Divine and Demonic Necessity in the Oresteia

By CARL-MARTIN EDSMAN

Aeschylus' religion[1]

Aeschylus remains wholly within the context of the ancient religion. He forms his dramatical works with stern gravity and deep religiosity, so that a pervading piety is natural and there are no godless people. The archaic attitude of the poet appears not the least in his view of the departed. They are (as in Homer) bloodless shadows without emotions or perceptions (Agam. 568). But at the same time the murdered ones cry for vengeance, Nemesis rules over all and everything, and Dike looks after the right of the angered dead. The departed, therefore, have a dangerous power (Choeph. 479 ff., 315 ff.). When the earth has drunk the blood of a murdered person there is no turning back, even Zeus himself is then powerless (Eum. 647 ff., Choeph. 66 f.). The entire Oresteia is concerned with the necessity and the problem of blood-revenge, with retributive justice, but also—one must add—with atonement.

The fickleness of fortune and the vanity of human life (Agam. 1237 ff.) in Aeschylus retreats, however, before the omnipotence of the gods. *Koros* creates *hubris*, and this, in its turn, *atē*, which is already in itself a punishment (Agam. 370 ff., Eum. 530 ff.). The envy of the gods, to be sure, is found also in Aeschylus, but at the same time the poet turns against the idea that great fortune leads to great misfortune (Agam. 750 ff.). An unrighteous act gives birth to misfortune, while a righteous house happily flourishes with children.

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[1] For this general background I rely particularly on M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft V: 2: 1), 2. Aufl. München 1955, pp. 750 ff., supplemented by W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur, Die klassische Periode* 2 (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft VII: 1: 2), München 1934, pp. 265 ff., 222 ff.

There is no mechanical happening. Misfortune comes from the gods, but men have both free will and responsibility. Determinism and indeterminism stand naturally side by side. Religious thinking about that which has happened ascribes this to the gods. But in the ethical decision man is free (Eum. 531 ff.). There is also a combination of these views (e.g. Agam. 1505 ff) so that it is said that God's hand is also present when somebody hastens into destruction. (Pers. 742).

The principal theme of the tragedy is the tension between personal predisposition, personal will and personal desire for freedom on one hand, and divine, human or other necessity on the other. At the time of Aeschylus, the purposeful individualism of the new Attic democracy throws doubt upon the divine righteous order of the world. Solon had already struggled with this problem, making the ancient belief in a divine providence his own. The development prosperity—satiety—hubris and ensuing divine punishment (ὄλβος, κόρος, ὕβρις, δίκη) is firmly laid down, and it places the responsibility on man. Aeschylus builds further on this and wants to illustrate the problems of god and man, state and individual, fate and freedom. Man does not unpunished break the laws of righteousness which, for humanity's own welfare, stand under the omnipotent protection of the gods.

In *The Seven Against Thebes* (687) it is said that Eteocles acts in blindness (ἄτη). But the chorus reckons with his free choice, and he himself blames the gods for the evil. In the same way Cassandra acts and speaks under the necessity of Fate which she herself anticipates. Still none of Aeschylus' dramas is a tragedy of Fate. In his view the idea of hubris is bound up in a peculiar way with the requirements of justice and with the family's guilt. Posterity has to atone for the crimes of the ancestors, and punishment draws near as blindness, *atē*. Retributive justice rests as a curse on a certain house. It does not, however, strike an innocent person but, as it says later in the Bible, "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal. 6: 7), or in the words of Cicero, *ut sementem feceris ita metes* (*De Or.* II, 65, 261). Aeschylus puts this rule in the following way, "Who acts shall endure. So speaks the voice of the ageold wisdom" (δράσαντι παθεῖν, τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φωνεῖ) (Choeph. 313, cf. Agam. 1563 f., Eum. 489 ff.).

Good fortune follows the moderate one, a kind of reward of righteousness, while punishment is a consequence of hubris. Filial piety and hospitality

are not moral duties, however, but religious demands. In the same way the popular saying "Wisdom comes through suffering" has been lifted up by Aeschylus to a higher level, when he speaks of πάθει μάθος (Agam. 177, cf. Eum. 521).[1]

It is true that man at first understands god-sent suffering as an evil. In such cases Aeschylus avoids speaking of a certain god but mentions quite generally a demon, as if he wanted to distinguish between the supreme judge and the one who carries out his will. The "Allotter" often takes the shape of a wild beast that strikes its claws into its prey. But in the *Oresteia* the doctrine of πάθει μάθος is the keystone in Aeschylus' theodicy: man cannot escape suffering, it belongs to his existence.

The gods rule the world, and everything comes from them (Agam. 1487), even misfortune. One might say, to use a later Christian expression, that what happens is "God's will". The question why something happens is often lacking. When it is touched upon (Agam. 677 f., cf. 649), it always deals with guilt and righteousness, the latter being most frequently bound up with Zeus or appearing as his daughter Dike (Choeph. 949, 639 ff.). Zeus' virgin daughter Dike appears shining with light in the smoky cottages of the poor (Agam. 773 ff.), while she turns her eye away from the golden palaces of the soiled rich. Sometimes she weighs with her scales (Agam. 249, Choeph. 61), sometimes she fights with the sword of retribution in her hand (Choeph. 639, 947 ff.), sometimes she is the firm rock against which the ill-deed is crushed (Eum. 565), sometimes she is a firm trunk or root-stock (Choeph. 646). With Zeus and Kratos she forms a trinity (Choeph. 244 f., cf. Agam. 182). It is she who protects the foreigner and secures gods and parents the veneration that is due to them (Eum. 270 f., 545 f.). She has justice dispensed sooner or later in life (Choeph. 651, 936, 957, Agam. 463), or judgment may also come after death (Choeph. 61 ff., Agam. 1527, 1555 f., Eum. 274 f., 339 f., 355 ff.). Through familial solidarity the punishment may also hit the descendants of the guilty person (Agam. 373 ff., 758 ff.). The relationship between the dead and their descendants is illustrated by the fishing net in

[1] For this, see H. Dörrie, "Leid und Erfahrung. Die Wort- und Sinn-Verbindung παθεῖν–μαθεῖν im griechischen Denken", *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse* 1956: 5.

the sea, held up by the floats (Choeph. 505 f.), quoted among others by Clement of Alexandria. Also evildoers may be the instruments of divine punishment, e.g., Clytaemestra (Agam. 912 f., 1396, 1406, 1432, 1526). At the mythical level retributive justice takes the shape of the Furies, who like indefatigable dogs or good archers hunt their prey. The Furies in their turn forebode the magically effective curse of Alastor or Ate. According to one interpretation of Aeschylus Dike is in the center of the poet's religion (Schmid).

Zeus is both omnipotent and righteous (Agam. 160 ff., 355 ff., 1563 f.) to such an extent that he sometimes becomes rather a principle than a personal god (Agam. 160 f.). The other gods are subordinated to Zeus, as e.g. Apollo in *The Eumenides*. In a famous fragment there appears even a pantheistic idea of the supreme god. Aeschylus' Zeus religion, which has hardly influenced posterity, is a "grandiose creation" (M. P. Nilsson).

The drama *The Suppliants* forms the first and the only preserved part of the trilogy on the Danaids, who fleeing from the threat of marriage come to Argos. There the king hesitates between the risk of a war and the refusal of the sacred right of asylum. "The central and the most sublime thing in the choruses of the tragedy is the monotheistically coloured Zeus religion that embraces and pervades the entire work of Aeschylus" (E. Zilliacus).[1] Danaus states that the righteous order of the world cannot be altered:

> Who not even in hell,
> Where another Zeus among the dead (they say)
> Works out their final punishment, can flee
> Their guilt of lust.[2]
>
> (229 ff.)

The Danaids also appeal to Zeus when King Pelasgus hesitates to receive them into his protection:

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[1] In his Swedish translation, Stockholm 1933, pp. 15 f.

[2] Translation here as in the following from *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. by D. Grene–R. Lattimore, Vol. I: *Aeschylus*, Chicago 1959, which is based on H. W. Smyth's text in *Loeb Classical Library* (1922–26). Since this translation has not always managed to combine poetical beauty and faithfulness to the original in the same brilliant way as Zilliacus, it has been utilized somewhat sparingly for verbal quotations.

Both sides of related blood he sees,
Zeus holds a sensitive balance,
To evil and the righteous weighing
Just and unjust fairly.
Why fear to act justly?
(402 ff.)

.....
Do what you will,
Thy house remains to pay,
Fined in thy children:
Justice is equal.
Mark the justice of Zeus.
(434 f.)

When the Argives have granted them asylum, the Danaids pray that the gods might preserve them from war because they have shown mercy. But there is also prayer for welfare in all respects instead of war and plague. Let fear of god, wisdom, obedience to the law and filial piety prevail, let the women bear their children, let the earth be blessed with crops, and let the herds increase.

In their utmost distress, when the virgins are violently forced to the waiting ship, they exclaim:

Earth, Mother Earth,
Avert his fearful cry.
O son, son of Earth, O Zeus.
(890 ff.)

The first part of the drama concludes with a prayer to Zeus, which consists of a dialogue between the two halves of the chorus and which emphasizes that Zeus' will is inalterable and inscrutable. The last strophe of the united chorus (= the Danaids) runs:

And strength may he assign us.
I am content if ill
Is one-third my lot,
And justly, with my prayers,
Beside the saving arts of god,
To follow justice.

(καὶ κράτος νέμοι γυναι-
ξίν· τὸ βέλτερον κακοῦ
καὶ τὸ δίμοιρον αἰνῶ,
καὶ δίκᾳ δίκας ἔπε-
σθαι, ξὺν εὐχαῖς ἐμαῖς, λυτηρίοις
μαχαναῖς θεοῦ πάρα.)

(1069 ff.)

Thus Zeus and justice belong naturally together also in this drama. In the final strophe there is a glimpse of the tension between the different factors that determine man's destiny. The strict order of justice is to some extent broken through by the lot of Fate, which is met with fortitude and—it is hoped—will contain twice as much (δίμοιρον) good as ill. But this regularity does not prevent divine intervention. However, the prayers seem primarily to be aimed at having justice dispensed regardless of whether this is done through the normal course of a righteous order of the world, or whether it is aided by special divine action. On the other hand, it does not seem possible to find any opposition between justice and mercy in this passage. The laconic expressions of chorus lyrics are equivocal in themselves and in this case they also allow of different philological interpretations. Smyth's English version interprets both δίκας and πάρα differently from Lattimore and harmonizes the different components with each other: "(Content that,) through means of deliverance vouchsafed of Heaven, conflicting rights, in accordance with my prayers, should attend the course of justice." The term δίμοιρον, which, by the way, is also ambiguous, leads us to proceed to the problem of Fate in Aeschylus.

The Problem of Fate in General in Aeschylus

Aeschylus uses the traditional Greek expressions for Fate, even if he sometimes gives them a more or less peculiar content. Also the statistical distribution of words for Fate may suggest characteristic features in him. Thus the words for fate include *Tyche* (τύχη), luck or fortune, which is

rarely personified in Aeschylus and usually means unforeseen or uncontrollable luck rather than Fate. Thus Tyche can be good or bad and is sometimes bound up with the gods (Agam. 661). There is further *Moira* (μοῖρα), the portion or share allotted to man, also personified, with its synonym *aisa* (αἶσα), and in addition *ananke* (ἀνάγκη), necessity, while the related terms *adrasteia* and *heimarmene* are used in a few exceptional cases.

Dike (Δίκη) which has a strong fatalistic character, is naturally enough very frequent. To the same semantic sphere belongs also *Themis* (θέμις).

To some extent also divine *phthonos* (φθόνος), envy or jealousy of man's good fortune, is one of the factors that determine man's destiny (Agam. 904, cf. 1008 ff.). Its content is related to *nemesis* which follows *hubris* (cf. Agam. 370 ff., 468 ff., though the terms are not found here).

A peculiar position is taken up by the *Demon* (Δαῖμον, probably from δαίεσθαι, to apportion) which as family curse and hereditary guilt comes upon the members of a family, even on an innocent person like Orestes. It also appears with other names, such as *Ate* ("Ατη) and *Alastor* ('Αλάστωρ).

Ate, who in mythology is the oldest daughter of Zeus (Il. xix. 90), means "injury", "wound", moral blindness, disintegration and destruction. In Aeschylus *Ate* denotes primarily in a passive sense the condition of the injured, the act of suffering injury (=λύμη, βλάβη). There is only one scholion in Homer which explains the word in an active sense as ἑκούσιος ἁμαρτία, and Suidas as a secondary meaning renders it with the Christian synonym ὁ διάβολος ὁ ἀντικείμενος. Also the figures of *ate* as the field on which the corn grows, or as the fruit of *hubris*, are primarily passive. But in *The Persians* and *Agamemnon* the metaphors take on an active sense, and *Ate* becomes instead of a passive misfortune a demon and a diabolic destructive power, which lures man into its net, has the evil eye, and deprives man of his own will. She is furious and murderous, she can be sent by the gods, though she does not attack innocent people but is the fruit of *hubris* (Agam. 764 ff.).

Alastor is the spirit of the murdered one, which cries for revenge and atonement, personified as *Ate*'s son or incarnated in some survivor, e.g., Clytaemestra. Etymologically *Alastor* has been related to λᾶν (to behold), thus "the one who cannot be beheld" without the demon's evil eye striking the person in question, to the root λαθ (to forget), thus "the one who does

not forget", and finally and most probably to ἀλᾶσθαι, to rove, thus "Irr-geist" or roving ghost.[1]

The relationship between Fate and the gods is not univocally defined in Aeschylus. In *Prometheus Bound* Zeus seems to be subordinated to *Moira* or inevitable Fate. Sometimes Fate is identified with Zeus' decree. A Fate that is entirely independent of Zeus is hardly to be found in Aeschylus.[2] As far as man is concerned there is also the opinion that Fate is something inescapable. A man who has got many wounds does not die until his time is up (fragm. 362),[3] and one does not evade one's fate by staying at home.

However, Aeschylus purifies the Greek conception of the Olympian gods and subordinates them to an omnipotent Zeus. His will coincides with Fate, which now becomes not only inexorable but also good. "The Erinyes, once the chtonic powers of relentless vengeance, are persuaded to accept the beneficent rôle of demons of fertility. The sense of guilt is appeased by the discovery that only wilful sin knows no forgiveness. The last lines of the *Oresteia* present in festal song the union of all-seeing Zeus and the rule of *Moira*" (Eum. 1045 f.).[4]

When *Moira* at other places in Aeschylus appears as superior to Zeus, as in *Prometheus Bound*, there have been various attempts to solve the contradiction. W. Schmid for this reason regards this drama as spurious. Others (Zilliacus,[5] Greene, Vian) point to the fact that *Prometheus Bound* is only the first part of a lost trilogy. Fragments of the sequel show that Zeus himself is changed and is reconciled with the titan, who is set free by reason of a vicarious sacrifice of the centaur Cheiron.

Moira is the moral law that Zeus himself has broken by outraging his father. Therefore he too is struck by the Erinyes. Zeus must transform

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[1] For the terminology, see W. C. Greene, *Moira, Fate, Good, Evil in Greek Thought*, Cambridge, Mass. 1944, pp. 21, 105 f., 124, Schmid, *op. cit.* pp. 27 f., U. Bianchi, ΔΙΟΣ ΑΙΣΑ, Rome 1953, *Der kleine Pauly*, s.v. "Alastor". Cf. also E. Peterich, *Die Theologie der Hellenen*, Leipzig 1938, pp. 173 f., 213 ff. For the frequency of words, see G. Italie, *Index Aeschyleus*, Leiden 1954–55.

[2] Nilsson, *loc. cit.*, Schmid, *loc. cit.*

[3] Cf. R. Wildhaber, "Die Stunde ist da, aber der Mann nicht", ein europäisches Sagenmotiv, *Rheinisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 9, 1936, pp. 65 ff.

[4] Greene, *op. cit.* p. 110

[5] *Aiskylos Prometheus* tolkad av E. Zilliacus, Stockholm 1931, pp. 13 f.

himself in accord with the pattern or the harmony constituted by *Moira*, which is the law of evolution and the meaning of history, as Greene puts it.[1]

The Problem of Fate in the Oresteia

The contents and the tragic conflict of the *Oresteia* are briefly the following. Those who have suffered a violent death have a right for vengeance. Orestes has to take revenge for the murder of his father even if he is thereby forced to do violence to his mother and to the relative who is her lover. Apollo himself points this out as a sacred duty and threatens him with terrible punishments if the deed is not performed. Also the goddess *Dike*, the personification of justice, unconditionally demands blood revenge. As soon as the blood has flown, the soul of the murdered person cries for revenge and does not rest until a revenger appears, who, in his turn, has to atone for his deed. Each ill-deed generates a new one, not only in the individual but in the entire family to which he belongs. The evil is incarnated in the spirit of curse and vengeance, the demon Alastor. He requites ill-deeds committed, but at the same time he instigates new ones till he is satisfied with revenge.

In the family of the Atrids the family curse comes from Thyestes, who pronounces it when his brother Atreus reveals that the meat of a meal is that of Thyestes' own children. Thyestes' surviving son Aegisthus kills his uncle Atreus and entices Clytaemestra to murder her husband Agamemnon, son of Atreus, on his return from the Trojan war. This in turn forces Agamemnon's son Orestes to the murder of his mother and an uncle, although he shrinks back from such a deed.

But Apollo who has instigated it all, also finally brings about a reconciliation. The Furies, or spirits of retribution, who take the shape of the women of the chorus, pursue Orestes with their songs of curse to Delphi and Athens. The goddess Athene appoints a court, the Areopagus, which acquits Orestes. As Eumenides, the Furies receive a permanent cult place in Athens. They must, as Wilamowitz puts it, "recognize the state as the bearer and

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[1] Greene, *op. cit.* p. 124; cf. also Vian, "Le conflit entre Zeus et la destinée dans Éschyle", *Revue des études grecques* 60, 1947, pp. 190 ff., and L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece*, Stanford, Calif. 1962, pp. 90 ff.

guardian of justice and relinquish their revenging task to it. They do this at the same time as they find a home in the same state."[1]

The repeated allusions of the chorus to the curse that rests on the house and to the inescapable power of Fate form a recurring motif which puts its stamp on the entire trilogy.[2] The title of this paper, "Divine and demonic necessity in the Oresteia" consequently refers to something that is essential to this drama.

In *The Libation Bearers* the chorus invokes the deities of vengeance (377, 399, 471 ff.), the *Moirai* and *Dike* (306–314, cf. 461 ff.), as well as Zeus (395, 409) and Agamemnon himself (315 ff). Just before Orestes kills his mother he quickly reviews what has happened: if *Moira* shares the accusation of the murder of Agamemnon with Clytaemestra, she also bears the responsibility for Clytaemestra's imminent death (910 f., cf. 622, 635 ff., 927: *aisa*).

For all that justice has to be dispensed by human hands.[3] The persuasion and transformation of the Furies in addition to Athene's merciful voting imply that compassion, mercy, and divine grace are allowed to supplement the voice of reason. In the same way the human parties in Rafael's *Disputa* have their counterparts in the heavenly hosts.

The Furies claim kinship with their sisters the *Moirai* and thereby also with *Dike* (Eum. 961 ff.; cf. 172, 334 ff., 724), even if they only represent partial aspects of these powers. For it is a restricted *Dike* who pays heed to the murder of a mother as in the case of Orestes, but not to the killing of a husband, as in the case of Clytaemestra. There is also a conflict between the primordial *Moirai*, with whom the Furies are connected—they are not only devils and representatives of evil—and Zeus' later government which looks after suppliants and people not protected by the law. The murder of Clytaemestra is a just murder because the intention is good; therefore Orestes guilt is diminished.

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[1] Quoted from G. Pfannmüller, *Tod, Jenseits und Unsterblichkeit in der Religion, Literatur und Philosophie der Griechen und Römer*, München-Basel 1953, pp. 81 f.

[2] Greene, *op. cit.* p. 126. I have not had accession to J. W. Pugsley, "The Fate Motive and its Echoes in the Oresteia", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Association* 60, 1929, pp. 38 ff.

[3] Greene, *op. cit.* pp. 129, 131.

The change and transformation in *The Eumenides* cannot be brought about by the Zeus of *Prometheus Bound*, the merciless tyrant who is subordinate to *Moira*. But it is possible for the Zeus whom we know from *The Suppliants* and the end of the Prometheus trilogy. This Zeus "has learned by suffering to be wise and to feel pity, to relax the letter of the law and to forgive in order that real justice may be done, to conceive of goodness not as something external and objective but as the will that moves from within".

It might seem that Greene is here reading into Aeschylus the New Testament idea of God. But it is the inner logic of the drama that actualizes such language, even if one has to be on one's guard against anachronisms and disregard for peculiarities in comparing documents dealing with similar problems. "In interpreting *The Eumenides* even the most careful philologists become, whether willing or unwilling, halfway theologians."[1] It is impossible to get away from the question of meaning, however much, to a student of classical history and literature, it be inspired by classicistic aesthetics or bear the stamp of the drama of ideas, or otherwise be kept away from the Attic theatre. The gods, ancient and new, the primordial powers and the Olympians, the protectors of the family and the state, enter the stage replacing the human actors.

The innumerable scholarly interpretations of modern times are classified by Reinhardt into three main groups: the juridical, the religio-historical, and the political-ethical one, the latter with either a humanitarian or a political-patriotic emphasis. The educational effect that is connected with all these interpretations must have been more obvious to Aeschylus' contemporaries than to the modern reader. The glorification of Athens is of mainly historical interest to us. Possibly the idea that ancient social institutions remain but are reinterpreted and re-created in a progressive society may still fascinate us and have some relevance.

The juridical interpretation finds in *The Eumenides* the process of the state's taking over justice, the replacing of blood revenge by a regulated lawsuit. Society says, "The revenge is mine", thus abrogating the law of retribution, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". A humanitarian

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[1] K. Reinhardt, *Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologe*, Bern 1949, pp. 140 f.

public justice takes the place of ancient blood-revenge. It is only a pity that the case is so complicated.

The religio-historical interpretation finds in *The Eumenides* the triumph of the Olympian, heavenly and light gods over the earthbound, dark and terrifying powers of the primordial period. It is also the human and the formed that overcomes the demonic and the formless. On one side there are such notions as spirit—male—new, on the other side instinct—female—ancient, or according to Bachofen, patriarchate and matriarchate.

The political interpretation discovers in *The Eumenides* the birth of the *polis*, the description of the human spirit finding itself in a politically organized existence, the liberation of man to individual responsibility, his development from subordination to magical rites to the cultivation of right and truth in the spirit of Athene, etc.

After this brief exposition of the contents, the problems and the possible interpretations of the *Oresteia* we proceed to an examination of some specific passages. In *Agamemnon* the family curse has different names. Sometimes (1461) it is called the spirit of discord (ἔρις ἐρίδματος, Lattimore: "Demon of death"), sometimes (1468) it is called a demon (δαῖμον, Lattimore: "divinity") who attacks the two brothers of Tantalus' family. This thrice blood-fed demon of the family (δαίμονα γέννης τῆσδε) kindles the thirst for new blood (1475 ff.). But Clytaemestra tries in vain to blame the furious play of evil powers. While admitting that a great and angry demon (Lattimore: spirit) ravages the house the terrified chorus corrects her by saying that this happens through Zeus, who causes and brings about everything:

> For what thing without Zeus is done among mortals?
> What here is without God's blessing (θεόκραντον)?
> (1487 f.)

At the same time the chorus states that it is Clytaemestras own hand that has wielded the two-edged weapon. The queen herself maintains that it is the old fierce spirit of vengeance (παλαιὸς δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ) who has assumed her form and thus performed the deed (1500 ff.). The chorus, however, insists on the queen's individual guilt, even if the revenging spirit of the family has contributed:

What man shall testify
Your hands are clean of this murder?
How? How? Yet from his father's blood
Might swarm some fiend (ἀλάστωρ) to guide you.
(1505 ff.)

Thus, at the transcendental level the dialectics is concerned with demonic versus divine necessity, and at the human level collective versus individual responsibility and guilt. Freedom and bondage is another question which does not coincide with the antithesis divine-human. The poet does not end up in any philosophical antinomies but includes all these viewpoints in a living religious view of reality. To this belongs also the fact that the scale of justice (*Dike*) sooner or later sinks for the guilty one, as it is emphasized in the second part of the *Oresteia*, *The Libation Bearers* (61 ff.). The congealed writing of blood is not to be blotted out. A painful destruction, or, personally expressed, pain-bringing *Ate*, in the long run breaks down the guilty (διαλγὴς ἄτη διαφέρει τὸν αἴτιον).

Characteristically enough, the fatalistic words appear when the chorus describes this and other inevitable events. The gods (*sic!*) have placed upon the kidnapped slaves the fate or necessity of belonging to two cities (ἀνάγκην ἀμφίπτολιν). But

The day of destiny (τὸ μόρσιμον) awaits for the free man as well
As for the man enslaved beneath an alien hand.
(103 f.)

Fate is also personal and thus also acts in accordance with Zeus' will and the righteous laws of *Dike*:

Almighty Destinies, by the will
Of Zeus let these things
Be done, in the turning of Justice.
For the word of hatred spoken, let hate
Be a word fulfilled. The spirit of Right
Cries out aloud and extracts atonement
Due.

(ἀλλ' ὦ μεγάλαι Μοῖραι, Διόθεν
τῇδε τελευτᾶν,
ᾗ τὸ δίκαιον μεταβαίνει.
ἀντὶ μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ

γλῶσσα τελείσθω· τοὐφειλόμενον
πράσσουσα Δίκη μέγ' ἀυτεῖ·)
(306 ff.)

Smitten by all calamity and sorrow Electra exclaims on the gravemound of her father Agamemnon: "Is not disaster (doom: ἄτα), or Ate, invincible?" (339) But not only men but also superhuman or non-human powers are subject to Fate. In *The Eumenides* the Furies sing that also their revenging function is spun for them by the everdetermining (διανταία) *Moira* (334). They have it eternally from their hour of birth (349) and therefore represent the ancient laws (παλαιοὺς νόμους) which are now abolished by the young gods (808 f.).

We revert to some of the different total views that various scholars have derived from the same material. When E. Peterich in his work *Die Theologie der Hellenen* (Leipzig 1938) comes to speak of the Erinyes, he adds a special chapter called "Die Gnade" (pp. 227 ff.). It contains an analysis of *The Eumenides*, "the most magnificent theological poetry of the Hellenes". The drama deals with the struggle of the divine powers for the soul of the mother-murderer Orestes. The action presupposes a firm belief in a life in the hereafter and a justice that is dispensed beyond the grave (269 ff.), almost in the same way as the Christians look forward to a just judgment.

The revenging Erinyes are the guardians of eternal justice, and they are not satisfied with cultic purifications. Even if they appear as infernal spirits, comparable to the devils in Dante's Hell (300 ff.), they represent justice and not violence. They have their ancient office from *Moira* herself (334) and they are proud of it (392 ff.). Benevolence also belongs to their nature, Aeschylus is not the first to make them Eumenides.

There is both juridical and religious history in *The Eumenides*. Apollo defends the broader rights of matrimony, not only those of blood as the Erinyes. He punishes the murder of the husband and at Zeus command sends Orestes to take revenge on Agamemnon from his own mother Clytaemestra. Apollo, therefore, is an accomplice, accused with her and the real culprit. This makes the understanding of the drama more difficult for us. In the last resort the problem is concerned with free will, and the Greeks of that time neither acknowledged nor denied free will. Orestes has no free will, he is an instrument. Clytaemestra on the other hand has killed Aga-

memnon on her own impulse; when she blames her husband's sacrificing Iphigenia and his intimacy with Cassandra, these are pretexts. Therefore she is hit by the punishment of the gods, but can this reach Orestes who has carried out the will of the gods themselves (cf. 426: ἀνάγκαις)?

Not even the new court, Areopagus, can acquit Orestes, he has forfeited his life also according to the new justice, since one more than half of the judges has voted for death. But then Athene throws her white voting stone into the urn (734). So Orestes is acquitted. Why does Athene do this? Not only because she herself has no mother and consequently does not care for the murder of a mother (736), but she acts by order of Zeus, whom Orestes also immediately thanks as *Soter* (760). Thus the circle from the beginning of *Agamemnon* is closed, where the chorus of the Argivian old men sings of χάρις βίαιος (βιαίως).

Aeschylus has not only written of history of law and cult in *The Eumenides*, but he has also made a theological drama about justice and grace. Neither human nor divine justice can stand without grace, and this thought is older than Aeschylus. But in him something of this ancient Greek doctrine of grace has been preserved, according to which neither the Erinyes nor Zeus are purely revenging and judging deities, just as little as the God of the Old Testament is such a god.

This total view is found also in Greene. At every point Aeschylus has transformed the traditional material and poured new wine into the old bottles, whether myths, scenic technique, or religious ideas are concerned. The family curse is not an implacable fate, but it is finally removed and justice is crowned with mercy. The purity of motive in the acting person makes this solution possible, which means that the role of human will is inculcated. There is no mechanical predestination. Suffering is not overcome through resignation but through compassion and forgiveness. It is characteristic that Greene in a footnote quotes the words of Jesus on the cross, "Father forgive them...", when he wants to illustrate what Aeschylus means. The individual does not live in isolation but is a part of a universal human and cosmic whole. The poet boldly tackles the eternal contrasts between fate and freedom, justice and mercy, individual and collective, suffering and happiness. Divine grace and persuasion solves the conflict in the case of Orestes.

The opposite interpretation emphasizes above all the tragedian's contra-

dictions. The old patent-remedy against this is to speak of the poet's development or to distinguish between genuine and spurious works. A modified position is taken by Reinhardt. According to him Aeschylus uses for the most part traditional material which he has not been able to amalgamate entirely with the new. The inherited curse stands beside divine grace, belief in the envy of the gods beside the idea of theodicy, belief in a supreme omniscience beside the revenging spirits. Two traits in the poet's thinking appear as especially contradictory; first, divine omnipotence and predestination, which nevertheless demand human cooperation; and secondly, Zeus' justice which punishes every injustice, although the deity works as a cause in man, with good or evil, guilt or innocence as consequences.

It may be tempting to modernize and trace these contrasts back to one, namely, necessity and freedom. But this antinomy which is necessary for ethical action is absent in Aeschylus both formally and concretely. He does not have the opposition between "must" and "should", but only between "must" and "want to", i.e. a submissive complying. The dissonance which is strengthened in the course of time appears especially if one compares the hymns to Zeus in *The Suppliants* and in *Agamemnon* (160 ff.).

Every Greek god demands a kind of human action that corresponds to the nature of the god. Zeus demands from man wisdom that is won by suffering. To this corresponds in the deity divine violence (βία) and divine grace (χάρις). Man suffers from Bia and learns from Charis. But Charis is not the same as the Christian word "grace" but a reciprocally benificent interchange so that the term from the giver's point of view can mean graciousness, from that of the receiver gratitude. The opposite of Charis is therefore not Justice, so that grace would abrogate justice, but the relation between power and powerlessness, high and low, victory and submission, i.e. Bia.

With this we must conclude this research-historical review. Even if one may never disregard Aeschylus' historical background and his own particularity, the problems raised by the *Oresteia* are universally human and timeless. They may be expressed in different words in different times. But they are basic conditions of human existence. Therefore the dramatic works of Aeschylus continue to live and fill a place in this symposium on the problems of destiny.