Thesis
Subject:
Euripides' Idea of God and his Attitude Toward Contemporary Religion.
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Euripides' idea of God and his attitude toward contemporary religion.

Introduction

What were the ideas which Euripides entertained in regard to the divine government of the universe and an overruling deity, and what attitude did he sustain toward the gods of Greece as commonly accepted in his time?

This inquiry forms the substance of the following investigations based primarily on the poet's extant works. While we are confronted at times by the difficulty of discriminating between what was clearly his own individual opinion and what the sentiment of his characters, there are numerous inferences...
That may be safely made regarding his views of religion. The
chooses is commonly supposed to represent the poet's moralizings
and reflections but certainly it is not here alone that these are
found. Frequently, as will be seen, there are statements made by the
dramatic personage which coincide most probably with the opin-
ions of the tragedian himself.
To arrive with absolute accuracy at his own sentiments is indeed
not easy but our close observa-
tion of the characters concerned
and a proper interpretation
of the properties underlying
each significant remark will
aid us materially in ascer-
taining his views. It is not fair
to be sure, to attribute to Euripides
a particular view of theology sim-
ply because a certain character
may have given utterance to
That idea. No more should this be the case than if we assert that the Bible says, "There is no God," when it really asserts that this is the paying of the fool. But we may say that where the circumstances in the case clearly allow such interpretation, and comparison with other ideas expressed shows no inconsistency, there it would seem we are justified in conceding to the poet a personal view.

A few more words of introduction will suffice. As the Greek dramatists are studied more and more by modern critics, Euripides is being received with more appreciation and more favorable criticism than formerly. Of his admirers and supporters one of the foremost is Dr. Verrall, author of "Euripides, the Rationalist."
generous work. As an occasional reference shall be made to him in the course of this discussion, it is desirable to note briefly his most important theories. He undertakes to discuss Euripides' rationalistic tendencies by treating the "Alcestis", "Ion", "Iphigenia", besides the "Phoenissae" and a hymn. His treatment consists in giving a new explanation to several parts of the play which introduce the god. His belief is that the poet had two designs in view in some of the plays. A part of his audience—the majority in fact—was expected to accept the play exactly as represented and see in it the old conventional types of character and morals. The more cultured and inquisitive minds in his audience, on the other hand, he intended should discover in his
dramatic treatment of the gods as an undercurrent of thought, an advance in doctrinal beliefs. Thus the real motive was to bring certain myths and superstitions into disrepute and contempt. There being as has been explained "the repressed and superficial plot which was intended to satisfy the orthodoxy, and the rationalized modification which lay half-concealed beneath it and which the intelligent sceptic would easily detect." He endeavors, furthermore, to bring the European play into the sphere of any ordinary human experience without a supernatural or unrealistic influence about it. For instance, Miracles restores Alcestis to Admetus recovered from a trance and does not really cause her resurrection from the dead, as
The play itself implies another point may be added. Dr. Urrall thinks that at the beginning and at the end of the play the appearance of the gods is simply for the sake of effect on the popular mind. While his analyses are in a measure convincing, the whole treatment compels us to go with him, as he enjoins us to go with Euripides: "It is for us to follow him as far as we choose and when we will not or cannot, to go away."

Coming now to our diagnosis of Euripides, we may divide the religious philosophy of Euripides into two phases: (1) the constructive, wherein he reveals his conception of a divine director of the universe, from which we may formulate some general theory as to the characteristics of this being.
I. Constructive

His idea of God.

Our purpose now is to inquire whether Euripides actually believed in a god and a divine government of the world and if so what this conception consisted. We shall not attempt to analyze any possible undercurrents of ideas as seen in Dr. Urrall's discussions, or probe the unapproachable depths of this question. Instead, we shall take the plays of Euripides as we find them (complete and fragmentary), and interpret...
from them as clearly as possible what seem to have been his own religious views.

It may be said, first of all, that Euripides evinces an earnest belief in some Supreme Ruler of the Universe and chief Administrator of material affairs—a deity whose power was in all and over all. Now, as he conceived it, who was this deity? This query finds no absolutely full and satisfactory answer, yet viewing his miscellaneous statements we are not left in doubt as to his general doctrine. "Zeus" appears as the name by which the divine power is designated, yet it is clear that he cared not so much for the name as for the realization that a deity did exist. The following expressions, among many others, occur, making reference in one way
or another to Zeus:

'O Zeus- whoever Zeus is - for naught I know Except by hearsay' (Fragment 433)

'Heaven's king, revered Zeus' (Isthm. 774)

'Zeus, the most high, etc' (Pelas. 455)

'The chiefest, Zeus' (Herac. 238).

It is true that Aeschylus referred also to 'Zeus' but he seems to have put an almost equal (if not equal) degree of faith in the other gods, as is illustrated in the Agamemnon 55-59: "Above there is one that hears, either Apollo, or Pan, or Zeus, the shrill lament of winged mourners who dwell in his skies, and sends a late avenging fury upon the transgressors." Furthermore, he had not ceased to regard Zeus as the same kind of deity as Homer had pictured. The human tendency expressed by Aeschylus (Agam. 160-172) where Zeus like an earthly king, usurps the throne of
his father, Cronus, who had likewise
worse formerly destroyed his
son, Uranus, in a traditional
idea not voiced by Euripides.
For Euripides does not picture
Zeus as acting thus but gives
it appears, a more dignified,
noble and sublime aspect to
his qualities.

The prominent attributes which
he assigns to the deity depict him
as (1) All-seeing, (2) Invisible, (3) Just,
(4) Omnipotent, (5) Wise, (6) Holy and
Righteous, and (7) Good.

(1) Omnipotence - The deity's omnisci-
ence is mentioned in Frag. 960
where he is referred to as one
who sees all things and is himself
 unseen.

Now nearly this fits our own
conception of God! Electra 1177
shows the following:

'O earth and all beholding seas
To mortals, see the bloody deeds.
Abominable, Furies twain—
destroyed upon the ground by stroke
of my own hand, 'Rule for my woe.'

Zeus, it appeared, was the
beholder of all deeds on earth,
both good and bad. The reward
or vengeance which always comes
presupposes his all-seeing power.

(2) - Invisibility - If it has been quoted above that he saw all things
but was himself unseen, Europa
asserted that Zeus was some-
thing more than a lifeless im-
age in a temple (Frag. 968):
'What house constructed by the builders' hands,
coved in its walls the gods' like form contain?

Thus he does not even think
of Zeus as existing in tangible
and earthen form. His own view
does not assign Zeus to the con-
ventional Olympian height where
he may revel and delight in am-
broxia and nectar. In fact, he
attains to that breadth of thought
which makes the ether and man's mind synonymous with Zeus, as Fragment 935:

'Know thou perceive this boundless air, above, Embracing in its moistened arms the earth? Consider thou this Zeus, esteem this God.'

or as Fragment 1007:

'the mind in each of you is deos.'

A similar suggestion of invisibility on the part of the divinity is seen in Proades 884-887:

'O thou Earth's stay and Dweller on the Earth Whose False art - unrecognizable - Zeus, whether nature's need or mortal mind I thee teach.'

The abode of the deity is nowhere definitely described. Yet reference is made (Phoen. 84) to 'The shining clouds of the heaven' and (Proad. 884) to the 'Earth' as his place of habitation.

(3) Justice - conceiving of some "primal cause" and divine influence in the world and de-
nominating it "Zeus" with some degree of indefiniteness. 
Euripides appears to conceive of justice as a very prominent 
attribute or as a divine essence co-existent with Zeus him-
self. In Fragment 508 he tells how not even would 
the whole heaven suffice if Zeus should 
write down the sins of mortals or could be beheld exact punish-
ment of each but that justice is there somewhere near, if you 
desire to see. Compare Fragment 150: 
"Thus say, indeed, that justice is Zeus' child 
and dwelleth near the evil deeds of men. 
"Fragment 257 makes reference to justice 
'Who is near by and the not seen yet seen 
and knows whom there is need to harm.' 
Zeus in the true Euripidean 
sense seems no longer a god 
filled with human passions as he 
often formerly depicted, no
longer anthropomorphize in nature. He does not unjustly inflict punishment upon mankind nor does he act with revenge and malice but with just recompense for past deeds. The ideas of Zeus and Justice seem interlocked. The following passage, though placed in the mouth of Hercules, seems clearly to express the poet's sentiment. She, after addressing Zeus as 'nature's need or mortal mind', exclaims (Iliad. 887-888):

'I thee bequeath for on thy noiseless way Proceeding, thou art justice guid'st to men.' In Aesch. Oed. 394-395 we find the following:

'In, God, not undiscerning, always knows When oaths are falsely broken or made these' force!'

Compare Electra 585-586. The references to the power of Justice are frequent. See Electra 957-958-
a choruses. The three preceding lines (Elec. 954-956), as a final quotation, are strong.*

"Let none dream. The vio' at starting he run well,
That he outruneth justice, ere he touch
The very goal and gain the bourn of life".

(4) Omnipotence - We cannot as-
sert that Euripides had only a
monothestic idea of God, for as
we shall find, he did not wholly
refute the notion that other gods
existed possessing certain in-
fluence but he does clearly and
unmistakably attribute to Zeus
the highest power. In Ictades 948-
949 we read:

'And be Thou mightier than Zeus
Who sole control all of the other gods.'

God's power is greatest in the re-
frain from the choruses in Alcestis

* Way's Translation, Vol. II
The god in whom Euripides seemed to place faith was a deity whose power extended over all the world, controlling not only all the gods but all mankind. He was therefore in every sphere to be recognized as all-powerful. See Orestes 1546-1548 in this connection:

And the deity directs for men, an end wherever he sooth desire, his power is very great.

The passage found in Aeschylus 976-977, 980-981, for Zeus himself whatever he wills, accomplished by Thine own aid, referring to necessity, gives us reason to discuss at this point the interpretations of the poet's use of necessity and fate. Does this passage mean that necessity is a force or power which operates independently of human or divine will, having no super-

determinate influence back
of it? That is, is Zeus himself sub-
ervient to the decrees of necessity?
Fate likewise comes in here on
an equality with necessity. Fre-
quently references we find are made
to necessity and fate, and the
inseparable power they possess.
Each appears to be an influence
which cannot be shunned by mor-
tals or affected in any way by
them. In Iliad 5.18 Menelaus is re-
presented as remarking:

No saying that is mine but from the wise
Nought hath more power than due necessity.

The following is a chorus of Aeschylus 962:

All literature have I perused
The orbs celestial soared
And many arguments overheard
But naught found I that could outweigh
Necessity, etc.

As to fate, see Virgil, Ec. 615–616:

It is not right to flee from fate
No one with wisdom will repel it

Rhesus 634 shows:
There could not be more than He's fate. 

VESP. 1255-1256 voice this same idea: 

"As misfortune cometh from new ills; 
Fate and Necessity grant no escape."

Now shall such questions as these be regarded as consistent or at variance with his other views of God? When these are considered in connection with the poet's philosophy and not when viewed in individual and disconnected passages, it appears that Zeus is still possessed of this omnipotence with necessity and Fate as direct manifestations of His will which overrules the acts of men. This seems a true inference from Heracl. 608-614, a chorus:

"οὐτίνα φημε Θεῶν ἀτέρ ὀλβίων, οὐ

Βαρυποτμοῦν ἄνδρα χειρείθαι

οὐδὲ τὸν αὐτὸν ἔτει φεβάναι δόμον ἐπεμιχθίᾳ. παρὰ δ' ἀλλᾶν ἀλλα

μοῖρα διώκει.
τὸν μὲν ἄφιε Συνθήκην Βραχύν
κόπο
τὸν δ' ἀρίτιαν εὐδαιμόνα τεύχει.

There is evidence then that the
people did not conceive necessity
and Fate as some influence
external, independent, and self-
directed but as an influence
conditioned on divine direction
or acting cooperatively with Zeus.
Where, as we quoted above, Ne-
sessity is spoken of as stronger
than all else, may we not inter-
pret this to mean that all earth-
ly affairs and all mankind
must yield to necessity but not
to imply that things divine are
subject to it? Such things as
offerings of sacrifice or words of
supplication are of no avail
before it, for necessity is the per-
sonified emblem of Zeus' power
and will. And Fate is no less an
expression of the divine determi-
nation. Compare Androm. 1266-1269:

"But wait, tell from the sea

With fifty as a chorus, Nereids,

-an aid to thee - I come for what

is fated

must thou endure. For thy doom

Zeus decreed."

In fact, the idea of Fate is represented in Phoen. 634 and Phain. see 1606 by the word διαίμονα. It is implied in Elec. 1248-1249 that Fate and Zeus (μοῖρας Ζεύς τε) are one

force in the world:

'Henceforth Thou must

perform what Fate and Zeus decreed for the

Zeus' will. Then seems to be full-

filled. This' the operation of the

two forces, necessity and Fate.

That is, they are not independent

of Zeus' power but are instru-

mental in accomplishing his

purposes. Hence, notwithstanding

the influence of necessity

and Fate, Zeus is omnipotent.
and still rules with justice. As was noted above, Septuagint 220 suggests 'The greatest power': "Θεοὶ σὺν εὐχάριστῳ: Θεῶν χάρ δύναμις μεγίστην."

(5) Wisdom - The attribute of wisdom is definitely ascribed in a few passages but is clearly implied in many more. In Hellen 1441-1442 is found This invocation:

'O Zeus who art called father and wise
God,
Look upon us, relieve us of our ills.'

In Phoemenae 86-87:

'There is no need, if Thou art wise,
To leave
The same men ever in unhappy state,'

Where Zeus is appealed to, the condition 'if Thou art wise' strongly implies a generally recognized wisdom on His part.
The wisdom of the deity is again pointed out in Phaenissae 412-414:
Focasta: 'How say you in a wild heart's name, O child?
Polyneices: 'Know not, God called me to my fate.'
Focasta: 'Well, wise is God.'

That description of God which reads, 'Too wise to err, too good to be unkind,' seems almost to voice the Greek idea.

(6) Holiness and Righteousness—While occasions are not often found where epithets of holiness or righteousness are applied to Zeus in the plays of Euripides, we are sure of the idea God he would have his audience believe Zeus to be. For the tendency, as has been hinted, was to ascribe to Zeus human failings. He himself regarded the gods, if they exist ed, as by no means immoral or
mean of low (Sp. Taur. 391):
"For I believe none of gods is wise, 
His Zeus, then, must be holy, righteous, fierce. Him does Pylades describe 
as, ‘King, indeed, of heaven, holy Zeus’ (Sp. Taur. 749). This phase of 
the several gods will be discussed 
more at length further on.

(7) Goodness - While the goodness of the Supreme Being is 
closely connected with, and implied in, some of the foregoing 
attributes, it may be illustrated 
a little more in detail. This 
quality may be shown in three 
special ways: (a) In his being in 
voked as a witness of agreements 
or oaths; Sp. Taur. 1077:
‘That I shall maintain silence of the deed 
On which Thou hast let great Zeus know.’
Suppliants 1174-1175:
‘And Zeus is witness and the heavenly gods 
Worthy of what things at our hands you do.’
(b) In his being a defender of the
helpless; Ps. 32:1.

Since lucky is my spear and Jees himself
Is on our side, friends many do I find.
Compare also Elee. 137 and 671.

Both as a witness and a defender Jees appears kindly disposed to the deserving, ready to protect and care for them.
Yet his goodness is more strikingly demonstrated (c) in his providential dealings with mankind. (Herac. 608+) a chorus, has already been partly quoted, showing how Providence directs affairs, changing men's fortunes, yet good will. His providential care is also mentioned prominently in Hippocrates 1102+. Lines 201-218 of the Suppliant's make it quite evident that the poet was not insensitive to the abundant goodness of God in supplying the many needs of man. This
Praise to the God who shaped in order's mould,
Our lives redeemed from chaos and the brute,
First, by implanting reason, giving Then
The tongue, word, herald, to interpret speech;
Earth's fruit for food, for nurturing Thee of
Rainedrops from heaven, to feed earth's forebodings
And water her green bosom; herewithal
Shelter from storm, and shadow from the heat,
Sea-tracking ships, that traffic might be ours,
With fellow-men of that which each land lacks
And, for invisible things or surely seen,
Soothsayers watch the flame, the liver's furls,
Or from the birds divine the Things to be.
Are we not arrogant, then, when all life's needs
God's quiet, therefore not to be content?
But our forethought moves stronger fain would be
Than God: we have gotten overarching hearts,
And dream that we be wiser than the Gods.

* Way's Translation, Vol. I.
The foregoing attributes seem to be the distinctive qualities of the Divine Being as conceived by Euripides.

Yet it remains to be said that in view of his rather indefinite idea of the controlling power of the universe, his philosophy does not at all times appear absolutely consistent and free from doubts. For instance, he says in Fragment 1013:

"The thought has often come into my mind of chance or God controls affairs of men."

Note also Hecuba 488-492, where Polykrates, addressing Zeus, asks if he oversees mankind or does chance do so? This may be an outburst of the poet's own sentiment. Likewise Arr 1512 might be noted. On Nike, 1102+ (quoted above) he says he finds
on reflection upon diverse affairs, an assurance that Providence directs us all but upon closer consideration that a clear intelligent view of the actions of Providence is well-nigh impossible, for he is left in wonder amid the misfortunes and deeds of mortals. In general he has an abiding trust in Providence but when he looks at individual instances in life he feels the dependency of doubt coming upon him. Whence he has been compared to Job. Fragments 271 and 283 appear at variance with our general theory of the European beliefs but as we do not know the connection in which they were used in the play, it is not advisable to lay stress on their contents. Fragment 271: 'Whosoever thinks Eros no great god, No highest one of all the deities
Either is foolish or unskilled in good, not knowing him the greatest good. To me:

Fragment 288 (in part):

Who says foreordain that gods exist in heaven?

They do not, no, unless some man hath wish

in folly thus to use tradition and

But ye yourselves behold — not in

my word

Place confidence!

May not, however, the other passages implying doubt and some degree of inconsistency, as cited above, be regarded as very, very natural results of close and inquiring study of conditions and affairs about him, as the youth saw them? Such expressions occurring at random need hardly affect the theory that Epicure believed in a government of the universe by a divine Being.
Euripides, accordingly, shows a distinct advance in individuality and originality as regards religious opinions, when compared with his predecessors in the drama, Aeschylus and Sophocles. In comparing briefly The Eumenides, I quote Mr. Leigh ("Tragic Drama of the Greeks") as to the two earlier tragedians. He remarks, "The ancient mythical gods were more to him than mere types and abstractions, and through their names might be uncertain and their deeds distorted by tradition, he seems to have felt no doubt in heart that they were real and hot divinities." He states that the tone of Sophocles is rather that of a man who has outgrown the simple creed of his countrymen but recognizes its value and efficacy, and everywhere
speaks of it with veneration.

Returning now to Euripides, we find that he attained a far nobler idea of a Supreme Deity than either Aeschylus or Sophocles. Furthermore, as will be shown later, he manifested his non-acceptance of the traditional and mythical accounts of the gods and endeavored to create clearer and purer conceptions of these divinities. The time in which he was living had no small effect upon his development into a thinker of the progressive and advanced type, even though his contemporary, Sophocles, did with stand similar influences. It is not strange that in this period of Athens' history when the sophists, rhetoricians and especially philosophers were causing many innovations in thought, Euripides should have
viewed more rationally than older poets the myths of his ancestral religion. But remembering that he was a contemporary and associate of Socrates will not allow us, on the one hand, to wonder at his philosophy, or, on the other hand, to attribute to him higher conceptions than those here shown.

II—Destructive

His Attitude toward Contemporary Religion.

The foregoing review of Euripides' idea of God by no means completes the discussion of his attitude toward religion. For he does not allow his philosophy to rest with asserting a belief in a divine government of the world under one Supreme Being. Two additional theories of his must be set forth to give a full and compre-
The comprehensive notion of his theological views: (a) That Zeus ("whosoever he was") did not alone exist to rule the universe but that there were other gods as his co-workers who were, however, subject to his will; but (b) that, if these gods (Zeus included) were to be accepted, the popular myths and traditional tales so often promulgated regarding them—even The Homeric tales—must be discredited or treated with considerable rationalism and discretion; and furthermore, that the gods could not be believed in as partakers in crime, transgressors of laws, both human and divine, or beings guilty of immorality, lust and murder. Hence altogether it appears that Euripides can best be described as a compromising polytheist.
Let us note these two theories somewhat in detail, though a brief treatment may suffice for the first of these.

(a) — That Socrates should shortly and unequivocally affirm that there was one God and only one, who directed all the affairs of mankind and the world itself is quite beyond our expectation. Such a doctrine or revelation in this 5th century under the existing circumstances would have been remarkable indeed. Great reforms are always manifested by the "signs of the times." They do not spring forth full-grown from the minds of innovators without at least some outward premonition. And the idea of monothelism seems to have been, above all things, of necessarily slow culmination. Socrates, then, appears
in only a very natural light when examined in regard to his religion. There were many assertions made about the gods by others in his time and made for centuries before him which he was too sane and logical to accept even in the Book of Euripides. A matter to be contended with was the prestige and power given by Homer to the traditional tales of the gods. This maintained a strong hold upon Greek minds even in Euripides’ time. Then too neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles had openly dared to dissent from the popular faith in the conventional tales of the deities. So that altogether Euripides’ position seems to have been that of a primer, accepting and rejecting fully the idea of the existence of the Olympian deities would
have been in the sight of his contemporaries unendurable to have calmly contended the prevailing opinions regarding them would have been in his own estimation grossly foolish.

Hence he adopts a compromise.

The following selections from his plays are given as representing one phase of his own philosophy.

Fragment 981 deserves special notice:

'Butil ere existen the' one mocks in word,
Both Zeus and gods beholding mortal woes.

In Froude's 948-949 we find:

'And be thou mightier than Zeus who both control all of the other gods.' See also Fragment 1063:

'Tis the province of men who are just and wise
In misfortune to be not wroth with the gods.'
Fragment 646:

'Who disregards the gods is untrustworthy.'

Fragment 940:

'Know well when your sacrifice is made, though it be small, it yet procures safety.'

Fragment 797:

'May I never be less than a friend to gods, since they repay each deed, thus they delay.'

Paley gives the sense of Niph. 104 thus: "As none (gods) care for one person, and not for another, so it is with men's feelings towards the gods."

Phil. Aec. 1034-1035 shows, 'If gods exist the righteous man shall get his due reward; if they do not, why toil?'

Fragment 581 is interesting here:

'Whenever I see the wicked ones of men overthrown, I say there is a race of gods.'
No very definite or positive declarations appear as to the functions of the various gods mentioned here and there. While Zeus is not described in a very detailed way, much less so are the individual traits of the other gods depicted. Yet it is reasonable to believe that the above excerpts from Euripides' plays embrace in a general way his idea of polytheism. He seems to have accepted the gods of his ancestors as real and powerful beings but rejected with abhorrence the myths that ascribed to them the passions and weaknesses of mankind. This revolt against popular conceptions will next be discussed.

(30) There are many passages in his plays which bear out the theory that Euripides en-
devoted to inculcate in the mind of his fellow citizens prouer conceptions and nobler thoughts regarding the duties Zeus himself funds a defender in the form (Fragment 289):

'I think not even in secret
That Zeus has imitated men's base arts
And gone manlike into the couch of
These.'

His theory is briefly summarized in Fragment 294 (lines 6-9):

'By you I wish to say,
If gods are in me fully they are
No gods.'

In the Andromeda Neoptolemus appears at the shrine of Apollo and, according to the messenger's tale, is there stricken down by another's hand and dies. Then the messenger asserts (1161-1165):

'Thus the flesh he who divines
for others,'
The judge in all men of just
deeds,  
Exact vengeance of Achilles' 
sons,  
for he recalls just like a wicked 
man  
all quarrels [but]. How can he 
then be wise?
In Her. Eur. (339+) we find a 
charge of reproach vehemently 
made by Achilles against 
Zeus the reputed father of Achilles by her. Here Zeus is made 
to appear wanton and in- 
nocent. A reproach would proba- 
ably emphasize more strongly 
an idea? Then a defence:  
'thou craftily approach'st unto my 
couch  
unsearing marriage rights that 
no one gave.'

Erípiodes decredits, in The Words 
of Sphégipha (Ach. Eur. 380+),  
the mere thought that Athena

is a goddess who delights in those sacrifices where mortals are offered up as victims. He rejects the idea that a goddess who threatens from her altar a polluted man who has a blood-rened hand showed herself joyful in human slaughter and denies that Zeus could have borne such folly." He does not believe that Polytheus tormented the gods on child-flesh — as tradition had it. He thinks the inhabitants of Laurus blasphemously impugned to the goddess their own fondness for bloody deeds (1 Ph. 4, 391): 'For I believe no one of gods is base. This is the keynote of his gospel — an effort to purify the common ideas about the gods. The idea — and if morally for the deity must at all events be higher than for mortals. As another quotation bearing on this point compare 1 Th. 2:10.
The unreasonable found in 
gods overstepping the bounds 
of morals and righteousness in 
again seen in the treatment 
that Euripides gives Apollo in 
The "Brestes." Here twice after twice 
The god is accredited with having 
inspired Brestes with the desire to 
kill his mother Clytemnestra 
(lines 29, 76, 161, 191, 255, 416-417, 546, 1665). This accusation comes from 
three sources at least, Clytemnestra 
and Brestes. The audience must 
have perceived in the play a 
distinct condemnation of Apollo. 
Moreover the characterization of 
Athena as shown in The Rhesus 
may well be cited. Athena here 
involved herself in deceitfulness 
or striking favoritism. Some 
critics think that these offenses 
are sufficiently palliated at the 
clerk of the respective plays. For
in the Orestes 1667 Orestes himself remarks that Pocian is no "lying prophet" but an "exonerated" and in the Phoeniss Athena escapes censure. This one has directed Diomedes and Ulysses how and where the hero Phoebus, who lies asleep in his tent, may be seized and murdered. Yet this formal exoneration is manifestly rather an outward semblance inserted for policy's sake than a sincere and genuine vindication. This view is in accord with Dr. Vernell's theory that often the introduction or conclusion of a play of Euripides was simply a subterfuge of the poet for meeting largely the expectations of his audience. We shall now narrow our discussion of Euripides' criticisms on the religious traditions of his day down to those two plays which seem to touch
most directly the subject under consideration - The "Son" and the "Bacchae".

The "Son" - A typical instance of the destructive criticism in Euripides may be seen in the "Son" where the immoral acts and unworthy conduct of Apollo are made to appear most detestable.

Creusa, the daughter of Echthres, King of Athens, had been outraged by Apollo, by whom she had a son, giving birth to him in a secret cave and then leaving him unknown to her. He is taken care of by Apollo who makes him his minister in the temple at Delphi. Creusa, in the meantime, is left heir to the throne of Athens upon the death of Echthres and receiving valuable assistance in war from Athis.
an Achaian chief, consents to become his wife. His children being born to them, they decide to convert Apollo's oracle. The action of the play begins at this point Creusa chance to arrive at the temple a little in advance of her husband and these converses with her own unrecognized son. She speaks to him as if on behalf of another who had been badly treated by Apollo. Though they reveal to each other some of the hidden facts of the past, neither suspects the real truth involved.

Some of the remarks made must be noted: "Don exclamations" (lines 252-254):

"O having deeds of god! What then? Shall we play justice back if we are lost this wrongs of those who rule?"

Don, at first, naturally rejects with scorn the thought that Apollo is
unnatural and attributes the crime to some mortal. Even if there were such suspicion, the remarks, who would ask the god about it, for he would take vengeance on such a person? Furthermore, what the god wished not to be known, should not be sought after by sacrifice or men (369-380). In 435-450 he utters a strong sentence as to the God's duty. He has now become convinced that Apollo is really guilty of the accusations made and condemns his conduct. When men sin, the gods punish them. How then can the gods who lay down laws for mankind engage in lawlessness themselves? Apollo, Poseidon, and Zeus will make their temple worship void if this state of things exists. It is not just to speak of men
as bare if they only emulate
the evil deeds of gods—their
great exemplars. We need
not stop to mention the few
details in the plot: how Xuthus
receives the unexpected response
that he whom he meets in his ex-
it from the temple is his son,
how Creusa, influenced by her
red servant, plots unwittingly
against her own son to poison
him, or how Ion is saved through
the silent testimony of his baby,
garments and necklace. The fact
remains evident that the effect
of the play is such as to cast
great discredit upon Apollo
and to bring the character which
tradition ascribed to the god into
much discredit. The concluding
scenes of the "Son" attempt
to justify Apollo's actions on
the ground that he providential-
ly directed the affairs of Creusa.
...and so to a satisfactory end. But here too most probably is a lesson in disguise: the gods if they were to be rightly honored should be represented to mankind as being a worthy of confidence and adoration, absolutely free from any perversion of selfishness, lust or cruelty in their dealing with men.

The "Bacchae" — The "Bacchae" clearly ranks as one of the most imaginative, articulate and successful dramas that Euripides produced. Taking the popular Dionysiac rites as his theme he has pictured certain phases of it as to create a series of thrilling scenes. It will be clear and its interpretation concern us here more especially.

The underlying facts are as follows:
Zeus, desiring to behold the great majesty of the great Godhead, exacted of Hera a promise that he should appear accordingly. Then, though against his own wishes, Zeus visited her, wielding his fiery thunderbolts. So awful and brilliant was this manifestation that Semele was immediately destroyed. Immediately with this, however, she gave birth to an immature babe, Dionysus, as afterwards named. Him Zeus was forced to have hid in his thigh until he was fully developed.

The play opens with a prologue by Dionysus, followed by a chorus. Then occurs a conversation between Theseus, the king, and Cosmos, the father of the new king of Thebes, Pentheus, to whom he had recently transferred the throne. The retired king
seems to sanction fully the worship of Dionysus. The response that Peisídes makes is quite worthy of note (200-204). King Pentheus now enter greatly surprised at the information he has received in regard to the observance of the Dionysiac rites round about Thebes (230). Peisídes, moreover, receives a twin re- tribute for his supposed influence in the introduction of the rites (255-263). But the valley maintains the honor of the "new god" by the gift of the two chiefest powers—Semele (Earth) and Dionysus (284). However the king orders his seat of assembly to be destroyed and the participants in these rites to be bound and imprisoned, and finally Dionysus himself to be treated likewise. Though he soon after- wards escapes miraculously from
prison. He then appears in human guise to Pentheus, and by im-
posing upon his credulity and curiosity, succeeds in raising his interest to such a point that the latter is induced to ac-
company Dionysus (still passing for a mortal) to the revelries of the Bacchantes. For he goes with the expectation of gaining much conclusive and indubitable testimony against the Dionysian innovations. To be brief, they ar-
rive at the scene of the Bacch-
antal festivities. Pentheus asks to
mount a tall pine tree for a clearer view of the revellings. Dionysus grants the request bending low a tree for the's purpose and then gently re-
leasing it. As the king sits there mounted on high, the god calls forth to the demoned and thor-
oughly frenzied women near
At hand to punish Pentheus for his infidelity. With the height of tragic irony, Agave, the king's mother, as the tree is torn up by the roots and she comes with it falling heavily to the ground, pours out upon him believing in her frenzy and madness her own son in a lion's teeth and soon sends his body into pieces. The remaining scenes show her intense grief upon the recovery of the scenes and the realization of this most inhuman deed. The following sentiment is the expression of the messenger (1150-1152) and seems to sum up the incidents of the play.*

"Ay, self-reliant and reverent for the gods are best, I ween; 'tis wisest far for men to get these in possession, and cleave thereto."

* Way's Translation, Vol. III.
There are some critics who regard the "Bacchae" as a reaction on the part of Euripides. They arrive at this conclusion by assuming that, after having been for years a reformer of an advanced type, the naturally derived in his declining days to place himself in a more acceptable relation with the Athenian public. Now, after we have seen without any reasonable doubt that Euripides discredited and condemned the popular belief in the traditional tales of the gods and strove for a purer theology, what shall we say of the theory in question? To question it throws a damper over all our preceding observations and to affirm that this was undoubtedly his object, i.e., to "retract," materially lowers that reputation of an
original thinker which we have attributed to Euripides and that commendation as a Democrat which he has received. This final attitude on his part would be on inconsistency too objectionable.

But we need not accept this explanation of the "Bacchae." For there appears another theory which harmonizes this play with his long-established attitude and which does not imply inconsistency on his part in refuting in one of his last plays an idea he had so often reiterated in preceding plays. This theory is suggested by the treatment that Dr. Unravel gives of the "Alcestis" and the "Ion" in "Euripides the Rationalist"—viz., that the poet, bound in as he was by conventionality and prejudice, intended that his plays be enter—
freed in a two-fold; in other words, there were two audiences
in one. The first accepted bliss
or every thing said and believing
or every sentiment uttered and ac-
cepting the conventional morals
the second, discerning, as through
a veil, the aggressive spirit of the
reformer toward contemporary
religion, and appreciating cer-
tain views not boldly expressed
by him. "That is to say, what
appears on the surface as the
"moral of the "Bacchae"", an ex-
oration to the worship of the
popular god of joviality and
wine and the consequence of
disobedience, really has a differ-
ent aspect when viewed from the
standpoint of the poet hidden
within.

It would not be safe to assert
that no moral pertains to the
observance of Dionysiac rites
and worship of the god himself is apparent in the "Bacchae"; for this seems the prevailing idea when the play is considered superficially; man must follow the established order of things, the traditional formulae regarding the gods, or else suffer the fate that befall Pentheus. The non-believer in the new Dionysiac cult. Indeed, the sympathy of the chorus is enlisted on the side of the Bacchanal worshipers (370+, 775+, 1032, and 1328-1329).

But we must remember there were at least two conventions that forced Euripides to turn the surface current of his plots in the direction of the tide of popular belief. The one was that of having to conform to the fixed regulations of the stage itself, as well as to the associations connected
with the Dionysiac festivals. He was not at perfect liberty to de-
side the god of Revelry or to cast
upon his idol of the Athenian heart. Policy
was certainly one needful quali-
ty. The second convention arose
from his necessity employment
of the common myths. The art-
istic element essential to the
drama demanded that he use
there and use these as best
he might. And this treatment
for artistic purposes is largely
responsible for the portraiture
of the gods we see in some of
his plays. F. D. Maurice remarks
that "Euripides had enough
of vague religious beliefs to
qualify him for treating sym-
metically fables which cer-
tainly he did not accept as
actual facts." The fact that
we have in the "Bacchae" the
distinct types of theology -
that in Ormnes, that in Phis-
reidas, and that in Peniche-
neus. It simply that Euripides
had applied a considerable
degree of philosophic inquiry
and personal investiga-
tion to such themes. We see the
old divine holding tenaciously
to the old traditions. The old
king accepting at first lean-
say the doctrine of Dionysus,
then Penicheus representing the
considerate and conservative
man, slow to accept the new
theories and slow to reject the
old. Even though vengeance does
come upon the king, this does
not furnish the only possible
lesson. Considerable discredit.
it is clear, is thrown upon Di-
ompus and The Bacchands in
certain phases, both directly
and inferentially. It is de-
monstrated how these Dionysian rites are performed under the semblance of religion but how under cover of darkness and revelry lewdness is commonly practiced (486-487). A god pictured as here Dionysus is, could assuredly not have appealed to the philosophical poet as rational. Imagine Euripides placing credence in the tale that Zeus had once concealed Dionysus in his thigh! If we deny his belief in this, just as reasonably may we extend our denial to other ideas. May not the remark made by Agave (1349) bespeak the poet's thought:

"The gods ought not to rival men in wrath?"

Hence, altogether, the "Bacchae" seems to reflect a double purpose with a two-fold
interpretation: To the average Athenian Dionysus is glorified;
to the sceptical Athenian he is a mere fraud. Mr. Jevons, in
his "History of Greek Literature" where he speaks of Euripides' plays as a whole, asserts that to assume that he utilized two
audiences "is going too far." Nevertheless, the theory as out-
lined above, and applied to the "Bacchae" becomes ex-
ceedingly plausible when we reflect how it harmonizes
various interpretations. The "Bacchae" is, when thus explained, not a "rep-
entance", nor a "reparation", nor does it lay the tragedian open to the
charge of grave "inconsistency" but rather justifies his former
position and leaves our verdict of his work unchanged.

* Page 222-Note 1.
This thesis is accepted as evidence of the candidate's fitness for the degree of A. M.

James W. Kyle
Boyd

Euripides' idea of God