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The Idea of God in Aeschylus and Sophocles

THE IDEA OF GOD IN AESCHYLUS AND SOPHOCLES

OUR survey has now reached a period in which the poets' religious and philosophical thought is fully conscious. But we shall do well to remember how they expressed that thought, and how we, in our turn, must try to recover it. The thought of Aeschylus and Sophocles may be clear and conscious, but we are to remember that these men were dramatists, and therefore realised their thought in the medium of drama – as for example a composer expresses his in music. If we wish to know what Aeschylus thought and believed it is not enough to study what he says, for his medium is more than speech; it includes also dramatic situation, the dance, music – in fact, the whole art of the theatre. This and nothing less than this, is the material that we must examine in our attempt to establish the religious thought of these two dramatists. Too often, as it seems to me, scholars have imagined that it is possible to divide a dramatist's work into two separate parts: on the one hand, his religious, philosophical, political thought; on the other hand, the art-form which, like some vehicle, carries this philosophical merchandise. Mr. A thinks that he can reasonably write a book about Sophocles' thought without concerning himself with Sophocles' dramatic art; Mr. B thinks that he can say something sensible about Sophocles' dramatic art without concerning himself with his religious ideas. Mr. A and Mr. B delude themselves. A work of art is not a vehicle with interesting merchandise inside it; it is a ζῷον. If it is alive, its soul and its body are inseparable. The living thought and the living form each explain the other; each exists, indeed, for the sake of the other.

If therefore I say things this morning which may seem to

concern dramatic criticism rather than the study of religion I shall be doing it deliberately and, I hope, constructively. You will understand too why I shall say little or nothing about fragments and plays which can be more or less plausibly reconstructed. A fragment without its context may mislead us, and although a reconstruction may give us the skeleton of the play, it cannot recreate its life and so recover for us the poet's thought. Another reason for my present neglect of fragments is that I wish to concentrate on certain major problems, which only the interpretation of complete plays can solve.

The first of these problems is that quite frequently, both in Aeschylus and in Sophocles – as well as in Euripides, who is not my concern this morning – the Gods are presented to us as being unreasonable, cruel, stupid, or otherwise imperfect. In the *Agamemnon* Zeus 'sends', πέμπει, Agamemnon to punish the sin of Paris, and then destroys him for doing it. Zeus decreed this war – but the Elders of Argos thought that it was a gross error. At least, they say to Agamemnon:

σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιὰν
'Ελένης ἕνεκ', οὐ γάρ σ' ἐπικεύσω,
κάρτ' ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος
οὐδ' εὖ πραπίδων οἴακα νέμων...

'When you began this war, to bring back a wanton woman at the cost of men's lives, I thought you a fool, or worse.' There seems to have been a difference of opinion, about this war, between the Elders and Zeus, and it is not evident that Aeschylus thinks the Elders to be wrong. Or take the *Electra*. Agamemnon offends Artemis, and the goddess retaliates by holding up the fleet so that it can go neither backwards nor forwards; Agamemnon has to kill his daughter because he has killed one of Artemis' stags. A cruel story. Is it simply a bit of mythology surviving into Sophocles'

play, like an old fossil in a piece of more recent limestone? No, Sophocles meant it; he was a poet, not a geological process. But what did he mean? Hippolytus' servant says to Aphrodite in Euripides' play:

χρὴ δὲ συγγνώμην ἔχειν . . .
σοφωτέρους γὰρ χρὴ βροτῶν εἶναι θεούς.

Neither in Euripides nor in Sophocles does the goddess pardon what a man might think a venial offence. What do these gods mean to the poets?

Another problem: there is the theological difficulty of one god quarrelling with another. We have just seen that in the matter of gods who are more cruel than men Sophocles and Euripides agree – except that Sophocles does not talk so much about it; it is interesting then to observe that in the matter of gods who quarrel it is Euripides and Aeschylus who agree. They never quarrel in Sophocles – a point which deserves explanation. I will say nothing about the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus in Aeschylus' play; for one thing, there are desperadoes who believe that the play was written not by Aeschylus but by another poet of the same name, indistinguishable from Aeschylus. But what of the *Oresteia*? Zeus designs a war, and Artemis hates it:

ἐπίφθονος Ἄρτεμις ἁγνὰ
πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς . . .
στυγεῖ δὲ δεῖπνον αἰετῶν.

Again, in the *Agamemnon* the Erinyes are in complete harmony with Zeus and Apollo, but in the *Eumenides* they are on extremely unfriendly terms. An explanation is wanted. If Euripides showed gods in conflict because he was an atheist, for what reason did Aeschylus do exactly the same thing?

Here are two problems: gods who are imperfect, and gods who are in conflict. There is a third, to which Dr. Snell

has already drawn our attention: what is the normal relationship, in Greek Tragedy, between the activity of the gods and the activity of men? For very often – as indeed in Homer too – we seem to see the same action on two levels at once. As this seems to me the central problem, I would like to discuss it first.

You will remember how, early in the *Agamemnon*, the chorus explains that the two sons of Atreus have been sent by Zeus, like an Erinys, to punish Paris. When an eagle has been robbed of its young, the god

> ὑστερόποινον
> πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἐρινύν
> οὕτω δ' Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων
> ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει Ξένιος
> Ζεύς, πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικός,
> πολλὰ παλαίσματα . . . θήσων
> Δαναοῖσιν Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως.

Zeus 'sends' Agamemnon. Accordingly, at the beginning of the second ode, we hear that it is Zeus who has captured and ruined Troy. The blow came from Zeus.

But does Agamemnon know that he has been sent by Zeus? When Artemis holds up the fleet does Agamemnon say to her: 'But, Artemis, I *have* to go to Troy; Zeus has sent me'? Three times the ominous word πτολιπόρθης is used of Agamemnon; is it ever suggested that not he, but Zeus, was responsible? Even more striking is the killing of Cassandra. Who causes her death? Is it not obvious? Agamemnon brings her home as his paramour; Clytemnestra, inevitably, murders her. It is very simple, very natural. But this is not the explanation which is given by Cassandra herself. Cassandra sees that she is the victim of Apollo. It is Apollo who has brought her to this house of the Erinyes, to this bloodstained palace, in order to satisfy his own resentment. Aeschylus does all he can – even to the extent of puzzling

most of his modern critics – to impress on us that Cassandra is really the victim not of Clytemnestra but of Apollo, as I will try to show later. But Clytemnestra herself does not know this. Clytemnestra, like Agamemnon in the matter of the war, is working quite independently, an entirely autonomous agent.

Is it Zeus or is it Agamemnon who begins the war? Is it Zeus or is it Apollo or is it Clytemnestra who determines that Cassandra shall die? Obviously, in each case it is both. Why then does Aeschylus give two explanations of one action? What is the relation between the divine and the human action?

We turn to Sophocles, and there we find the same problem again and again. Take for example that scene in the *Electra* which is exactly parallel to a scene in the *Tyrannus* – each of them an excellent illustration of what I said at the beginning, that a dramatist can express his thought through dramatic situation, without using words at all. The Queen is frightened. She comes into the orchestra to offer sacrifice and prayer to Apollo. The whole audience is assisting at a holy rite; it keeps a reverent silence. Doing so, it hears from Clytemnestra a prayer of unexampled wickedness: the smoke of the sacrifice carries up to the God the petition that he shall keep Clytemnestra safe in the enjoyment of what she won by murder and is protecting by adultery. The audience remains silent. Suddenly the silence is broken by the arrival of a man who brings news – good news to Clytemnestra: Orestes is dead; he has been killed, as it happens, at Delphi. But we know that this man is an enemy of the Queen's, and that his news is false.

Now, what do we think, in the theatre, when this man comes in? What *can* we think, except that he is Apollo's immediate and fitting answer to a blasphemous prayer? The god has sent him. But it was Orestes who sent him; it was arranged between them in the first scene of the play.

Similarly in the *Tyrannus*, where Iocasta prays that Apollo will prevent what Apollo has predicted. Again, a man comes with news: Polybus is dead! It is Apollo's answer to the prayer. But has Apollo sent him? The man himself does not think so: he has come for his own private reasons, as he tells us quite explicitly. Human action, divine action, or both?

One more instance, from the *Antigone*. Teiresias warns Creon that he has angered the gods and that the Erinyes will strike. They do strike – and Sophocles is careful to explain how they do it. The ruin of Creon comes about in the most natural way possible. Antigone, being what she is – impulsive, decisive in action – hangs herself rather than await slow death by starvation. Haemon, being in love with her, enraged with his father, tries to kill him, and failing in this kills himself. Eurydice, as Sophocles reminds us, has already lost one son; losing the other she curses Creon and stabs herself to death. Is the ruin of Creon the work of the divine Erinyes, or the natural result of his own actions? Both.

That is to say, in both dramatists – and in Euripides too – we often find the same action presented on two levels at once, and if we would understand the religious thought of these poets we must first understand this. Then the other problems will clear themselves up.

Let us begin with the *Electra*. What is the point of the two levels there?

We observe that Apollo does not order Orestes to kill his mother. It is Orestes and Electra themselves who determine to do this. Orestes simply asks the god how he shall try to do it, and the god gives him sensible advice. We observe too that Apollo does nothing to help the avengers. They plan the vengeance and they carry it out as autonomous agents. Further, Sophocles makes it quite plain why they resolve to do it. The characters of Electra and Orestes are drawn vividly; so are the circumstances in which they

are living – Orestes living on charity, in exile; Electra living with the hated murderers, treated like a slave. This is not decorative character-drawing, mere play-making. Sophocles is showing us that two people of spirit and courage, not like Chrysothemis, will inevitably refuse to accept the situation in which Electra and Orestes find themselves.

Nevertheless, although they are acting independently, Apollo acts with them. He accompanies them, so to speak, on his own plane; not intervening, but approving. As soon as Orestes arrives in Mycenae Clytemnestra has her prophetic dream; it does not help the avengers, but we remember καὶ γάρ τ' ὄναρ ἐκ Διός ἐστι. The gods may not be helping, but they are not indifferent. The Paedagogus, though sent by Orestes, enters as if sent by Apollo in answer to an evil prayer. The chorus makes us feel that the Erinyes and the spirit of Agamemnon are working with, or in, the avengers.

But if the action is already completely intelligible on the human plane, what does Sophocles gain by adding the divine plane? If we remove it, we see the reason at once. If we rewrote the *Electra*, leaving out everything that concerns the gods, we should have a perfectly intelligible play, but a less philosophical one. It would be not a 'religious' but a 'secular' one; a play of character, intrigue, exciting action, perhaps of psychological study. As so often happens, one can put it best in Aristotelian language: the action would be τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον, a particular action, τί 'Ηλέκτρα καὶ 'Ορέστης ἔπραξαν ἢ τί ἔπαθον, the exciting story of their revenge. With the gods in the background, θεοὶ μεταίτιοι, the action is both a particular and a universal. As a particular action, what Electra and Orestes do is natural, even inevitable. But in the background we see also Apollo and the Erinyes, and what they represent: the principle of Δίκη. The gods do not control the human action; that is the whole point. To borrow a term from mathematics, they are there as a system

of coordinates, fixing for us certain eternal principles. As we watch the particular human action against these coordinates, we can read their values. The god accompanies the actions of the avengers; that is to say, their actions correspond to, and illustrate, the principle of δίκη.

All that we have to do now is to interpret Δίκη, Justice, in the Greek and not in the Christian sense, and our difficulties disappear. In certain of the Ionian philosophers Δίκη is the principle of Order which pervades the physical universe; the balance of forces, the natural rhythm in things. In Sophocles it is something similar, but in the universe of human affairs. Here too there is a natural order, a proper balance; and if it is disturbed, by an act of violence, even by an unconscious offence, like that of Oedipus, it will reassert itself, in one way or another. 'If the Sun should leave his path, the Erinyes would bring him back.' The crime of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus was a violent interference with the due order of things. Therefore it brought about a situation that was essentially unstable. The law of Δίκη comes into operation, and – once more – Sophocles shows us *how* it works: it works through the natural course of things. That, indeed, is precisely what it is. It is the divine background that shows us that a universal law is at work in the particular case. The act of vengeance may not be moral, beautiful or edifying; that is not the point. The point is that it is the inevitable consequence of the original crime.

It is very evident that oracles play a great part in Sophocles' thought. What do they mean? Every surviving play of his contains at least one prophecy. He is so much concerned with oracles that one might take him to be an orthodox believer of an almost priestly kind. But if we suppose this, we have misunderstood both his religion and the profundity of his mind.

It is the *Tyrannus* which raises this problem in its most acute form, but before we examine this play it will be

convenient to take a simpler case, Teiresias' prophecy in the *Antigone*. This has indeed the dramatic function of breaking the obstinacy of Creon, but it has a philosophic function as well. Creon, time after time, has defied some of the natural sanctities or natural forces in human life, and these, as is their nature, recoil on him and crush him. Specifically: Creon overlooks, defies, outrages, the instinctive respect which humanity feels for a dead body, the horror we feel that a dead man should be eaten by animals, the natural love of a sister for her brother, the loyalty of a daughter towards her family, the love of a young man for a girl. All these fundamental things Creon tries to override, and they avenge themselves on him, in the desperate anger of his son and the broken heart of his wife. It is Δίκη at work, the Law that operates in these human affairs. And as there is a Law, its operation can be predicted. The philosophical function of prophecy is therefore the same as the function of the rest of the divine background: it assures us that the events occur not ὡς ἔτυχε; they are not merely what happened in this particular case. They were bound to happen in this or in some similar way, because human affairs obey Law. If there were no Law, not even a god could prophesy.

For 'the idea of God' in Sophocles, the *Tyrannus* is critical. The play has been held to demonstrate that Sophocles believed in a blind, arbitrary Fate. In fact, it proves the opposite. Except in one important particular, the gods in this play are the same as the gods in the *Electra*: they are concerned in the action, but they do not intervene in it, still less control it. The exception is of course the starting-point of the whole myth, the oracle which Apollo gives to Laius. This must be taken as a datum. Sophocles will take the old myth, with its implication of a blind Fate, and give it an entirely different interpretation. Taking this as a datum we find just what we found in the *Electra*. On the human plane there is an entirely self-contained, intelligible action, played out by autonomous

human actors – Laius, Iocasta, Oedipus, two shepherds, Polybus, a tipsy young man in Corinth . . . Everything happens naturally.

What about the divine background? We have just been speaking of oracles. There is in the *Tyrannus* that ode about oracles – perhaps rather a surprising one. The chorus is loyal to Oedipus, yet it prays that the oracles may be conspicuously (χειρόδεικτα) fulfilled, for if not, ἔρρει τὰ θεῖα, 'religion is at an end' – if 'religion' is a good translation, here, of τὰ θεῖα. Besides this, we have that sacrifice which we have already looked at: the prayer, and the man from Corinth, who comes so explicitly because he is hoping for a reward, and yet seems to have been sent by Apollo, in answer to a prayer. And such a prayer! Clytemnestra's prayer was abominable; she deserved what she got. But why does Sophocles treat in precisely the same way Iocasta, who prayed only for some innocent escape from an awful threat? Because Iocasta's prayer was worse than Clytemnestra's – not in its intention, but in its implications. Let us look at it for a moment; it may teach us something about Sophocles' gods.

Iocasta has already spoken sceptically about oracles. Let us observe what she says presently, when the Messenger has come and she thinks Oedipus' father to be dead:

> ὦ θεῶν μαντεύματα,
> ἵν' ἐστέ.

'Oracles! They are nothing!'
She continues:

> τί δ' ἂν φοβοῖτ' ἄνθρωπος, ᾧ τὰ τῆς τύχης
> κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δ' ἐστὶν οὐδενὸς σαφής;
> εἰκῇ κράτιστον ζῆν, ὅπως δύναιτό τις.

'Chance rules; forethought is impossible; live at random!'

That is what Iocasta's prayer implied. If oracles fail, if a

prophecy can be annulled, we live in a random universe, without Law, without moral law therefore, without any possibility of πρόνοια, rational calculation – a doctrine more dangerous even than Clytemnestra's open wickedness.

It is the essential meaning of the *Tyrannus* that the universe obeys Law. We may not understand it all, but moral law is a great part of it, and at least we know something about that. The story of Oedipus, the great and wise king who fell so suddenly and so abysmally, may seem to prove that life is ruled by chance, but it is not so. As we follow the play, we can see how naturally it all happened; and the fact that all could be prophesied indicates that it all obeyed rational law, since what is random cannot be predicted.

Sophocles' conception of the gods, then, we might summarise roughly in some such way as this. They symbolise his conception of an unchanging framework of Law which permeates human life as it does the physical universe; and when I say 'Law' I mean moral law and something more. Sophocles, as imperiously as any religious teacher, demands holiness, reverence, purity, wisdom. These moral principles are an important part of the pattern to which our universe is built; but there is more than this. The conception of δίκη in the *Electra* is more like a natural law than a moral law. When Artemis so implacably punishes Agamemnon she is not conspicuously a moral force; still, this sort of thing is what happens in life. When Oedipus is punished for what he did in ignorance – though rashly – he is being treated cruelly; he is not punished for a moral fault; he is suffering the inevitable consequences of what he and others have done inadvertently, even casually. Perhaps even more mysterious is the pattern in the *Trachiniae*, where the blood of the Hydra which Heracles slew becomes the poison by which Heracles, justly, slew Nessus, and at last the poison by which Heracles himself is slain, giving at last revenge to the dead Hydra.

That Life can be cruel we all know. Aristotle would not

accept it, in tragedy; but Sophocles does. Yet, says Sophocles, Life is not random, nor, ultimately, is it unintelligible. The Law can be harsh to the individual; the gods can be cruel. But at least there are gods. We know some of their laws, and we can try to obey them.

From Sophocles we may return to Aeschylus. I shall confine my discussion almost entirely to the *Oresteia*. For one thing, neither our time nor your patience is infinite, for another, the *Oresteia* and the *Persae* are the only complete works of Aeschylus that we possess. What does Aeschylus mean by Zeus in the *Supplices*? As we do not know how he completed the trilogy, we cannot be certain. I am not sure if I understand the *Septem*: I have not been able to read and reflect upon the first and second plays of that trilogy. I think I understand, vaguely, the religious or theological background of the *Prometheus*, though it is only one play of three, but only because it seems to resemble fairly closely the *Oresteia*.

As we have seen, the *Oresteia* raises some difficult problems. Zeus 'sends' Agamemnon to conduct a war to which Artemis objects violently; Agamemnon is cursed by his people for doing what Zeus planned; he is murdered for doing what Artemis made him do; and when Clytemnestra has killed him we are told that this too was contrived, or sanctioned by Zeus:

> ἰὴ ἰὴ διαὶ Διὸς
> παναιτίου πανεργέτα·
> τί γὰρ βροτοῖς ἄνευ Διὸς τελεῖται;
> τί τῶνδ' οὐ θεόκραντόν ἐστιν; (*Agam.* 1485 ff.)

And with this Zeus we must compare the Apollo in the same play, an Apollo who tried to seduce a princess, bribed her, and then, enraged, has her destroyed. If Euripides had told this story we should have heard a great deal about his 'scathing attack on an effete Olympian religion', but as it is Aeschy-

lus, nobody seems to object. Nor does Aeschylus treat the story casually, as if it were part of an old legend which he had forgotten to remove. On the contrary, one of the longest scenes in the play is concerned directly with this point, that it is Apollo who is destroying Cassandra; and the passage which critics have understood least is concerned with nothing else: I mean the passage in which first Clytemnestra and then the chorus try to communicate with Cassandra, fail, and then ask the apparently stupid question: Does Cassandra understand Greek? On this, some critics have spoken of Aeschylus' rather primitive technique. May they be forgiven! The technique is superb. Aeschylus is emphasising in the most directly dramatic way that Cassandra is not, except superficially, Clytemnestra's victim. Clytemnestra triumphed over Agamemnon in the matter of the purple carpet; so far from triumphing over Cassandra, she cannot even communicate with her. Cassandra is set apart; she enters the palace, not when Clytemnestra bids, but when the god drives her in. Clytemnestra is only Apollo's agent – a guilty, a foul, an unconscious agent of Apollo, even as Agamemnon was a guilty and unconscious agent of Zeus.

And in each case, if we turn from the human to the divine level, the instrument of divine justice is the Erinys. Agamemnon was sent to Troy as an Erinys; Cassandra is brought to the Palace of Atreus to meet her death; to this haunt of the Erinyes, where

κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,
δύσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων.

What are the gods who act in such a way? What is the significance of the two separate levels on which the action takes place? Why is Cassandra destroyed, for one reason, by Clytemnestra, and, for a different reason, by Apollo?

We will leave these questions for the moment, because there are others in the later part of the trilogy. If anyone

should say that these are questions that concern the dramatic critic only, I should repeat what I said at the beginning: Aeschylus, being a dramatist, is expressing his thought in drama, and if we have not fully understood the drama, we can have little confidence that we have understood his thought.

Coming to the *Choephori*, still more to the *Eumenides*, we notice that the character of Apollo has changed. Here we have a majestic god of light and purity, a god whom it is not easy to identify with the god who pursued Cassandra, and then, vindictively, used an adultress and a murderess to destroy her. We notice too that Agamemnon's character is different. No longer is he the violent πτολιπόρθης, the sacker of cities, the destroyer, the slayer of his own daughter; no longer the man of ὕβρις and of blood. He is the great King, the glorious conqueror, foully slain by a woman, his own wife. We notice too how different the avengers are. Agamemnon punished Paris in ὕβρις, with indiscriminate violence; Clytemnestra and Aegisthus punished Agamemnon from no very holy motives. But Electra prays for purity, and Orestes comes with clean hands, and not to serve some guilty purpose of his own. We notice yet another difference: the harmonious relations of the Olympian gods and the Erinyes have broken down. Apollo has now nothing but contempt for the Erinyes, and they have nothing but indignation for him and the other 'new gods'. It is clear that neither the old nor the new gods are wholly in the right. To make it clearer still, Aeschylus brings them before a human jury, and the jury is equally divided.

The dramatic critic is accustomed to find, in dramatists of this calibre, good sense, expressed through intelligent and significant structure and style. He suspects therefore that all these differences are related, and that when the relation is established, good sense will appear. But there is still one major question to raise.

Early in the *Agamemnon*, in the πάροδος, Aeschylus writes what we may call a Hymn to Zeus:

> Ζεύς, ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ' αὐ-
> τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ . . .

Why does he put these stanzas here, in a part of the play in which the behaviour of Zeus seems to be anything but wise? Another question: Why does he bring in the old myth of Zeus and Cronos? He says with emphasis that Zeus came as a conqueror, overthrowing an unnamed predecessor. He uses this myth, presumably, not simply because it existed – for he was not compiling a Dictionary of Mythology – but because it was relevant. Relevant to what?

These stanzas, if nothing else in the trilogy, associate the *Oresteia* with the *Prometheia*, for the *Prometheus Vinctus* is based on the idea that Zeus is a new god, new and therefore tyrannical; and it even mentions the possibility that Zeus in his turn may be overthrown. Some scholars have found it inconceivable that Aeschylus should have believed in a Zeus who was imperfect, but developed into something better; they found it inconceivable therefore that Aeschylus wrote the *Prometheus*. If this is so, we seem to be in some danger of proving that he did not write the *Oresteia* either.

You would not expect me, in a quarter of an hour or thereabouts, to survey the *Oresteia* in sufficient detail to justify and prove the general interpretation which I am going to put before you; nor perhaps would this be the proper occasion for doing it. But I hope that I shall have said enough to make acceptable to you both the interpretation itself and the theological ideas which it imputes to Aeschylus.

If gods come and go, as Cronos did; if gods 'improve', as apparently Zeus and Apollo do, what is there in the universe that is eternal and unchanging? Or does Aeschylus see nothing like this? Certainly he does. Eternal and unchanging things are certain laws: that ὕβρις breeds ὕβρις and leads

to ἄτη; the law of δίκη, which means, in this trilogy, that wrong done will provoke retribution. These two laws are like two immovable columns, standing for ever; human society must be built around them, and must accommodate itself to them. The *Oresteia* shows how human society has, ideally or potentially, discovered how to do this. The *Prometheia* seems to have dealt with the growth of society, particularly perhaps in its cultural aspect; the *Oresteia* does the same thing, but specifically in relation to the problem – the moral and political problem – of Justice.

In the *Agamemnon* Aeschylus pictures a state of society which has failed to accommodate itself to these two laws. The law of δίκη is of course satisfied – it must be, for it is a law of nature. But it is satisfied only in a way which brings the other law into operation, the law of ὕβρις and ἄτη. In the private history of the House of Atreus, as in the public matter of Paris, Helen, Troy, Iphigeneia, and the war, the inevitable retribution is inflicted always by guilty persons, who are themselves those who have been wronged, and hit back, blindly, indiscriminately. As in Sophocles, the human actors are quite autonomous; they are not directed by the gods. But the gods participate in what the human agents do; they are precisely what Agamemnon calls them: θεοὶ μεταίτιοι. The war, in all its indiscriminate violence, is conceived and carried through both by Zeus and by Agamemnon, independently. So too the murder of Agamemnon and of Cassandra. This means just what it means in Sophocles; the divine plane universalises the human actions. If we performed on the *Agamemnon* the same surgical operation that we did on the *Electra*, and removed the divine plane, we should turn the play into a study of a calamitous and rather uncoordinated series of events in the history of a singularly violent family. The addition of the divine plane gives to the action the authority of a universal, together with the sharpness of a particular. Not only do all the human actors avenge their

wrongs in the same way, but the gods themselves follow the same principles. That is to say, we are following not merely the behaviour and the fate of a certain royal family, but contemplating a stage in the moral history of mankind. This crude way of achieving δίκη is presented to us as a universal; at the moment, nothing better is known.

It leads straight to chaos – to social and political chaos. This is already implied in the demand made by Artemis. The conflict between her and Zeus is a sign that the whole system is wrong; it suffers from internal contradictions. The violence of the eagles cannot pass unpunished. Even Zeus agrees with that:

> τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ ἄσκοποι θεοί

and

> τί τῶνδ' οὐ θεόκραντόν ἐστιν;

The demand for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is a token of the violence that Agamemnon is contemplating, and it creates a specific μῆνις against Agamemnon, which is the counterpart of the general μῆνις which is felt against him by the Greeks at large.

The dramatic expression of the chaos to which it all leads is that Argos falls into the hands of a tyrant – and a singularly disgusting one. This leads us straight to the answer to one of the questions which the *Choephori* raised: why is Agamemnon now different? Briefly: from the darkness and chaos of the *Agamemnon* we are to make our way forward into a brighter world, although it is through a conflict that seems insoluble. Higher moral and philosophical conceptions now prevail. Orestes is an avenger of a new kind; his hands are clean, his motives are pure. Correspondingly, Apollo is a very different god from the one who so vindictively pursued Cassandra. The Erinyes whom then he used are now beneath

his contempt. His part in this play and in the *Eumenides* is to champion a principle. He, the Olympian, will at all costs defend the cause of the King, the Father, the Husband, head of the State and of the Family. It was the original Olympian gods who were particularly associated with civic usages: Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, Athena, Hera, Hestia. Apollo is defending the cause of Agamemnon because he sees in the King and the Husband the very key-stone of the social fabric – the fabric which is now threatened. Order and authority must be vindicated, or Justice is impossible. The Erinyes are now in revolt. When Zeus and Apollo themselves were blind and violent, the Erinyes were their unquestioning agents; now they are not.

There is neither time nor need to describe how Apollo and the Erinyes are both defending something without which civilised society cannot exist; both also ignoring something without which it cannot exist. Apollo would override certain instinctive sanctities; the Erinyes have no interest in the fabric of civilised society. Apollo's famous biological argument is absurd, and was meant to be absurd; he is in possession of only half of the truth. The whole truth comes only with Athena and her new institutions, in which authority and reason and mercy and αἰδώς are all blended. The Erinyes are persuaded; they give up something, but they receive more. They too 'improve'; they give up blind pursuit of their victims and accept reasoned judgement. Once more they range themselves beside Zeus, but on a higher level. Now Zeus at last reigns supreme, with no fear of divine opposition, for he has fulfilled himself and become Τέλειος.

Now, if we look back to the beginning of the *Agamemnon*, we can see why Aeschylus placed there the myth of Ouranos, Cronos and Zeus – a myth so alien to Sophocles. In these stanzas Aeschylus does not say that Zeus is all-wise; indeed, at the moment he is not. What he does say is that Zeus has made wisdom possible:

τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώ-
σαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν —.

which I think we must interpret not 'In order to learn you must first suffer', but 'out of your suffering wisdom may come'. In the *Prometheus* Aeschylus is looking back across the centuries to primitive Man – to neolithic Man, so to speak, and it seems to me probable that in the trilogy he traces, in some sense, the rise of Man to his contemporary triumphs. In the *Oresteia* too he looks back, though not so far, and in a rather different spirit; not from the cultural triumphs of the Fifth Century, but from its moral and political maturity; and he aks: How did this arise, out of barbarism and violence? (He also asks, and answers, the question: How is this mature moral and political system to be maintained?) He puts his answer to the first question in myth. There were the long reigns of the earlier gods. Under them, man suffered indeed but made no progress; there was πάθος but no μάθος. But at last things began to change; a new spirit stirred among men. What it was, how it happened,

οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι
πάντ᾽ ἐπισταθμώμενος
πλὴν Διός.

When Zeus became the supreme god, suffering was no longer barren; Zeus 'opened the path to wisdom'.

Now we can answer a previous question, why the idea of conflict between gods is found in Aeschylus and in Euripides, but never in Sophocles. In Aeschylus, such conflict is a sign of imperfection or incompleteness in the moral order; it disappears when that order is complete. In Euripides, contending deities (like Aphrodite and Artemis in the *Hippolytus*) prefigure conflicting instincts or emotions within the nature of man. Sophocles, at least in his surviving plays, does not

concern himself with the development of society and its moral order, nor with psychological conflict. He sees man as a being who lives in a universe partly explicable, partly mysterious, but ultimately rational, having its unchanging laws, its eternal rhythm. In such a universe, conflict between its gods is impossible. Man is his theme, not political man, but the life of man in its broadest aspect, and the laws that govern this do not change and cannot be contradictory.

'The gods', then, in these poets represent those universal forces or principles or laws which make Life what it is. What, asks Aeschylus, has brought humanity out of barbarism to civilisation? There has been a certain willingness to learn from bitter experience, a certain striving after more restrained and intelligent conduct, and after a higher political expression of this. Today, perhaps, we should speak of 'the spirit of progress'; Aeschylus, in the desire to relieve the 'pressure of thought', the φροντίδος ἄχθος, calls it Zeus.

Here is one aspect of the religion of the dramatic poets. The gods are never transcendental, external to our universe, whether controlling it or being indifferent to it. Often, as in the *Oresteia*, they are some force within ourselves, some divine instinct. Such they are, very clearly, in the *Antigone*. Antigone's whole being rises in revolt against Creon's inhuman decree. She goes out and buries her brother. The Watchman, who speaks like a man who does not fully comprehend the tale he has to tell, describes what he found. When he has finished the chorus says:

> Ἄναξ, ἐμοί τοι μή τι καὶ θεήλατον
> τοὔργον τόδ' ἡ ξύννοια βουλεύει πάλαι

'Is not this the work of a god?' This is not conventional piety; it is a profoundly significant remark. In obeying her deepest human instincts Antigone was doing the work of a god, and the god was working through her.

But often the conception of the gods is perceptibly dif-

ferent from this: not an innate force or instinct, but a law. In the *Persae* Xerxes commits ὕβρις, and the law of ὕβρις operates against him; the god crushes him. How? Partly, as in the *Antigone*, through the instinctive and courageous resistance of the Greeks, but partly by an agency that is not human, for it was no human hands – in the play – that harassed and ruined the Persians in their retreat, but the country itself; for it condemned them to thirst and famine, and a river froze over deceitfully and drowned them. No sharp line is drawn between humanity and 'inanimate' nature. Both move in a certain regular pattern, and the pattern reveals, or is expressed by, the gods. So the double plane, of which I have said enough already, is the traditional poetic Greek way of indicating the universal pattern to which the particular event conforms. A universe without gods would be one in which there was no pattern, no λόγος, no significance.

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DISCUSSION

M. Chapouthier: L'exposé si dense de M. Kitto soulève de multiples questions; je n'en veux retenir qu'une, d'ordre général; elle vise la différence entre la conception et le rôle des dieux dans Eschyle et dans Sophocle. La différence semble être à première vue que les dieux dans Eschyle se mêlent beaucoup plus à l'action des hommes; dans Sophocle, les dieux rivaux sont plus distincts. A quoi attribuez-vous donc la différence? Vous avez indiqué qu'Eschyle était préoccupé de justifier le développement de la civilisation, les progrès de la société.

Mr. Kitto: The difference seems to be this: Aeschylus, at least in the *Oresteia* and the *Prometheia*, is concerned with the

struggles of humanity from barbarism to civilisation, while Sophocles contemplates the laws, and the mystery, of human life. From Sophocles' point of view, Life is something which in its essentials does not change; its laws, its framework, are immutable; it follows a pattern which is eternally the same. One might therefore say that Aeschylus' thought is dynamic; Sophocles', static. In Aeschylus, the gods participate in human action because, from his point of view, the very foundations of human life have changed – and the gods represent that which is fundamental; men and gods together have arrived at something new. But from Sophocles' less 'political' point of view, the fundamental things have not changed. His gods cannot say anything new; they have said everything already. They do not intervene, because they have already laid down the unalterable laws of the universe; and the laws will operate against men who break them, without the necessity of divine intervention.

M. Chapouthier: Autre question: si Eschyle est un poète théologien, s'il aboutit à un système théologique cohérent où Zeus est le dieu suprême, est considéré un peu comme un roi souverain, comment cela se concilie-t-il avec cette notion de développement humain et d'idéal démocratique? Le système théologique d'Eschyle semble lié à un système royal.

Mr. Kitto: Perhaps so, but the important point seems to me to be this: that the supremacy of Zeus is a symbol of the essential unity, and therefore intelligibility, of the universe. If one god can oppose another god, that may be good democratic doctrine, but it is chaotic theology, and bad philosophy. I see nothing anti-democratic in the conception that the Universe is a harmonious unity and that one supreme god governs it.

Mr. Rose: Perhaps we might say that for Aeschylus the gods formed a kind of Periklean democracy, under the rule of their best, namely Zeus.

Mr. Kitto has called our attention to the two planes, one divine and the other human, in the plays. If we look at Shakespere's *Macbeth* we find something similar, indeed quite a close parallel

to an Aeschylean situation, different though the atmosphere and dramatic technique are. It is clearly desirable that the amiable but weak Duncan should yield his place to a stronger man, with the ultimate result of bringing the Stuarts into power; the reasons existing when the play was written were quite sufficient to justify such a view. But it is not for Macbeth to bring this about by murdering his king, and at first he sees this:

If Chance will have me king, why Chance may Crowne me,
Without my stirre. (*Macb.* i, 4, 143-44)

Later, overpersuaded by his wife, he becomes the agent, but the guilty agent, of destiny.

Another point. I cannot believe that the famous address to Zeus in the *Agamemnon* really refers to Uranos and Kronos. What does the text actually say?

οὐδ' ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,
οὐδὲ λέξεται (so Ahrens; οὐδὲν λέξαι codd.) πρὶν ὤν.
ὅστ' (ὃς δ' codd.) ἔπειτ' ἔφυ, τριακ-
τῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.
(Aesch., *Agam.* 167-72)

Now how can Uranos be so utterly departed that 'it shall not even be said that formerly he was'? One has only to look up on a clear day to see him. And Kronos: it might indeed be said that he has 'found a wrestler to overthrow him', but how is he 'gone' (οἴχεται)? His festival was celebrated every year at Athens and seems to have been very popular. I believe Aeschylus is contrasting the transient power of men however great (note the generic pronouns, ὅστις and, as I would read, ὅστ', suggesting that he is not alluding to definite and namable figures) with the eternal omnipotence of the god.

Mr. Kitto: But would Aeschylus call Zeus the 'conqueror', the 'triacter', if those whom he had overthrown were only men?

Besides, the idea that Zeus overthrew earlier gods is fundamental to the *Prometheus*. In that play, even Zeus, in certain circumstances, will be overthrown. We must not expect too much consistency in these matters. In legend, Kronos was banished to Tartarus: surely it was possible for a poet to say that Kronos was an earlier god, dethroned by Zeus?

Mr. Rose: No, I do not think it possible.

M. Snell: Ehrlich habe ich es immer so aufgefasst, wie Herr Kitto. Der Uranos, der Himmel, das ist hier rein mythologisch, würde ich sagen.

Mr. Rose: If you take the passage as purely mythological, that is possible. But the rest of it is serious theology. Aeschylus does indeed use mythological language in many parts of his plays, but would he do so in the middle of a theological pronouncement?

M. Snell: Das hat aber nichts mit dem Kult zu tun.

Mr. Rose: Admittedly, the passage is very difficult.

M. Gigon: M. Rose hat sehr gut die Verwandtschaft zwischen bestimmten Aspekten der attischen Tragödie und Shakespeare hervorgehoben. Noch wichtiger scheint mir aber die Beziehung zwischen der attischen Tragödie und Herodot zu sein. Auch da haben wir zwei Ebenen des Geschehens: Kandaules, Kroisos und Kyros handeln aus eigenem Antriebe unvernünftig; dennoch aber steht dieses Handeln unter einer höheren Notwendigkeit und dies bewirkt, dass Kandaules wie Kroisos und die Andern in der Mitte zwischen Schuld und Schuldlosigkeit leben. Natürlich trägt diese höhere Notwendigkeit in der Tragödie den Namen von Gottheiten, während sie bei dem Historiker gewissermassen anonym bleibt. Vorhanden ist sie hier wie dort und zwar keineswegs als ein Sittengesetz, das die Guten belohnt und die Bösen bestraft, sondern als eine durchaus aussermoralische Verkettung von Realitäten. Herodot steht der attischen Tragödie (der Art des Sophokles) so nahe wie sonst nur noch die Ilias.

Mr. Kitto: Yes, I think this double level seems to be thoroughly characteristic for the Greek mind, right from the beginning. It

must be the same thing that the power that the Greeks have of seeing the universal in the particular; with other people, in other literatures the efforts to portray the universal very often have the effect of leaving the particular rather vague. Greek is perhaps unique in combining the particular with the universal. Is it not perhaps the case, that one of the historical developments of the Greek mind, is in gradually disengaging the individual from the divine? As you were saying, in the Iliad and Herodotus, there is a feeling that the responsibility of the individual is not complete: 'It is the god that makes me do this.' There is an example, when Helen, in the Troades says: 'It is not I who am responsible, but Aphrodite'. This argument is immediately destroyed; in tragedy, man is responsible himself.

M. Gigon: Sicherlich muss man für Herodot ausser dem Gesagten noch den Einfluss 'der Wissenschaft' annehmen, fassbar einmal in der immer wiederkehrenden Frage nach den Ursachen der Geschehnisse, sodann in der betonten (letztlich an die Physik des Xenophanes erinnernden) Ablehnung aller spekulativen Konstruktionen kosmographischer Art.

M. Chapouthier: Je suis de l'avis de M. Gigon sur les rapports d'Hérodote avec la tragédie. J'irais même plus loin que lui; je vois dans son idée de la destinée non point une conception d'historien, mais une conception empruntée au drame. Hérodote construit ses récits de façon à mettre en évidence une moralité des événements. La parenté avec le drame de certains épisodes qui se soumettent à une gradation, qui tendent vers un dénouement, est très sensible dans l'aventure de Cambyse. L'histoire d'Hérodote a une tendance moralisante; après l'événement les Grecs ont considéré les Guerres Médiques comme un épisode nécessaire et sanctionné par les Dieux.

M. Snell: Wenn Herr Kitto so betont, wie stark bei Sophokles die Idee lebendig ist, dass es bestimmte Gesetze in der Welt gibt, so möchte ich doch auf einen Punkt zu sprechen kommen, inwiefern sich diese feste Ordnung der Welt unterscheidet von dem, was wir bei Homer und Hesiod finden. Auch für Hesiod steht dieses

rechtliche Gesetz über allem Geschehen, aber ein wesentlicher Unterschied ist, dass dieses Weltgesetz nicht mehr mit der gleichen Sicherheit regiert, sondern etwas problematisch geworden ist. Dass man fragt, wie eigentlich dieses Gesetz aussieht, dass es anregt zum Nachdenken, das ist etwas, was bei Herrn Kitto sehr schön herausgekommen ist; dieses Gesetz fordert ein Grübeln heraus. Finden wir da nun nicht auch die andere Seite der Münze, dass nun im menschlichen Geist das Verhältnis zu dem Recht insofern ein anderes geworden ist, dass nun auch für den Menschen in einem täglichen Handeln es nicht meht möglich ist, zu unterscheiden, wo eigentlich das Richtige liegt. Bei Homer und Hesiod braucht man doch nur zu sagen, das ist das Richtige, also tue das. Aber so ist es in der Tragödie nicht mehr, dadurch, dass der Mensch selber verantwortlich ist, und die ganze, schwere Entscheidung über das, was recht ist, bei ihm liegt. Da werden die Dinge sehr viel komplizierter. Ödipus oder Agamemnon handeln ja nicht unrecht wie ein Ägisthos bei Homer, einfach aus Verblendung, sondern das sind grosse Menschen, und das gross sein heisst in der Tragödie prinzipiell in Qual, in Zwiespalt zu verfallen. Das macht ja gerade das Tragische aus, in meinem Gefühl. Diese neue Konzeption des Göttlichen in der Tragödie hängt zum guten Teil daran, dass der Mensch zum Bewusstsein erwacht ist, und damit wird alles viel schwieriger.

Mr. Kitto: Yes, I think I agree entirely. It seems to me, that as regards the responsibility, the conscious responsibility of man for his own actions, that we have in the surviving plays of Sophocles various degrees of guilt. In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus sinned wantonly and deliberately; they fully deserved what they suffered. In the *Antigone*, Creon does not offend the gods wantonly; his motives were honest, but his judgment was bad. But Oedipus offended in complete ignorance; at the most, he was guilty of what English lawyers call 'contributory negligence'; but he is punished nevertheless. Here, perhaps, is the purest form of tragedy.

M. Snell: Wo gibt es das vorher, dass der Mensch das Gute will,

und nur deswegen verkehrt handelt, weil er etwas nicht wusste; das gibt es nur in der Tragödie.

M. Verdenius: You have explained the role of the gods in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles as a universalizing principle. It seems to me that our discussion leads to the question whether this idea can be traced back to earlier times. Could we say that in the *Odyssey* Athena is universalizing the actions of Odysseus? I should rather regard her assistance as a glorification of the hero. We may perhaps assume a development from this glorifying function of the gods to their universalizing function. In that case the transition from the glorifying to the universalizing point of view seems to be found in Pindar. His effort to detect a universal meaning in the glorious achievements of men also influences his interpretation of the favours of the gods.

Mr. Kitto: I do not think I should quite agree with you about the function of Athena in the Odyssey. I think I should say this rather, that what Athena does, or rather what Homer does in making Athena continually help Odysseus, is to suggest that in the triumph of Odysseus one universal principle is working, and Athena helps it to triumph: namely the justice of the gods. There Homer is universalizing the experience of Odysseus in much the same way as the divine plane does in tragedy. As I suggested in the beginning, there is Odysseus, the just king, can Zeus allow him to be treated like this? The answer is no; the god will protect, defend justice. It is indeed true that the help of Athena glorifies Odysseus, but I would suggest that it is in the converse way: he is glorified because being universalized, as the state of just king is because of his justice.

M. Verdenius: Perhaps the glorifying aspect of the gods is more prominent in the *Iliad.*

Mr. Kitto: And in Pindar too. In the Second Pythian, when Artemis and Hermes help to prepare Hieron's chariot for the race, they confer a kind of halo upon it. This is not 'universalizing' in the tragic sense, although perhaps it is not far from it.

M. Chantraine: Il me semble que dans la différence qui vient

d'être évoquée entre le rôle des dieux dans l'*Odyssée* surtout, et dans la tragédie, il apparaît un trait important qui n'est pas sur le plan des dieux, mais situé sur le plan des hommes. Dans l'*Odyssée* la question de savoir qui a raison ne se pose pas une minute, le bon c'est Ulysse. Les méchants ce sont les prétendants, et Athéné tout naturellement va aider Ulysse. Dans la tragédie, quand Apollon pousse Oreste à tuer sa mère, c'est une grosse affaire pour un fils que de se décider à tuer sa mère, et par conséquent il l'engage dans une difficulté morale qui aboutira d'ailleurs à un problème juridique où interviendra Athéné à la fin de l'Orestie. Si bien qu'au fond je suis amené par un détour à rejoindre ce que disait tout à l'heure Monsieur Snell.

Mr. Kitto: I think the philosophic foundation of the Odyssey surely is what is sometimes called 'poetic justice', not tragic philanthropia, which is nearer to comedy than to tragedy. What we all like to see, the triumph of the worthy man is not Comedy in the modern sense (though it is 'comedy' in the mediaeval sense), but it does not attain the intensity of tragedy.

M. Gigon: Es bleibt bestehen, dass die Odyssee im Kern untragisch ist, die Ilias dagegen eminent tragisch, vor allem in der Gestalt Hektors, der als der Edelste unter allen doch tragisch gezwungen ist, für eine schlechte Sache zu kämpfen. Man darf auch an die Kypria denken, die – wenn auch in poetisch vielleicht grober und unschöner Weise – den Hintergrund des troischen Krieges voll enthüllen: die Absicht der Götter in alledem und die Wege, auf denen sie ihre Absicht erfüllen derart, dass Paris und Helene auch in der Mitte zwischen Schuld und Schuldlosigkeit verharren.

M. Chantraine: Je voudrais répondre à Monsieur Gigon, Monsieur Kitto conclura ensuite; mais il me semble que la différence fondamentale entre l'*Iliade* et la tragédie, c'est que dans l'*Iliade*, les hommes sont rendus malheureux, sont égarés surtout par les dieux. Mais il ne se pose aucun problème de justice, il n'y a aucun choix qui se pose à l'homme. La preuve, c'est que vous avez été obligé de dire qu'Hector défendait la mauvaise cause.

M. Snell: Ja, wo steht das eigentlich?

M. Gigon: Hektor weiss durchaus, dass Paris menschlich gesehen 'schuld' ist.

M. Snell: Ja, aber wo steht das, dass er moralische Probleme empfindet?

M. Gigon: Bestehen bleibt, dass der Dichter der Ilias wie derjenige der Orestie unbestreitbar den Eindruck erwecken will, dass der Zorn des Achilleus wie das Kämpfen Hektors wie der Muttermord des Orestes in einem Zwielicht stehen. Sie sind weder ganz zu billigen noch ganz zu tadeln – ohne dass man natürlich die moralischen Schemata anwenden dürfte, wie sie erst in der Sophistenzeit zur Ausbildung gelangt sind.

Mr. Kitto: As for the *Iliad*, it seems to me to be tragic in two ways. There is a generalised tragic feeling which suffuses the whole poem, a kind of inherent tragedy: the constant juxtaposition of heroism, glory and death. This inherent tragic idea is expressed very sharply from time to time, as for example when the Trojan Elders on the wall see Helen: she is so beautiful that men *must* fight for her. Then, besides this general tragedy, there is the specific one: the quarrel between the two men – both in the wrong, but Achilles at least not desperately so – which inevitably has such catastrophic results, to the Greeks in general and to Achilles in particular.

Is not this the very essence of tragedy, that a natural human error leads to wide-spread suffering which is out of proportion to the cause; and that this disproportionate suffering is seen to be not a casual or accidental result, but one which comes from the very nature and structure of human life? So in the *Coloneus*, Oedipus reflects that he is becoming of importance at a time when he is nothing at all, quite ruined; and Ismene replies: 'Yes, the gods abased you then, and are raising you now.' The *Coloneus* I do not find easy to understand, but I do not think that Sophocles had any moral or rational explanation of what the gods were doing to Oedipus. It is simply typical of human life, part of its structure.

M. Chantraine: Monsieur Kitto dans son exposé si intéressant, faute de temps, n'a pas beaucoup parlé d'Oedipe. Mais justement Oedipe est un personnage dont le tragique pourrait être homérique, parce qu'il me semble qu'Oedipe a toujours agi au mieux, n'a pas commis de faute (comme Hector qui ira à la mort); c'est en réalité dans l'*Orestie* que la tragédie pose un problème beaucoup plus moral, beaucoup plus moderne que dans l'*Oedipe*.

Mr. Kitto: But is it true that Oedipus always acted for the best? Sometimes indeed he did what seemed wisest, but at other times he acted on impulse. If for example he had been a man of real self-control and wisdom, would he have allowed himself to kill a man old enough to be his father?

M. Chapouthier: J'aimerais poser une question particulière, mais qui a des conséquences générales. Je pense à l'expression 'Zeus quel qu'il soit' dans les paroles d'*Agamemnon* et dont M. Kitto a parlé. Qu'entend-il exactement par là? Il me semble indiquer qu'il considérait comme nouvelle l'idée exprimée par ce 'ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν'. 'Zeus whoever he is'. Comment l'interprétez-vous?

Mr. Kitto: Aeschylus believes in the unity of the universe. It is governed by one supreme power. Men call the supreme god 'Zeus' – and Aeschylus is content to use this name.

M. Chapouthier: Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de savoir s'il veut dire 'Zeus, quelle que soit sa fonction particulière dans la mythologie', ou bien s'il pense à des conceptions autres que celles des mythologues 'quel que soit Zeus en réalité'.

M. Chantraine: J'ai plutôt pensé à la première interprétation, que le chœur, par cette expression, agit pieusement selon la religion traditionnelle, – quelle que soit la forme de Zeus, son nom en ce cas particulier.

Mr. Kitto: If I interpret the *Oresteia* rightly, 'Zeus', the conquering god, prefigures that Spirit or Power which has enabled man, after untold years of barbarism and moral violence, to rise to the high conceptions which are implicit in the *Polis*. For this Spirit and Power Aeschylus can find no better name than Zeus.

M. Chapouthier: Je signale cette expression parce qu'elle est très fréquente dans Euripide et il est intéressant de savoir si les deux poètes lui donnent la même valeur.

Mr. Rose: I take the words of Aeschylus (*Aga.* 160-62) to be no more than a poetical variation of the well-known formula εἴτε ὅστις καὶ ὁπόθεν χαίρει ὀνομαζόμενος, cf. for instance Plato, *Crat.* 400e, with Stallbaum's note there and that of Fraenkel on the Aeschylean passage. As you rightly say, however, it means something quite different in Euripides.

M. Chapouthier: Parce que l'expression introduit alors un doute sur la nature et peut-être sur l'existence du dieu.

Mr. Rose: Yes: Ζεύς, ὅστις ὁ Ζεύς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδα πλὴν λόγῳ (Eur. fgt. 480), implies that the speaker does not even know if Zeus exists; for Aeschylus, his existence is certain, the doubt extending only to the detail of whether he should be called Zeus or by some other name.

M. Chapouthier: J'aimerais savoir si Eschyle pense déjà à l'équivalence avec une force de la nature ou si c'est une expression banale de la religion populaire qu'il emploie; à un moment on a recours à Zeus et l'on ne veut oublier aucun de ses aspects.

Mr. Kitto: I think that Aeschylus doubts if the supreme power is a personal god; something more transcendent than this.

M. Reverdin: Dans un fragment d'Eschyle dont on ignore le contexte (Nauck[2] 70), se trouve une formule, généralement considérée, à tort ou à raison, comme orphique:

> Ζεύς ἐστιν αἰθήρ, Ζεὺς δὲ γῆ, Ζεὺς οὐρανός,
> Ζεύς τοι τὰ πάντα χὤτι τῶνδ' ὑπέρτερον.

Dans les Suppliantes (vers 524 sq; 574), Zeus est invoqué en des termes qui révèlent une conception plus complexe, plus vaste de sa divinité que celle de la mythologie traditionnelle. Il est non seulement ῎Αναξ ἀνάκτων, mais τελέων τελειότατον κράτος et on le dit δι' αἰῶνος κρέων ἀπαύστου. Ces textes ne seraient-ils pas de nature à éclairer pour nous le sens du passage d'Agamemnon sur lequel nous discutons?

M. Chapouthier: Cela découvre une parenté entre Eschyle et les philosophes de la nature, la remarque irait dans le sens de M. Kitto: la formule vague d'Eschyle suppose un Zeus plus puissant que le Zeus ordinaire.

M. Reverdin: Alors c'est plutôt 'Zeus, quel que tu sois'.

M. Chapouthier: L'idée sortirait alors du cadre de la religion populaire; car les Grecs du commun à cette époque prenaient-ils suffisamment de liberté à l'égard de leur dieu pour penser qu'il était autre chose que ce que les représentants de la religion officielle prétendaient?

M. Snell: Es steckt doch offenbar ursprünglich die Angst darin, dass es nicht der richtige Name ist. Aber ich glaube auch, dass Äschylus diese populäre Volksmeinung dazu benützte um zu sagen, – ganz wie Herr Kitto meinte, – dass Zeus etwas so Grosses ist, das es für uns nicht vorstellbar ist.

M. Reverdin: Je voudrais faire encore une remarque. Dans Prométhée, dans l'Orestie, le monde des dieux, et précisons même, le monde des Olympiens est sujet au devenir. Il évolue. Il tend vers plus de perfection morale. On serait presque fondé à parler d'optimisme théologique. L'idée de providence, l'idée que les dieux manifestent de l'intérêt et de la compassion pour les hommes, et se soucient de les acheminer vers une civilisation meilleure, ces idées ne sont pas étrangères à Eschyle. Notre poète semble admettre qu'une loi morale préside à l'évolution parallèle du monde des dieux et de celui des hommes; Zeus, pour lui, est perfectible; avec le temps, il devient meilleur, plus juste.

Il y a là, je crois, un aspect très important, dont il importe de tenir compte pour comprendre la notion du divin chez Eschyle.

Mr. Kitto: Do you think that the gods, as they improve, help men to improve, or does it seem to you that the two are independent? That is a problem which has troubled me a great deal. In the Prometheus does Zeus lead men to something better?

M. Reverdin: En un certain sens oui. N'oublions pas que *Prométhée*, tel que nous le connaissons, est une œuvre tronquée. Le pardon de Zeus, qui intervenait vraisemblablement dans la

suite de la trilogie, devait apparaître comme un acte de justice envers le Titan révolté, et aussi envers les hommes, dont il avait été le bienfaiteur. De même dans l'*Orestie*, c'est à la suite d'une évolution dans le monde des dieux que la justice de l'Aréopage peut s'établir chez les hommes.

Mr. Kitto: It seems to me that the two lines of progress are independent – or, rather, that the one is a reflection of the other.

M. Chapouthier: Il nous reste à remercier M. Kitto pour son exposé et les éclaircissements qu'il a bien voulu nous fournir.