BOYD. EURIPIDES' IDEA OF GOD. THESIS 1901

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Euripides' Idea of God and his Attitude toward Contemporary Religion.

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Introduction

What were the ideas which Euripides entertained in regard to the divine government of the universe and an over-ruling 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 chorus 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 dramatis personae which coincide most probably with the opinions of the tragedian himself. To arrive with absolute accuracy at his own sentiments is indeed not easy but our close observation of the characters concerned and a proper interpretation of the proprieties underlying each significant remark will aid us materially in ascertaining his views. It is not fair, to be sure, to attribute to Euripides a particular view of theology simply 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 saying 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" a strikingly in-

genuous 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", "Iphegenia", besides the "Phoenissae" and a hymn. His treatment consists in giving a new explanation to those parts of the play which introduce the gods. 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 presented 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 an undercurrent of thought, an advance in doctrinal beliefs. Thus the real motive was to bring certain myths and superstitions into discredit and contempt, there being as has been explained "the ostensible and superficial plot which was intended to satisfy the orthodox, and the rationalized modification which lay half-concealed beneath it and which the intelligent sceptic would easily detect". He endeavors, furthermore, to bring the Euripidean play into the sphere of an ordinary human experience without a supernatural or unrealistic influence about it. For instance, Heracles 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. Verrall thinks that at the beginning and 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 impels us to do with him as he enjoins us to do 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 discussion proper, 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.

(2) The destructive, wherein he censures any imputing of sin and weakness to the gods, scoffs at their reputed improprieties, and tries to inculcate higher conceptions regarding them.

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 ~~wh~~what this conception consisted. We shall not attempt to analyze any possible undercurrents of ideas as seen in Dr. Verrall's discussions, or probe into unfathomable 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 nought
I know
Except by hearsay' (Fragment 483)
'Heaven's King, revered Zeus' (Iph. Taur. 749)
'Zeus, the most high, etc' (Rhes. 455).
'The chiefest, Zeus' (Herac. 238).

It is true that Aeschylus appealed 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, Kronos, who had likewise formerly dethroned his sire, Uranus, is 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) <u>Omniscience</u> - The Deity's omniscience is mentioned in Frag. 960 where he is referred to as one 'Who sees all things and is himself unseen'.

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

'O Earth and all-beholding Zeus
To mortals, see the bloody deeds

abominable, bodies twain
destroyed upon the ground by stroke
of my own hand, price for my woes.'

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 - It has been quot-
ed above that he saw all things
but was himself unseen. Euripi-
des asserted that Zeus was some-
thing more than a lifeless im-
age in a temple (Frag. 968):
'What house constructed by the builders' hands,
Could in its walls the godlike form contain?'

Thus he does not even think
of Zeus as existing in tangible
and earthly form. His own view
does not assign Zeus to the con-
ventional Olympian height where
he may revel and delight in am-
brosia 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:
'Dost 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 Θεός'.

A similar suggestion of invisibility on the part of the divinity is seen in Troades 884-887:
'O thou Earth's stay and dweller on the Earth
Whoe'er thou art, - unrecognizable -,
Zeus, whether nature's need or mortal mind
I thee beseech'.

The abode of the deity is nowhere definitely described. Yet reference is made (Phoen. 84) to 'the shining clouds of the heaven' and (Troad. 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 himself. In Fragment 508 he tells how not even would the whole heaven suffice if Zeus should write down the sins of mortals or could he beholding exact punishment of each but that Justice is there somewhere near, if you desire to see. Compare Fragment 150: 'They 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, tho' not seen, yet sees, And knows whom there is need to harm'.

Zeus in the true Euripidean sense seems no longer a god filled with human passions as so often formerly depicted, no

longer anthropomorphic 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 Hecuba, seems clearly to express the poet's sentiment. She, after addressing Zeus as 'nature's need or mortal mind', exclaims (Troad. 887-888):

'I the Beseech. For on thy noiseless way
Proceeding, thou all justice giv'st to men.'

In Soph. Ant. 394-395 we find the following:

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

Compare Electra 585-586. The references to the power of Justice are frequent. See Electra 957-958—

a chorus. The three preceding lines (Elec. 954-956), as a final quotation, are strong:*

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

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

'And be thou mightier than Zeus who doth control all of the other gods'.

'God's power is greatest is the refrain from the chorus in Alcestis

* Way's Translation, Vol. II.

220. 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:

'An end the deity directs for men,
An end wherein he doth desire.
His power is very great.'

The passage found in Alcestis 976-977,

For Zeus himself whate'er he wills
Accomplisheth 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 superior determinate influence back

of it? That is, is Zeus himself subservient to the decrees of necessity? Fate likewise comes in here on an equality with necessity. Frequent references we find are made to necessity and Fate, and the irresistible power they possess. Each appears to be an influence which cannot be shunned by mortals or affected in any way by them. In Hel. 513 Menelaus is represented as remarking:

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

The following is a chorus of Alcestis 962+

'All literature have I perused
Thro' orbs celestial soared
And many arguments o'erheard
But nought found I that could outweigh
Necessity, etc.'

As to Fate, see Herac. 615-616:

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

Rhesus 634 shows:

'Thou couldst not do more than's fated thee'
Hip. 1255-1256 voice this same idea:
'Alas misfortune cometh from new ills;
Fate and necessity grant no escape'.
Now shall such quotations 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 phil-
osophy and not when viewed in
individual and disconnected
passages, it appears that Zeus is
still possessed of his 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:

"οὔτινά φημι θεῶν ἄτερ ὄλβιον, οὐ
βαρυποτμον
ἄνδρα γενέσθαι
οὐδὲ τὸν αὐτὸν ἀεὶ βεβάναι δόμον
εὐτυχίᾳ· παρὰ δ' ἄλλαν ἄλλα
μοῖρα διώκει·

τὸν μὲν ἀφ' ὑψηλῶν βραχὺν
ὤκιστε,
τὸν δ' ἀτίταν εὐδαίμονα τεύχει".

There is evidence, then, that the poet did not conceive Necessity and Fate as some influence external, independent, and self-directed but as an influence conditioned on divine direction or acting co-ordinately with Zeus. Where, as we quoted above, Necessity is spoken of as stronger than all else, may we not interpret this to mean that all earthly 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 personified emblem of Zeus' power and will. And Fate is no less an expression of the divine determi-

nation compare Androm. 1266-1269:

'But wait, I'll from the sea
With fifty as a chorus, Nereids,
- An aid to thee - I come. For what is fated
must thou endure. For thus doth Zeus decree.'

In fact, the idea of Fate is represented in Rhesus 634 and Phoinissae 1606 by the word δαίμων. It is implied in Elec. 1248-1249 that Fate and Zeus (μοῖρα Ζεύς τε) are one force in the world:

'Henceforth thou must
Perform what Fate and Zeus decreed for thee'

Zeus' will, then, seems to be fulfilled thro' the operation of the two forces, necessity and Fate. That is, they are not independent of Zeus' power but are instrumental in accomplishing his purposes. Hence, notwithstanding the influence of Necessity and Fate, Zeus is omnipotent

and still rules with justice. As was noted above, Alcestis 220 suggests 'the greatest power':
"θεοῖσιν εὐχώμεσθα· θεῶν γὰρ δύναμις μεγίστη."

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

'O Zeus who art called father and wise god,
Look thou on us, relieve us of our ills.'

In Phoenissae 86-87:

'There is no need, if thou art wise, to leave
The same man 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 Phoinissai 412-414:

Jocasta: 'How share you in a wild heart's name, O child?'

Polyneices: 'Know not. God called me to my fate'.

Jocasta: 'Well, wise is God'.

That description of God which reads, "too wise to err, too good to be unkind",

seems almost to voice the Euripidean 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 ideal God he would have his audiences 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 existed, as by no means immoral or

mean or low (Aph. Taur. 391):
'For I believe no one of gods is base'.
His Zeus, then, must be holy, righteous, pure. Him does Pylades describe as, 'King, indeed, of heaven, holy Zeus' (Aph. Taur 749). This phase of the several gods will be discussed more at length further on.

(7). <u>Goodness</u> - 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) On his being invoked as a witness of agreements or oaths; Aph. Taur. 1077:
'That I shall maintain silence of the deeds
On which thou plann'st let great Zeus know'.
Suppliants 1174-1175:
'And Zeus is witness and the heavenly gods
Worthy of what things at our hands you go'.
(b) On his being a defender of the

helpless; Rhesus 320:
'Since lucky is my spear and Zeus himself
Is on our side, friends many do I find'.
Compare also Elec. 137 and 671.
Both as a witness and a defender does Zeus appear 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 withal. His providential care is also mentioned prominently in Hippolytus 1102+. Lines 201-218 of the Suppliants make it quite evident that the poet was not insensible to the abundant goodness of God in supplying the many needs of man. This

striking passage is worthy of reproduction here*:

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 thereof
Raindrops from heaven, to feed earth's fosterlings
And water her green bosom; therewithal
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 dimly seen,
Soothsayers watch the flame, the liver's folds,
Or from the birds divine the things to be.
Are we not arrogant, then, when all life's needs
God giveth, therewith not to be content?
But our presumption stronger fain would be
Than God: we have gotten overweening 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 Talthybius, addressing Zeus, asks if he oversees mankind or does Chance do so. This may be an outburst of the Poet's own sentiment. Likewise Ion 1512 might be noted. In Hip. 1102+ (quoted above) he says he finds

on reflection upon divine affairs an assurance that a 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 despondency of doubt coming upon him. Herein he has been compared to Job. Fragments 271 and 288 appear at variance with our general theory of the Euripidean 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: 'Whoever thinks Eros no great god
Nor highest one of all the deities

Either is foolish or unskilled in good
not knowing him the greatest god to men'.
Fragment 288 (in part):
'Who says forsooth that gods exist in
heaven?
They do not, no, unless some man
doth wish
In folly thus to use tradition old
But you yourselves behold - not in
my words
Place confidence'.
May not, however, the other
passages implying doubt and
some degree of inconsistency,
as cited above, be regarded as
only very natural results of close
and inquiring study of conditions
and affairs about him, as the
poet saw them? Such expres-
ions occurring at random need
hardly affect the theory that Eu-
ripides believed in a govern-
ment 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 trio, I quote Mr. Haigh ("Tragic Drama of the Greeks") as to the two earlier tragedians. Of Aeschylus he remarks, "The ancient mythical gods were more to him than mere types and abstractions, and though 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 potent 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 withstand 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 old-er poets the myths of his ancestral religion. Our 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 towards religion. For he does not allow his philosophy to stop 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-

hensive notion of his theological views: (a) That Zeus ("whoever 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 old 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 <u>compromising polytheist</u>.

Let us note these two theories somewhat in detail, though brief treatment may suffice for the first of these.

(a) - That Euripides should slowly 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 reformations are slowly manifested by the "signs of the times" - they do not spring forth full-fledged from the minds of innovators without at least some outward premonition. And the idea of monotheism seems to have been, above all things, of necessarily slow culmination. Euripides, 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 acquiesce in. Back 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 this popular faith in the conventional tales of the deities. So that altogether Euripides' position seems to have been that of a pruner, accepting and rejecting. To have rejected entirely the idea of the existence of the Olympian deities would

have been in the sight of his contemporaries unendurable - to have calmly sanctioned 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:

'But there exist ein tho' one mocks in word,
Both Zeus and gods beholding mortal woes.

In Troades 948-949 we find:

'And be thou mightier than Zeus
Who doth 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 pious sacrifice is made,
Tho' it be small, it yet procureth safety.'
Fragment 797:
'May I nev'r be less than a friend to gods
Since they repay each deed, tho' they delay.'
Paley gives the sense of Hip. 104 thus: "As some (gods) care for one person, and not for another, so it is with men's feelings towards the gods".
Aph. Aul. 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:
'Whenéer I see the wicked ones of men O'erthrown, 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.

(b) - There are many passages in his plays which bear out the theory that Euripides en-

devoted to inculcate in the minds of his fellow-citizens purer conceptions and nobler thoughts regarding the deities. Zeus himself finds a defender in the poet (Fragment 209):

'I think not even in secret
That Zeus has imitated man's base acts
And gone manlike unto that couch of thine'.

His theory is briefly summarized in Fragment 294 (lines 6-7):

'To you I wish to say
If gods act shamefully they are no gods'.

In the Andromache 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 then hath he who divines for others,

'The judge to all men of just
deeds,
Exacted vengeance of Achilles'
sons,
For he recalls just like a wicked
man
all quarrels past. How can he
then be wise?'

In Her. Fur. (339 +) we find a charge of reproach vehemently made by Amphitryon against Zeus the reputed father of Hercules by her. Here Zeus is made to appear wanton and insolent. A reproach would probably emphasize more strongly an ideal than a defence:

'Thou craftily approach'st unto my
couch
Usurping marriage rights that
no one gave'.

Euripides discredits, in the words of Iphigenia (Iph. Taur. 380 +), the mere thought that Artemis

is a goddess who delights in those sacrifices where mortals are offered up as victims. He rejects the idea that a goddess who thrusts from her altar a polluted him who has a blood-stained hand showed herself joy in human slaughter and denies that Leto could have borne "such folly." He does not believe that Tantalus banqueted the gods on child-flesh - as tradition had it. He thinks the inhabitants of Tauris blasphemously imputed to the goddess their own fondness for bloody deeds (Iph. Taur. 391): 'For I believe no one of gods is base

This is the key-note of his gospel - an effort to purify the common ideas about the gods. The standard of morality for the deity must at all events be higher than for mortals. As another quotation bearing on this point compare Her.

Eur. 1341-1346.

The unreasonable found in gods overstepping the bounds of morals and righteousness is again seen in the treatment that Euripides gives Apollo in the "Orestes". Here time after time the god is accredited with having inspired Orestes with the desire to kill his mother, Clytemnestra (lines 29, 76, 161, 191, 285, 416-417, 596, 1665). This accusation comes from three sources at least, Electra, Helen, and Orestes. The audience must have perceived in the play a distinct condemnation of Apollo. Likewise the characterization of Athena as shown in the Rhesus may well be cited. Athena here involves herself in deceitfulness or striking favoritism. Some critics think that these offences are sufficiently palliated at the close of the respective plays. For

in the Orestes 1667 Orestes himself remarks that Loxias is no "lying prophet" but is exonerated; and in the Rhesus Athena escapes censure, tho' she has directed Diomedes and Ulysses how and where the hero Rhesus, 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. Verrall'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 "Ion" and the "Bacchae".

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

Creusa, the daughter of Erechtheus, King of Athens, had been outraged by Apollo, by whom she had a son, giving birth to him in a secret cave and there leaving him. Unknown to her, he is taken care of by Apollo who makes him his ministrant in the temple at Delphi. Creusa, in the meantime, is left heir to the throne of Athens upon the death of Erechtheus and receiving valuable assistance in war from Xuthus

an Achaian chief, consents to become his bride. No children being born to them, they decide to consult Apollo's oracle. The action of the play begins at this point. Creusa chances to arrive at the temple a little in advance of her husband and there converses with her own unrecognized son. She speaks to him as if in 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; Ion exclaims (lines 252-254):

'O daring deeds
Of gods! What then? shall we pay justice back,
If we are lost thro' wrongs of those who rule?'

Ion, at first, naturally rejects with scorn the thought that Apollo is

immoral and attributes the crime to some mortal. Even if there were such suspicion, he remarks, who would ask the god about it, for he would take vengeance on such a person? Furthermore, what the gods wish not to be known, should not be sought after by sacrifice or omen (369-380). In 435-450 Jon utters a strong sentiment as to the God's duty. He has now become convinced that Apollo is really guilty of the accusations made and condemns this 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 base if they only imitate the evil deeds of gods - their great exemplars. We need not stop to mention the full details in the plot - how Xuthus receives the oracular response that he whom he meets on his exit from the temple is his son, how Creusa, influenced by her old 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 disrepute. The concluding scenes of the "Ion" attempt to justify Apollo's actions on the ground that he providentially directed the affairs of Creusa

Xuthus and son to a satisfactory end. But this too most probably is a lesson in disguise: The gods if they were to be rightly honored should be represented to mankind as being worthy of confidence and adoration, absolutely free from any suspicion of selfishness, lust or cruelty in their dealings with men.

The "Bacchae" — The "Bacchae" easily ranks as one of the most imaginative, artistic and successful dramas that Euripides produced. Taking the popular Dionysiac rites as his theme he has so pictured certain phases of it as to create a series of thrilling scenes. Its purpose and its interpretation concern us here more especially. The underlying facts are as follows:

Semele, desiring to behold the great majesty of Zeus 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. Simultaneously with this, however, she gave birth to an immature babe, Dionysus, as afterwards named. Him Zeus was fabled 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 Teiresias, the seer, and Cadmus, 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 Teiresias makes is quite worthy of note (200-204). King Pentheus now enters greatly surprised at the information he has received in regard to the observance of the Dionysiac rites round about Thebes (220). Teiresias, moreover, receives a stern rebuke for his supposed influence in the introduction of the rites (255-262). But he boldly maintains the honor of the "new god" telling of the two chiefest powers - Semele (Earth) and Dionysus (284). However the King orders his seat of augury 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 afterwards escapes miraculously from

prison. He then appears in human guise to Pentheus, and by imposing upon his credulity and curiosity, succeeds in raising his interest to such a point that the latter is induced to accompany Dionysus (still passing for a mortal) to the revelries of the Bacchanals. For he goes with the expectation of gaining much conclusive and indisputable testimony against the Dionysiac innovations. To be brief, they arrive at the scene of the Bacchanal 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 this purpose and then gently releasing it. As the king sits there mounted on high, the god calls forth to the demented and thoroughly 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 he comes with it falling heavily to the ground, pounces upon him believing in her frenzy and madness her own son is a lion's whelp and soon rends his body into pieces. The remaining scenes show her intense grief upon her recovery of her senses and her 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-restraint and reverence 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 recantation on the part of Euripides. They arrive at this conclusion by assuming that, after having been for years a reformer of an advanced type, he naturally desired 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 discountenanced 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 sanction it throws a damper over all our preceding observations and to affirm that this was undoubtedly his object, i.e., to "recant", materially lowers that reputation as an

original thinker which we have attributed to Euripides and that commendation as a dramatist which he has received. This final attitude on his part would be an 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. Verrall gives of the "Alcestis" and the "Ion" in "Euripides the Rationalist" - viz., that the poet, bound in as he was by conventionalities and precedents, intended that his plays be inter-

preted in a two-fold sense; other words, there were two audiences in one - the first accepting blindly everything said and believing every sentiment uttered and accepting the conventional morals; the second, discerning, as through a veil, the aggressive spirit of the reformer toward contemporary religion, and appreciating certain views not boldly expressed by him. That is to say, what appears on the surface as the moral of the "Bacchae", an exhortation to the worship of the popular god of jovidity and wine and the consequence of disobedience, really has a different aspect when viewed from the standpoint of the part hidden within.

It would not be safe to assert that no moral pertaining 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 overtook Pentheus, the non-believer in the new Dionysiac cult. Indeed, the sympathy of the chorus is enlisted on the side of the Bacchanal worshippers (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 deride the god of Revelry or to cast open reproach upon this idol of the Athenian heart. Policy was certainly one needful quality. The second convention arose from his necessary employment of the common myths. The artistic element essential to the drama demanded that he use these - 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. J. E. Mozley remarks that "Euripides had enough of vague religious beliefs to qualify him for treating sympathetically fables which certainly he did not accept as actual facts." The fact that we have in the "Bacchae" three

distinct types of theology — that in Cadmus, that in Tiresias, and that in Pentheus — seems to imply that Euripides had applied a considerable degree of philosophical inquiry and personal investigation to such themes. We see the old diviner holding tenaciously to the old traditions, the old king accepting at first hearsay the doctrine of Dionysus, then Pentheus 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 Dionysus and the Bacchanals in certain phases, both directly and inferentially. It is de-

monstrated how these Dionysiac 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 outlined above, and applied to the "Bacchae" becomes exceedingly plausible when we reflect how it harmonizes various interpretations. The "Bacchae" is, when thus explained, not a "burlesque", not a "recantation", 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