Cosmos and Polis:

The Good City

in *The Orestia* and *The Divine Comedy*

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

Drew University in partial fulfillment of

The requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Letters

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Madison, New Jersey

May 2018

ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
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The twentieth century stands as testament to the consequences of bad ideas. All actions, good or bad, start with ideas; philosophy matters. When societies accept philosophies that discount the individual human person's value, catastrophe results. On the other hand, when societies affirm human dignity, culture flourishes. In their introduction to the *Orestia,* Robert Fagles and W.B. Stanford note a lack of scholarship exploring connections between the *Orestia* and *Divine Comedy*, two works that express the ideals of western civilization's watershed periods: pre-classical Athens and Florence on the cusp of the Renaissance. Both works embody the humanist perspective that would become the hallmarks of classical Athens and Renaissance Florence. As the main characters journey from tragedy to transcendence, the authors explore the cultural significance of cosmic, philosophical, political and religious assumptions. Each presents a "good city" as the example of a perfect community that guards all citizens' freedom and dignity.

Dedicated to

my family

Kathy

Deb

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Ginny Phelan and Liana Piehler

for their generosity, time and expertise

Note: All quotations from the *Orestia* are from Robert Fagles's translation unless otherwise noted.

All quotations from the *Divine Comedy* are from Allen Mandelbaum's translation unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

In their introduction to Aeschylus's *Orestia,* "The Serpent and the Eagle," Robert Fagles and W.B. Stanford propose that scholarship has not fully explored the *Orestia's* and *Divine Comedy's* connections (92). Aeschylus and Dante each present watershed periods in western civilization's history: Athens on the cusp of the classical age and Italy on the verge of the Renaissance. Both cosmological inquiries shaped western science and philosophy, while their views of human nature and the individual in society helped form western government and political history. In both societies, confidence in the freedom and rationality of the individual in an orderly universe influenced exploration in every area of scientific inquiry and artistic expression. Shaped by discoverable rules and laws, the orderly universe invited the individual and society to play, learn, contemplate, research, explore, wonder and create with confidence.

The idea of a rational universe gained ascendency in both classical Greece and Renaissance Europe; yet, at times, these societies never completely abandoned the alternative view: cosmological chaos. In the *Orestia*, Aeschylus raises the conflict in light of the presocratic thinkers, favoring the chaos view. Ironically, though, Aeschylus's vision crystallizes the very questions Socrates, Plato and Aristotle would soon answer differently. As the marble cut away by a sculptor outlines the work's final shape, a society's discarded ideas clarify the ones it chooses. Each work assumes a cosmology. Each author's perspective may narrow his view, but his holistic cosmological vision helps form western civilization and merits examination and comparison, too.

In three-part journeys, the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy* explore their society's values, controversies, family politics, philosophical questions, political debates and religious convictions; in each work the cosmological context encompasses the journeys. For the main characters Orestes and Dante, the journey leads to an ideal city where individuals grow beyond personal disgrace, self-inflicted or not, deserved or not, to grace. So, both works speak to the community and to the individual viewer or reader. Both authors wrote their works with broad audiences in mind. Intending his plays to compete for production at the public Dionysian Festival, Aeschylus wrote the *Orestia* for all Athenians. Consciously choosing not to write in academic Latin, Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy* in vernacular Italian, the people's common language, so all the people could understand it. Besides a poem by St. Francis of Assisi, Dante composed in the vernacular earliest among Italian authors.

Just as each author composed for a whole society, their heroes' journeys span the entire cosmos as as well. About Aeschylus's universe, C. J. Herington notes, "this is a universe in which everything matters and everything interacts" ("Aeschylus" 10). Elsewhere he calls the Aeschylean point of view a "world-vision," "the early Greek sense of wholeness, of a world whose parts, spiritual and material, were interdependent and possessed equal power for good or ill," and finally, "no Greek poet or prose writer after him was ever able to reproduce a similar vision" ("Aeschylus" 1-2). In *The Discarded Imag*e, C. S. Lewis notes that until the seventeenth century, western civilization saw all that exists as part of one system, such that cosmology, philosophy, religion, literature, history and science all coalesce in harmonious interconnectedness. Lewis calls this

system “the Model.” He references Dante in particular as a perfect example; “delighted contemplation of the Model and intense religious feeling of a specifically Christian character are seldom fused except in the work of Dante” (19). Current society divides knowledge into discrete domains such that a modern reader struggles to imagine a western civilization in which literature, history, science, philosophy and theology are all just different perspectives on the same single subject: the universe and everything about it as one whole, one *uni*-verse. Only a century before Dante, centers of learning, appropriately called universities, sprang up in cities all over Europe with this holistic worldview.

Immersed in what Lewis calls “the Model,” neither author imagines telling the story of individuals isolated from the community, the state or the cosmos. Orestes and Dante reach their transcendent cities only by navigating the cosmos’s entire terrain; should they avoid any person, natural element or divine force, their journeys would abort. They must engage the world around them, in all its particularity, or see their missions fail. How they engage with the cosmos depends on how the authors portray it. Both authors used language about the cosmos derived from contemporaneous scientific debate and in both works, ontological assumptions blend inextricably with individuals’ stories, families and communities; purposefully, the authors explore why and how we exist along the journeys. In both works, characters want and need to know where they came from and how best to interact with, and in some cases, use to their own ends, the forces of nature. The entire breadth of the cosmos, through the authors’ lenses, provides the canvas and the paint with which the authors bring their characters to life.

In both the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy,* cosmological and religious views mix necessarily as characters grapple with circumstances; the religious and cosmological unite imminently before the characters' senses. Aeschylus wrote the *Orestia* in the early classical period, when Greeks believed in the Olympian gods, though some began to see them as representations of transcendent ideals like justice. Also among the early classical Greeks in Aeschylus's day, a competing view saw a universe in chaos, a view Aeschylus's best known scientific contemporaries shared. Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy* after western civilization synthesized the Hebrew, Greek and Roman classical influences with Christianity. Westerners saw agreement among these influences, chief among them a highly ordered universe. Just as the *Divine Comedy* describes a very physical cosmos with Hell, Earth, Purgatory and Heaven materially present and organized as parts of a whole, Aristotelian perspectives already began influencing the start of a new Renaissance in every area of art and inquiry. The two works convey their societies' religious beliefs and these beliefs shaped the societies' histories, too. Yet, general histories and political, philosophical or religious treatises lack literature's power. Only literature contextualizes and unifies all these facets for later generations.

In these literary works, against the backdrop of history, cosmology and culture, individual characters tell their own stories, bringing historical context to life. How each character navigates the cosmological terrain matters. Both works give voice to every facet of their respective societies; each author excludes no gender or class. Even a woman, in a society without legal rights for women of any class, a woman who killed the king, an evil woman by most accounts, gets a voice. Possibly the greatest achievement

classical Athens passes on is drama itself, in which every individual, good and bad, powerful and disenfranchised, owns a perspective and a voice. Never mere cogs in a wheel, individuals tell their own stories rather than have third parties dehumanize and subjectify them. Dante's late medieval world inherits such a perspective; Christianity only enhances the perspective and it serves to inspire a new Renaissance in western civilization. There would be no *Divine Comedy*, or *Hamlet*, for that matter, without it.

Literature magnifies focus on the individual, yet the perspective spans even more broadly. In literature one sees that history, art, philosophy and religion are not discrete, abstract things. In literature they are real, messy, portentous and parts of one story. In history, how easy it seems to simply condemn a tyrant, a murderer or an adulterer, until one hears that person's story. Whether it be a grief-stricken mother who lashes out at her daughter's killer, the mother's own husband and her daughter's own father, or a pair who exist together forever condemned to hell, killed as adulterers, when at first they only intended to read some poetry, no one can hear a person tell his or her story and not feel pity. How simplistic to say the Greeks believed in the Olympians or the medieval Europeans were Christians, yet, how profound to hear a character express faith in Zeus or Jesus and watch the character respond to tragedy relying on that faith! How rudimentary to learn a culture assumes an ordered universe or not, yet to see a character act on such an assumption, to see the consequences, how poignant!

Either physically or figuratively spanning the breadth of the universe, in the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy,* each hero makes a kind of descent. Dante cannot climb Purgatory's mountain to see the face of God in Heaven until he descends to the depths of

Hell; Orestes can't emerge a free king of Argos until he submits to a trial in exile. As Aeschylus reminds his audience, one must "suffer into truth" (*Ag.* 179*)*.

Dante and Orestes each needs a guide for the journey. Each has a mentor who uses the faculties of reason as light, but at a certain point each guide proves unworthy to the fulfillment of the journey, though at the start the travelers cling to these guides for dear life. "For my soul's salvation, I beg you, guard me from her, for she has struck a mortal tremor through me," Dante, facing a ferocious wolf, implores Virgil, while Orestes runs to Apollo for purging of guilt as the Furies chase him (*Inf.* I 65-67). In questioning their guides, each has a certain humility; for example, Dante asks Virgil whether or not he is worthy of the journey (*Inf.* II 22). Orestes also hesitates rather than forge ahead without question. Having killed his mother in obedience to divine law, he questions the one who commanded it, a god, "how does our bloody work impress you now—Just or not?" (*Eum.* 618). Since each hero starts out far from personal humility and neither sees examples of humility around him, for each, the hesitation or questioning represents a tremendously magnanimous leap. The characters win no satisfactory answers from their guides, since only the journey itself will provide the answers. By practice for Virgil and by nature for Apollo, these guides master abstract reason alone. Both guides offer only pure intellect. But reason takes these travelers only so far and eventually neither Virgil nor Apollo can answer his charge's deeper questions.

His sins weigh Dante down at the start of his journey. Virgil can explain sin's cause-and-effect nature and its consequences, but he must admit ignorance when Dante wonders about salvation. One more wise, not by earthly but heavenly standards, must

take over to answer such questions. No great poet, Beatrice claims no magnum opus. As a saint in Heaven, though, Beatrice can take over where the Eternal City's citizen and the heavenly City's foreigner, Virgil, cannot.

Similarly, Orestes's questions prove too tiresome for Apollo. Orestes kills his mother at Apollo's command, yet Apollo would rather overlook the Furies' screams; they are not *reasonable*. Finding the Furies unpleasant and annoying, the Olympian system gives them no credence. Still, Orestes will not overlook them. He flees to Athena, a new guide who takes the Furies as well as Mt. Olympus seriously. She understands the Furies and knows how to appease them, not with reason but with compassion. Apollo knows nothing about compassion, just as Virgil can't fathom the love of God, yet Beatrice can. The Furies are to Orestes what Dante's sins are to Dante: they provide motivation to persist. However painful the journey, each hero braves the depths of despair in order to ascend to a place of peace.

To the ancient Greeks, the Furies represent what Dante's contemporaries might call personified guilt or sinfulness and it agitates, pressing on the characters. Orestes and Dante each strive for wisdom that brings healing. Since their initial advisors can only bring them so far, Orestes and Dante willingly thrust themselves into depths that will offer wisdom not from abstraction, but from experience. Both Orestes and Dante willingly pay the price of wisdom from experience. Each sees clearly this would not be a passive, comfortable sojourn as Apollo or Virgil make lofty decrees or poetic expositions. This will be a trial, a crucible, a painful journey full of suffering. Orestes and Dante arrive at redemption, a legal redemption for Orestes and a spiritual one for Dante,

because they have the humility and courage to take the road that leads to trial. Their humility arises from their willingness to face hubris's consequences.

As mentioned before, Orestes murdered his mother. For him, the Furies' argument rings true, not Apollo's. In contrast, the proud Clytemnestra rages against any caution, arrogantly storming ahead. She lacks the courage and humility for a trial. She hears no Furies because she unceasingly screams her own righteousness, drowning out all other voices. The difference allows Orestes to make the journey, while Clytemnestra, frozen in never-ending rage, remains unmoved.

Similarly, among all the selfish, arrogant, wealthy Florentines of his age, Dante also humbly stops and questions his own actions. Each character sees very early on that this journey will frighten and endanger him. The Furies chase Orestes and the ominous wolf blocks Dante's way, yet, they press forward. Hell's sign to abandon all hope upon entrance looms, even threatens, but Dante, like Orestes, forges ahead, willing to "suffer into truth." At the final trial, Athena warns the Athenians to "never banish terror from the gates," explaining it no further (*Eum*. 712). Orestes and Dante look with purpose at what terrifies them, their own faults. Through the terror the heroes choose to confront, Aeschylus and Dante explore eternal questions on justice and the just society.

In addition to personal purification, both characters journey toward an ideal community, rightly governed. Moved by continuous violent threat to their cities, both authors reevaluate law and justice through examining their religious and philosophical underpinnings. While A.P. D'Entreves and Christian Meier each characterize the *Divine Comedy* and the *Orestia* respectively as mainly political works, such an assertion

diminishes both. Still, since bad governments make the authors and their heroes suffer, in the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy*, each author envisions a better government. In the midst of potential existential chaos in his city, each author champions an alternative; neither advocates a style of government without reexamining religious beliefs in the light of new philosophy. Chapter one will examine each author's view of ideal and just government.

In both classical Athens and Renaissance Florence, no aspect of life seemed separate from the rest of the cosmos; likewise, the authors' cosmologies encompass their visions of the perfect community. In Dante, an Aristotelian prime mover with a loving consciousness created an ordered universe; that order provides one purview for all characters. Despite his characters' faith to the contrary, Aeschylus presents Olympian gods with little or no control over a chaotic universe. Both works portray the cosmos with the latest philosophical-scientific visions, though in Aeschylus the vision conflicts with religious views while in Dante the vision and faith cohere. As the poet T. S. Eliot observed, "no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion" (Eliot 87). To Eliot, culture seems to be "the product of the religion" and even "the incarnation of the religion of a people" (Eliot 101). In relation to later medieval culture, Eliot contrasts classical Greco-roman cultures and notes that while the Greek and Roman appear secular, their classical periods represent religious cultures' decline, while medieval culture represents a religious culture's height (Eliot 100). Characters journey within the confines of a cosmos as construed by the authors. Chapter two will explore views of transcendence displayed in the *Orestia* and *Divine Comedy*.

Ultimately, in both works, the heroes journey to a perfect city, a community in full cooperation, where moderation and self-sacrifice contribute to the common good. Both cities analogize the transcendent to the degree the authors see an attainable transcendent. As was Augustine's *City of God* for the late Roman period, so was the *Orestia* for classical Greece and the *Divine Comedy* for the Renaissance. No city, real or fictional, exists impermeable to its citizens' beliefs, history, politics and worldview; the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy* popularize for a wider audience a new worldview, including new perspectives on the individual's role in the city and the cosmos. Both address the question of how an individual participates in the ideal city. For both, it is a journey full of suffering and self-effacement, a personal purification. For both, the purification requires relationship and forgiveness.

In the first of three parts in both works, the authors portray an inversion of the good city; there all the characters, relentlessly self-centered, focus only on wrongs against them and refuse all cooperation. The *Orestia* moves from a city of selfishly murderous chaos to one of peaceful moderation because people take charge, forgive and forge an orderly, moderate society. In the *Divine Comedy*, the journey moves from a place where all hopelessly and forevermore pursue their own personal agendas to a perfect community where, embracing God's will, all obey the law of love. Like medieval triptychs, each work unfolds in three parts, moving from darkness to light, falsehood to truth, barbarity to civilization. In this fashion, each work contrasts two cities, the first an ironically twisted image of the good city and the last, civic ideal. The heroes, Orestes and Dante, each journey from the corrupt city, whose inhabitants obsess endlessly and distract from

inward gaze only to rage against others, through a process of purification. They move to civic joy, fulfillment and light. In both cases, citizens may live in the transcendent, ideal city only after they learn, through painful experience, they must give up self-centeredness for the greater good.

Both works reach far out into the cosmos and heavens and deep into the souls of individuals to wrench answers. With incredible optimism, both envision the best about human and societal potential, even with full knowledge of the depths of human wickedness. Consider the problems of the main characters. Orestes's plight results, in part, because individuals close to the monarchy have no legal recourse under Bronze Age rule. Aeschylus's Athens saw continual violence among classes, with the lower classes having little recourse against the aristocrats. When the law itself is corrupt, where does one turn? Orestes took the law in his own hands and faced the consequences because the law could not help him otherwise. Orestes faces the problem in *Libation Bearers* and Aeschylus presents a solution in *Eumenides*. Similarly, Dante's Florence, like other cities in Italy, suffered continuous violent upheaval without legal recourse for the republicans with no ties to a monarchy. In *Inferno,* Dante presents Florence's and Italy's problems. He faces his own and his society's problems in *Purgatorio* and, in *Paradiso,* he presents a solution. In both, the "problems" and "solutions" find their roots in individuals, starting with Orestes and Dante, as well as in the society and the cosmos. Ultimately, the solutions involve official initiations into the new good cities. In *Agamemnon* and *Inferno*, the authors present the wretched status quo. In *Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio*, Orestes and Dante must go through a crucible all members of society must endure to reach the

final, bright joy of *Eumenidies* and *Paradiso*. Chapter three explores the heroes' journeys from civic corruption to the political ideal.

Perhaps no historical accident, Aeschylus's Athens and Dante's Florence were on the verge of the greatest cultural flowerings the world has ever seen on all the same levels, cosmic (the scientific and philosophical revolutions of the Socratics and the Italian Renaissance), political (the democratic revolution of Athens and the striving for equality in the Italian republics), and artistic, centering on humanist optimism, ambition and achievement. Like land left fallow, the strife left fertile ground for the flourishing to come.

Chapter One: The Just Society in the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy*

The *Orestia*

"Your city straight and just—its light goes through all the world."

—Aeschylus, the Eumenides 1002-1003

If from ancient Greece every pottery shard, broken column or merchant's ledger serves to tell us something about history, then classical Athens' only intact trilogy can do the same. Aeschylus, who lived from 525 to 456 BC, wrote the *Orestia* in about 458 BC and created an essential key to Golden Age Athenian civilization. The Athenian government chose Aeschylus's plays as part of the public celebration of religious festivals. These plays usually won top prize, and the *Orestia* is the only drama the government allowed to be shown more than once at the festivals; clearly the trilogy resonates with Athenian culture. Athenians believed audiences watching a play identify with the characters' experiences and undergo catharsis, or purgation, of the difficulties that led to the drama's tragic endings. One of only seven of Aeschylus's extant works, the *Orestia's* major theme is one of barbarism transformed into civilization, paralleling the history of Athenian institutions.

The Orestia's three plays follow Homer's storyline. The first, the *Agamemnon*, shows how King Agamemnon of the house of Atreus returns victorious from the Trojan War, only to meet his wife Clytemnestra, who kills him for sacrificing their daughter

Iphigenia to Artemis before battle. The history of the Atreus family includes other horrors, such as the story of Agamemnon's father, who fed his unknowing brother the flesh of that brother's own children. In the play, allusions to this story show that savagery is not new to the royal house. In the second play, the *Libation Bearers,* Electra and Orestes, the children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, avenge their father's death by plotting their mother's murder. In the third play, the *Eumenides,* the Furies, who want to punish Orestes for killing his mother, chase him. However, Apollo ordered Orestes to kill his mother in order to avenge his father's death. Apollo stands for the rights of fathers and the sanctity of marriage, as Zeus commands him to do. The *Eumenides* culminates in a trial Athena arranges, not in Argos, where the trilogy's action has taken place thus far, but at Athens's Crag of Ares, the location of the Areopagus, the city's real court. The whole trilogy symbolizes a progression from retributive justice to the classical Athenian system of trial by a democratic, impartial jury.

Aeschylus illustrates his own era in the plays. He presents Athen's court as a summit of legal and political achievement, just as Athenians themselves believed they had reached such a pinnacle. In 480 BC, when Aeschylus was 45, the Persians sacked Athens and destroyed the Acropolis's shrines. The Greeks, led by Athens, went on to defeat the Persians, ushering in approximately half a century of Athenian hegemony. According to Robert Fagles and W.B. Stanford, Greeks saw the defeat of the Persians as the "triumph of right over might, courage over fear, freedom over servitude, moderation over arrogance" (13). The Persians' defeat ushered in Athens's great classical period. This

was the time of Aeschylus, Pericles, Sophocles, and later Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Fagles and Stanford argue that the Parthenon and the *Orestia* constitute the greatest achievements of classical Athens. Both of these works, Fagles and Stanford hold, symbolize a departure from savagery and an embrace of harmony, balance and reason (13). These three qualities seem to symbolize the classical Greek standard of the Golden Mean, and they stand in opposition to the worst classical Greek fault, hubris, a fault because it is unbecoming and because it leads to calamity. Aeschylus illustrates savagery's metamorphosis to civilization in Athens through the story of the Atreus family. Agamemnon's arrogant hubris and Clytemnestra's vengeful justice evolve to Orestes's singular self-reflection, leading to the Athenian court's perfect justice.

Justice is a key theme in the *Orestia*; the great philosophers of Athens made it theirs as well. In classical Athens, Socrates clashed with the sophists over an issue central to the Atreus family's story. What is the basis for justice? Are there such things as absolute right and absolute wrong? If there are, how do we know them? When Socrates engaged the Sophists, the *Orestia* had already been presented to Athenians as ethical questions sought philosophical answers. Plato saw our access to absolute truth through abstract ideals and Aristotle saw it through examination of the physical world, yet both agreed human reason could find it.

When Plato recorded Socrates's ideas and Aristotle categorized what he found with them, the two philosophers created a thought system that influenced every major western philosophical, mathematical and scientific movement that followed. Either the newer systems harmonized with the idea of a fixed universal order or they reacted against

it, but all were in dialogue with it (Lovejoy 25). Until the nineteenth century, western thought has built on Socrates's view that there are such absolutes. According to his teaching, human beings can use reason to find what is right or true in any given circumstance. He never claimed to know all that is right and true; he claimed human reason, one step at a time, could come to know it. Based on this ability to judge phenomena against a logical absolute truth that exists outside feelings, emotions or opinions, humanity can establish standards, not only in math and science but also in the realms of ethics and justice. The sophists denied it but Socrates died affirming that an ordered universe, in accord with unified laws and separate from imaginary gods' whimsy, provides clues for perfect justice. This Greek philosophical debate developed one hundred years before Aeschylus, who presents each side's arguments in the trilogy.

In the *Orestia*, justice slips easily from the characters' hands. Set in Bronze Age Greece, the characters know nothing of Socrates's questions. Individuals and governments embrace varying interpretations of absolute justice, all based on the law of retributive vengeance. Not long before Socrates became a famous teacher, Aeschylus retold the Bronze Age family's story for a classical Athenian audience. In Aeschylus's *Orestia,* the characters assume that there is a standard for what is right and wrong: their own.

As each of the characters explain "justice" according to one perspective, Aeschylus shows the difficulty society has achieving it. An Athenian, Aeschylus upholds the Athenian court, the Areopagus, as a symbol of civilization, refinement and the best model of absolute justice the Greeks ever achieved.

Agamemnon and Clytemnestra represent views of justice the Athenians saw themselves as having surpassed. For Clytemnestra, a parent's love for her child is paramount, and a parent who would put his priority elsewhere deserves death. For Electra and Orestes, a wife should always honor her husband, and a wife who fails to do so deserves death. Apollo upholds the sanctity of marriage, while the Furies place the bond between mother and child above all other bonds. They do so by order of Zeus, who told the Furies to chase and terrorize matricides. Each of these figures recognizes an absolute good in the value of human life; each accuses another of the absolute negation of this good. All of them see their own actions as perfectly justified, with the exception of Orestes, who does struggle with how to reach perfect justice. His inner struggle symbolizes how Athens sees itself: citizens making careful, reasoned decisions according to laws set by the court in a democratic system.

What exactly had Athenians left behind as they progressed to this superior system? An examination of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's stand on justice reveals what Athenians saw as a thing of the past, but not the distant past. In Aeschylus's lifetime, in times between tyrants and during the democratic reforms, Athenians knew violent political disorder and they understood how easily it could come again. Democratic government was still new for them. In Clytemnestra's view, absolute right and wrong exist, and Agamemnon ignored that fact when he sacrificed their first-born child to Artemis for success in battle against the Trojans. After killing Agamemnon, Clytemnestra believed her actions brought her family back to a state of parity with absolute justice. She exclaims in *Agamemnon*, "it is right and more than right. He flooded the vessel of our

proud house with misery, with the vintage of the curse and now he drains the dregs" (1420-1423). She has no second thoughts as to whether or not her own actions have caused a falling away from the ideal of justice, and she feels no observable sadness over her choice. Rather, she can say, "rejoice, if you can rejoice—I glory" (1417). Even when the chorus calls her criminal in killing the king and "brazen" in her exultation, she stands firm:

> My heart is steel, well you know. Praise me,
> blame me as you choose. It's all one.
> Here is Agamemnon, my husband made a corpse
> by this right hand—a masterpiece of Justice.
> Done is done. (1427-1430)

Clytemnestra cannot ignore the chorus completely, though, even as she arrogantly dismisses all criticism. They are the elders of Argos and they seem to speak for the people. They say to Clytemnestra, "the people cast you off to exile, broken with our hate" (1435-1436). Clytemnestra takes this as a potentially legal judgment, perhaps fearing for the security of her position in the house, or even feeling a twinge of guilt she means to bury quickly, before giving it sway. Either way, hypothetically, Clytemnestra finds herself on trial. Firm in her commitment to absolute justice and confident in her vision of its standard, Clytemnestra gives her defense. How dare they accuse her when they say nothing of the crime for which Agamemnon received punishment? Furthermore, if Argos's old men wish to split hairs, should they themselves be fit judges, having looked the other way when a father killed his daughter?

Clytemnestra refuses to allow for the judgment of any other court except her own. Still, in fairness, she makes her case well. In the following passage, Clytemnestra defends her position with reference to the unfair application of the law in Argos:

> And now you sentence me?--
> you banish *me* from the city, curses breathing down my neck? But *he*--
> name one charge you brought against him then.
> He thought no more of it than killing a beast,
> and his flocks were rich, teeming in their fleece,
> but he sacrificed his own child, our daughter,
> the agony I laboured into love
> to charm away the savage wind of Thrace.
> Didn't the law demand you banish him?--
> hunt him from the land for all his guilt?
> But now you witness what I've done
> and you are ruthless judges. (1437-1448)

The fact that the law of Argos is applied unfairly lets Clytemnestra feel justified in ignoring it. The viewer can sympathize here. Agamemnon did go unpunished, for the law itself is not perfectly matched with absolute justice. Clytemnestra's mistake is to use the flawed legal system of Argos as an excuse to dismiss the law altogether and to create her own legal system that may be closer to true justice in treating Agamemnon but is woefully inadequate in all else. She seeks true justice only in the case that brought her pain, but she is completely blind to the fact that, by her own standard, she, too, is now

guilty. The legal theme extends throughout the trilogy, and Clytemnestra's figurative trial stands in contrast with Athena's trial in Athens at the end. As much as Clytemnestra's words pierce the heart, Aeschylus presents her sense of justice as inferior to Athena's.

While Aeschylus does uphold the idea that absolute justice is possible to achieve, he shows the viewer that people have great difficulty in seeing its application in an even-handed fashion. He clearly presents a series of characters who demand fairness in one instance but ignore it in every other. They do this blindly, and in each instance, they make proud declarations that they are right. Even as Clytemnestra defends herself saying, "it is right," and "he brutalized me," the reader is reminded of similar words from her victim, and later her victimizer (1420, 1466).

Early in the play, Agamemnon comes home, full of arrogance, stating, "for their mad outrage of a queen we raped their city—we were right" (808-809). Fagles and Stanford argue that Agamemnon's actions are like those of the Persians in sacking the Acropolis: brutish, uncivilized and therefore un-Athenian. The comparison could not have been far from the minds of Athenian audiences, either. Later, the reader recalls an atrocity further back in the family's history, the "brutal feast" where a father is made to eat his own child; Agamemnon's father served Aegisthus's unknowing father such a meal (1531). It was this crime for which Aegisthus sought retribution, so that when he sees Agamemnon dead he exclaims, "now at last I see this man brought down in the Furies' tangling robes… and I, the weaver of Justice, plotted out the kill" (1608-1609; 1635-1636). Yet, in the eyes of Orestes, urged on by Apollo himself, the only criminals are Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Even though the Furies plague him later, Orestes is sure

of himself when he says in Aeschylus's *The Libation Bearers*, “the adulterer dies. An old custom, justice” (983).

Following Fagles and Stanford’s reasoning concerning Athens, Clytemnestra and Orestes here are like the Greeks before Athens showed a light to Hellas during the classical age, ushering in a new form of law and government that surpassed all others in its parity with the Mean. The “old custom” referred to by Orestes would be replaced by a new and improved legal system. In the 460s BC, one of the final evolutions in Athenian law took place and was still sharp in the minds of Athenian audiences. These events preceded the development that Athens is best remembered for: pure democracy. For, by the 460s, a group of politicians had come to support the poor and gave them a role in politics (Meier, "Political Art" 25). Other elements of this group’s agenda included a war with Sparta, the leader of the opposing alliance formed to defeat the Persians. Finally, these politicians gained support of the poor class by demanding that power be taken from the Council of the Areopagus, whose members to this time were made up of the aristocratic class, the former rulers of Athens and the same class that ruled most of the rest of Greece’s city-states (Meier, "Political Art" 25). The goal here was more equality in government, a direction to which Athenian politics had been moving for some time. If the Areopagus had its power reduced, then the democratic Assembly would have more power. This became a major political struggle. It proposed to reduce aristocratic power, which dominated the Areopagus, in order to bring more political equality. They enlisted the support of the thetes—oarsmen in the Athenian fleet from the poor class—who rose to heroic status after the war with Persia.

This struggle led to the great political example Athens leaves to the world, rule not by aristocracy but by the people (Meier, "Political Art" 25). The movement succeeded and preceded the greatest flowering of classical Athenian culture: the building of the Acropolis and the writing of classical Greek tragedy, beginning with Aeschylus. The *Orestia* reflects these events and, according to Christian Meier, “the *Eumenides* gave expression to the political when it first burst upon Athens” (“Greek Discovery” 82). Aeschylus, an Athenian, war veteran and patriot, has Athenians bestow justice for Orestes. Orestes will be king of another city-state that still existed in the classical age, Argos. Thus, in one stroke, Aeschylus links Athenian democracy, symbolized in the court at the Areopagus, with the extension of fair laws throughout Greece. To Aeschylus, not only did Athens achieve military and naval supremacy among Greeks after leading the defeat of Persia, Athens also gifted all of Greece with the ideal of democratic rule of law. Aeschylus has Orestes exclaim his gratitude to the Athenians in the play; after thanking Athena for saving his house, Orestes addresses the Athenians gathered for his trial, after a tie in the vote set him free:

> And now I journey home. But first I swear
> to you, your land and assembled host, I swear
> by the future years that bring their growing yield
> that no man, no helmsman of Argos wars on Athens,
> spears in the vanguard moving out for conquest.
> We ourselves, even if we must rise up from the grave,
> will deal with those who break the oath I take—

> baffle them with disasters, curse their marches,
>
> send them hawks on the left at every crossing—
>
> make their pains recoil upon their heads.
>
> But all who keep our oath, who uphold your rights
>
> and citadel for ever, comrades spear to spear,
>
> we bless with all the kindness of our heart.
>
> Now farewell, you the people of your city.
>
> Good wrestling—a grip no foe can break.
>
> A saving hope, a spear to bring you triumph! (*Eum.* 776-791)

At this, Orestes exits and this speech is the last spoken by him or any mortal in the trilogy. Athena must still persuade the Furies to accept Orestes's freedom from punishment. She succeeds and the Furies make peace with Athens; the embodiments of retributive rage are appeased, too, by Athena and her people. The Furies express their gratitude here: "rejoice in destined wealth, rejoice, Athena's people—poised by the side of Zeus, loved by the loving virgin girl, achieve humanity at last" (*Eum.* 1004-1009). Finally, Athena escorts the Furies, now the peaceful Eumenides, along with the women of the city who gave the former Furies wreathes symbolizing their struggle with and victory over the law of vengeance. As they walk off the stage in unison, the women of Athens assess the import of what transpired, "this peace between Athena's people and their guests must never end. All-seeing Zeus and Fate embrace, down they come to urge our union on—cry, cry in triumph" (*Eum.* 1054-1057). Aeschylus portrays unity among Greeks, symbolized by the Furies's concession not only against retributive justice within

families, but also their new wish, “that the good Greek soil never drinks the blood of Greeks” and that all Greeks have “one common will for love and hate with one strong heart, such union heals a thousand ills of man” (*Eum*. 989-996).

Thus, Aeschylus presents Athens as having a civilizing effect on the Argives and all of Greece. In his own time, Argos was one of a number of weaker city-states who allied with the Athenian super-power and looked to Athens for leadership. What exactly is Aeschylus saying about pre-classical Greeks and their legal systems and how did he see Athens as the first to move beyond it, creating a superior model? Aeschylus's chorus, the elders of Argos who represent the society as a whole, verbalize the classical Athenians’ view of pre-classical Bronze Age Greeks. Aeschylus does not have them provide an answer; that would not come until Athena’s classical Athens provides one. But the legal problem eventually solved by the Athenians is real and stifling: a cycle of violence dominates Greek justice before Athenian hegemony eventually shows them light.

The perpetual passing on of guilt and punishment could seemingly go on with no end, as Aeschylus presents the story. This phenomenon of evil deeds being simultaneously avenged and passed on, like hair or eye color in a family, seems to be given a name by chorus; it is called a curse. In *Agamemnon*, they state the following:

> each charge meets counter-charge.
>
> None can judge between them. Justice.
>
> The plunderer plundered,
>
> the killer pays the price.
>
> The truth still holds while

Zeus still holds the throne:

the one who acts must suffer--that is the law.

Who can tear from the veins

the bad seed, the curse?

The race is welded to its ruin. (1588-1594)

The chorus does not limit the curse to one family, but widens its effect to the whole of humanity. Pain inflicted when each blow of vengeance strikes propels each victim to become another victimizer. The old men of Argos describe the perpetual passing on of vengeance in concrete, biological terms; it has become part of the physical make-up of the society. The imagery of vengeance and guilt having physical manifestations extends throughout the play, as the chorus calls guilt "an infection of the brain" very early on (69). The viewer sees the pain Clytemnestra must feel when, as she looks on the dead body of the husband she just murdered, she comments, "no stealthier than the death he dealt our house and the offspring of our loins, Iphigenia, girl of tears. Act for act, wound for wound!" (1551-1555).

Aeschylus paints a bleak picture of monarchical government in a Mycenaean Greek kingdom, Argos. Aeschylus characterizes Greek pre-classical forms of government in Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; the author casts Bronze Age government in relief against the superior ways of Athens. Agamemnon is king by inheritance. He sacrifices his own daughter to win a war and then brutally destroys Troy. He succumbs to Clytemnestra's temptation to overstep his bounds as a mortal by accepting honors fit for a god when he returns home. These actions show him to be arrogant and murderous. Yet,

his pre-classical legal system represented in the chorus of elders is shown to be unfair to everyone but the king himself, who can do no wrong in its eyes, even in killing his own daughter.

Aeschylus does portray monarchy as horrible here, yet, after Agamemnon's death, Clytemnestra proves to be an even worse leader. She kills the king, usurping power illegally. She is corrupt in that she plotted the regicide long before Agamemnon returned home from the war. She is having an illicit affair with the king's cousin and she sends her own son far away, long before the murder, so that she can rule instead of him. Her rule may be likened to the tyrants of ancient Greece who ruled for a time after the monarchs. They seized power and maintained it until the people decided to overthrow them and allow other tyrants to take over; they had no legal position other than the people's toleration. Monarchy and tyranny make the people subject to the personal flaws, triumphs, failures and troubles of one individual. All the history of government before Athenian democracy is represented in this trilogy; only Athenian democracy shows promise in bringing resolution to the curse of Agamemnon's house. The very curse that the elders of Argos clearly identify as without cure does finally find its resolution, but only in civilized, classical Athens (Meier, "Political Art" 118-119).

The chorus also speaks of a law that is not simply the same law of Argos that Clytemnestra found lacking; it is a higher law: Zeus' law. In other words, to the people of Argos, nothing can be done about the fact that "the one who acts must suffer" (*Ag*. 1592). An eye-for-an-eye retribution is the highest form of justice attainable in the mindset of this society, seen in the fact that they perceive it to be Zeus' will. According to Zeus's

rule, retributive justice is superior to the law of Argos, not inferior. All who seek retribution vehemently exclaim their own righteousness precisely because society has told them retribution *is* justice. No permanent satisfaction comes of this, but Zeus, as well as Apollo later in the *Eumenides*, is not a god interested in the ultimate happiness of human beings. In most cases, it seems he would rather not be bothered at all. The Olympians are far removed from the lives of people; as long as sufficient order exists among them to avoid disturbing Zeus' other interests, no matter how much they suffer, Zeus goes about his own business. So, here Aeschylus presents not only the law of retribution as inferior, but also the law of Zeus. When the playwright ultimately presents a just legal system in Athens it proves superior, therefore, even to the law of Zeus.

Yet, Aeschylus seems to have a conception of at least one Olympian capable of empathy for humanity's plight: Athena in the *Eumenides*. Aeschylus also imagines the Furies, who eventually become the Eumenides, as a force for the good; they demand parity for what remains lacking in Apollo's sense of justice. Athena reconciles Apollo's stark justice for fathers, marriage and order on the one hand, and the righteous rage of the Furies in defense of the mother's bond to her child on the other. Both Apollo and the Furies stand for the existence of an absolute good, as do the other characters in the play. But, like the others in Aeschylus's rendition of the house of Atreus, their version of justice is one-sided.

When one character in the whole trilogy, Orestes, stops to think about his action and discovers himself caught between the two opposing views of absolute justice, Athena

is able to reconcile the two views. As a consequence, both Athens and Argos can achieve a version of justice much closer to the absolute ideal than they had before.

In Orestes, Aeschylus shows one character progressing from a retributive sense of justice to the Athenian view, symbolizing civilization's progress in Athens. Orestes's initial view is the same as his mother's, caught in the same cycle in which Clytemnestra was caught, so that in the *Libation Bearers* he states, "for parents of revenge, revenge be done" (382). The chorus urges him on, since the Argives also believe in retributive justice: "your father mutilated—do you hear?" (432). Of course, Electra is part of the same belief system, and, as she tells her brother how she suffers, she adds, "hear that my brother, carve it on your heart!" (437). When Orestes comes to the point of killing his mother, though, he hesitates and upon this hesitation the whole trilogy turns. Each avenger who comes before him never questions the righteousness of murder, but this avenger does: "what will I do Pylades?—I dread to kill my mother!" (886). He is swayed by the logic of Pylades's argument, "what of the Prophet God Apollo, the Delphic voice, the faith and oaths we swear? Make all mankind your enemy, not the gods" (887-889). So, he kills his mother. Once again, society sees vengeance as supreme justice:

> justice came at last to the sons of Priam,
> late but crushing vengeance, yes, but to Agamemnon's house returned
> the double lion,
> the double onslaught
> drove to the hilt—the exile sped by god,
> by Delphi's just command that drove him home. (922-928)

It is not long, though, before the same chorus recognizes the problem: “here once more, for the third time, the tempest in the race has struck…Where will it end?—where will it sink to sleep and rest, this murderous hate, the Fury?” (1064-1067, 1075-1077).

Unseen forces hound Orestes after his act of vengeance. Today’s viewer might call this guilt and later, in Sophocles’s retelling, they are only visible to Orestes. In Aeschylus, they are the personified avengers visible to viewers, the Furies. The Furies are deities older than, though supplanted by, the Olympians; they stand up for the rights of women and mothers. Finally, the chorus sees retribution did not make all things right, asking where it will end; yet no one asks this question before the vengeance takes place, though Orestes does come very close.

When the Furies pursue Orestes to Apollo’s temple at Delphi, Orestes seeks relief from Athena. Humbly, he admits his crime, though he does see himself technically innocent because Apollo urged him on: “Queen Athena, under Apollo’s orders I have come. Receive me kindly. Curst and an outcast, no suppliant for purging…my hands are clean. My murderous edge is blunted now” (233-236). If he needs no purging, why is he tortured, and why does he fly to the gods for help? He is tortured by the Furies, who claim, “matricides: we drive them from their houses” (208). To Apollo, the Furies are disgusting nuisances because they refuse to allow him to enforce Olympian justice without facing the consequences. The Furies tell him, “you are no mere accomplice in this crime. You did it all, and all the guilt is yours” (197-198). Still, Apollo’s justice is not arbitrary; he too points to an absolute standard:

Why, you’d disgrace—obliterate the bonds of Zeus

and Hera queen of brides! And the queen of love
you'd throw to the winds at a word, disgrace love,
the source of mankind's nearest, dearest ties.
Marriage of man and wife is Fate itself, is
stronger than oaths, and Justice guards its life.
But if one destroys the other and you relent—
no revenge, not a glance in anger—then
I say your manhunt of Orestes is unjust.
Some things stir your rage, I see. Others,
atrocious crimes, lull your will to act.
Pallas
will oversee this trial. She is one of us. (211-222)

Here Aeschylus presents the ultimate conflict between varying standards of absolute justice. On the one hand Apollo upholds the marriage agreement, the fundamental building-block of any society. The marriage bond produces legitimate children who have positions in society agreed upon by all; society is ordered by marriage. The nuclear family was an important institution in Athens, as in all societies. Its main purpose was to produce new citizens, and citizenship was legally defined as the offspring of two Athenians (Spielvogel 79). On the other hand, the Furies uphold justice for women. Women may be the ones for whom society makes few protective laws, and this may not bother Apollo, who cares little for rights of individuals. Yet, women, spoken for by the similarly disenfranchised Furies in the play, deserve voice. The Furies' voices may

be weak and nagging compared to the proclamations of Apollo, but they have no other recourse in this society. They condemn each other for slights against absolute justice, yet the Furies ignore marriage rights and Apollo ignores the rights of the individual.

Aeschylus brings the action to this point of conflict by showing society's problem with absolute versions of truth: it is impossible to achieve, if it exists at all. In the final scene of the court at Athens, Athena shows respect for both views and reconciles them. Apollo could not accomplish this; he must defend the law that provides an ordered and patriarchal society, as his priestess Pythia tells the viewer at the start of the play, "but it is Zeus Apollo speaks for, Father Zeus" (19).

The Furies also get their authority from Zeus, who sends them to punish matricides. Aeschylus's conception of Zeus seems to be that he is a god who wants order, but in cases where the helpless are injured, he grudgingly acknowledges there must be some recompense. It seems even Aeschylus's Zeus must respect an absolute good that exists outside his own will. It reflects the Golden Mean, the supreme classical Greek ideal. Still, the honor given to the Furies is clearly not on equal footing with the written laws protecting order and the patriarchal family unit. For example, the Athenian marriage agreement states "I give this woman for the procreation of legitimate children" (Spielvogel 80). The Furies are desperately nagging because all the official rights have been given to the male, just as in historical Athens. While women could participate in religious functions, they were excluded from all other public life, could not own property and were always under male guardianship. Even Athena must say, "I honor the male, in all things but marriage. Yes, with all my heart I am my father's child. I

cannot set more store by the woman's death—she killed her husband, guardian of their house. Even if the vote is equal, Orestes wins" (750-756).

Concerning perfect justice in the *Orestia,* conflicting views mirror events in classical Athens. In *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, Christian Meier contends that the struggle between the Furies who condemn Orestes and Apollo who defends him mirrors the debate over war with Sparta between leaders Cimon and Ephialtes. He sees each side's bias fueling the bias of the other as in political partisanship (111). In addition, Ephialtes eventually advocated the elimination of the Areopagus court system. Meier suggests the views of justice put forth by the Furies and Apollo mirror the arguments concerning the validity of the Athenian court system. This line of thought parallels another of Meier, that perhaps the conflict between the gods may also resemble a rebellion against the Olympian gods who would put Orestes in this position, both of them sent by Zeus himself. Meier notes there is no way to know how much Athenians believed there could be only one just view according to the will of Zeus, so that Athenians would see this conflict as scandalous. The question of whether a court could find one absolutely just decision using the democratic process persisted. As mentioned before, the Areopagus had been taken over from the aristocratic class, the traditional rulers of Athens as well as all the Greek city-states, for a more democratic system. After the democratic reforms, the one power the court retained was deciding murder cases.

The argument between the Furies and Apollo reflects this conflict. According to Christian Meier, the Furies symbolize the old order of rule while Apollo symbolizes the new. The older gods, the Furies, are portrayed as uncivilized (they threaten to eat Orestes

alive), ugly and dark. They have little appetite for taking this trial to Athena's court. After all, Orestes admits his guilt. What more does a court have to offer than to find guilt or innocence? It is beautiful, light-filled and civilized Apollo who suggests going to Athena for justice and she establishes the court. Meier suggests Aeschylus sides with Apollo and in Athens with the civilized, democratic court system (109-112). Yet, Apollo does not really "win." The vote is even; Athena must break the tie. Apollo gets no final say; the Furies and Athena do. The idea that Apollo symbolizes the new is not completely satisfactory.

Meier also argues that the conflict between the old and young gods is over defense of old rights versus new ones. According to this reasoning, the Furies symbolize those in classical Athens who would defend the old system of aristocratic members alone in the Areopagus. Accordingly, Apollo represents the new, democratic system. Apollo, Athena and Zeus are all members of the younger, Olympian dynasty who, in mythology, supersede the rule from older dynasties, like that of the Furies (109).

Perhaps Meier concludes incorrectly that Aeschylus portrays the Furies only in a bad light and thus merely as symbols of the old methods of justice, though the Furies' arguments are just as logical as Apollo's. Apollo is golden and beautiful because he holds the position of power; he need not scream to have his voice heard and he need not bend over backwards, appearing deformed, to have his way. No one listens to the Furies, though, unless they do yell. They only attract attention from those in power by raging against them with all their might, and rage is never attractive.

Apollo, possibly symbolic of the male power structure, has no time for the Furies' arguments. Moreover, he blasts them for having the nerve to oppose the power structure he upholds. The Furies are females who radically and emphatically refuse to participate in a society based on justice designed by males. Any relationship with a male or a male's rules is seen as an alliance with injustice. It deepens their isolation, but it also keeps them free from compromising the purity of their convictions. Apollo seems a bit resentful concerning this aspect of the Furies that remains beyond his scope, as he berates them, "these obscenities!…They disgust me. These grey, ancient children never touched by god, man or beast—the eternal virgins. Born for destruction only, the dark pit…loathed by men and the gods who hold Olympus" (70-76). In other words, Apollo can't take care of this problem as he does others involving females; he can't lure them to his side through his seductive powers. Nothing at all, including Apollo's charms, will make the Furies stop calling attention to injustice.

Robert Fagles, in his translation of the *Orestia*, dedicates the *Eumenides* to his daughters and quotes Yeats about the Furies, right after the dedication, calling them

> That great family
>
> Some ancient authors misrepresent
>
> The proud Furies each with her torch on high. (228)

In his poem, Yeats would rather not see his daughters "content" nor with "satisfied conscience" (228). He prefers them be like the misunderstood Furies. Clearly, a reading of the role of the Furies and what they may symbolize politically in Athens must take into account the view that the Furies serve absolute justice in some way. They speak for those,

even in democratic Athens, with little or no political voice. These may include women, slaves and the poor. Seen this way, the Furies are not ugly, murderous and destructive but only seem that way to those who benefit from the status quo, all those symbolized in Apollo: the powerful and privileged in any society who remain blind to other's plight and blithely defensive of their position.

Aeschylus uses Orestes's character to symbolize a transformation in views of justice. Orestes is torn between Apollo and the Furies because he questions his own actions as no other character does in the trilogy. Perhaps his guilt-ridden questioning is what allows the Furies to torture him so much. He wants to know what is right, and he is willing to discover that he is wrong: "bear me witness—show me the way, Apollo! Did I strike her down with justice? Strike I did, I don't deny it, no. But how does our bloody work impress you now?—Just or not?" (615-619). As far as the curse's vicious cycle goes, Orestes tries to step outside of it to get a better view. Because he hesitates, he suffers, and the suffering is symbolized in the crucible of the final decision of Athena's court at Ares. Because he enters the crucible and willingly accepts what they decide, he brings healing and stops the cycle of his family's curse. Imagine Clytemnestra before this court. She would not care if the court and all the gods assembled together decided against her; she would go to her death screaming her righteousness. Could the mind of Clytemnestra conceive that while her argument is just, so is Orestes's? Yes, the arguments on both sides are just, but Athena instructs the court that they must look to the highest standard for achieving absolute good:

> neither anarchy, nor tyranny, people.

> Worship the Mean, I urge you,
> shore it up with reverence and never
> banish terror from the gates,
> not outright. (*Eum.* 710-712)

Because the vote is tied, Athena's vote counts and she takes Apollo's side. Yet, she does not discount the position of the Furies and she reminds them that their voice did carry equal weight with Apollo's. No longer do they need to demand their voices be heard in weak, furious, ugly screeches. At Athena's court, their council is taken. Athena persuades them, and the knowledge that their voice counted transforms the Furies into the *Eumenides*, or "the kindly ones"; they become what Aeschylus calls them in the title of the play. They are the same beings, though before their transformation, they were manifested as ugly, desperate entities, like people with nothing to lose. Having nothing, Athena gives them something: dignity. By showing them their arguments are respected as true, they change for the good: "I can feel the hate, the fury slip away" (908-909). Rather than complain how they must balance out the gods' unfair justice, now they can say,

> And the lightning stroke that cuts men down before their prime, I curse,
> But the lovely girl who finds a mate's embrace,
> the deep joy of wedded life—O grant that gift, that prize,
> you gods of wedlock, grant it, goddesses of Fate!
> Sisters born of the Night our mother, spirits steering law,
> sharing at all our hearths, at all times bearing down
> to make our lives more just,

all realms exalt you highest of the gods. (968-978)

Finally, because of Athena's intercession and acceptance of their anger, the Furies see that the gods' laws about marriage are just too. They lose their anger and become peaceful, which was the state they sought all along. To Aeschylus, it seems they always were Eumenides because they stood for an absolute good despite the fact that society, and the Olympian gods, ignored the absolute good they upheld. The Olympian gods seem to lack a kind of compassion that people can feel for other people, though they are capable of acknowledging its existence. So, for Aeschylus, if there is an absolute good that includes Olympian justice, it must go beyond it. It must be above the authority of Zeus, because Zeus finds he must allow the Furies to protect that part of the absolute good that his own law does not take into account. Athena herself does not say worship Zeus, she says worship the Mean. But who discerns the mean?

Through Athenians' ultimate vote on the guilt of Orestes, Aeschylus shows democracy replacing the will of Zeus and varying positions on absolute justice. Aeschylus has divine Athena ordain the trial itself, giving it legitimacy (*Eum*. 111-127). She appeases the Furies but does not condemn them, taking their arguments into account and respecting them as true. She synthesizes the wills of Apollo and the Furies, and Orestes happily benefits. In terms of classical Athenian history, Christian Meier sees the appeasement in terms of consensus between the old and new systems of law in Athens: the old aristocratic-controlled Areopagus and the new democratic-controlled Areopagus court. Ephialtes, a proponent of the new political system, argued against the old Areopagus and for war with Sparta, clashing against Cimon, who argued for time-

honored tradition. Meier points out the strength of the latter argument by noting that Ephialtes argued for the new court system by asserting that even the power of the old Areopagus was arrogated (110).

Like Apollo, Ephialtes eventually won but in a close race. The final outcome in the play is ultimately decided not by those arguing but by a fair system created by Athena, a fairness that seems to have sold the system to the classical Athenians as well. Personal belief does not sway Athena in her final decision. She comes up with a structure of due process that future cases can use in an impartial manner, just like the new court at Athens (113). Meier also points out the arbitrary nature of Athena's new system and compares it to democracy itself. Athenians, much like the American Federalist Alexander Hamilton, questioned the benefit of a system based on the arbitrary will of the general masses, poor and uneducated, compared to the experience and education of the former aristocratic court (111 Meier). Athena's explanation of why she would vote with Orestes also seems arbitrary.

Athena does not forget the Furies' arguments, however. When she advises the citizens of Athens who preside over the new court she created, "neither anarchy, nor tyranny" and "worship the Mean," she is echoing the call for the political balance that the Furies were screaming for all along (Meier, "Political Art" 114). Meier believes the classical Greeks must have seen "anarchy" to mean an extreme version of democracy with no check on the will of the masses. He quotes the Furies, "is there a man who knows no fear in the brightness of his heart, or a man's city, both are one, that still reveres the rights?" (Aeschylus in Meier 114). Interestingly, a *man's* heart and city are one and the

same, Aeschylus's Furies lament. The *demos* and *polis* are one and Aeschylus's Athena accepts this argument in her final address to the Athenians, as she explains that terror should never be banished from the gates (Aeschylus in Meier 115). If they remember this, they will share a system superior to all other Greeks. Meier notes the fact that just when in classical Athens, the Areopagus is losing traditional power, Athena is giving it new powers in Aeschylus's work. Athena gives exactly the same functions to the new court that Ephialtes left intact when the system was changed (115). The Areopagus continued on but only in hearing capital trials. Where Athena tells the new court they must be incorruptible, Ephialtes brought to trial many corrupt members of the old Areopagus (115). A true reconciling is achieved here.

But is it truly satisfactory? When Orestes finally questions the validity of what he had done in obedience to Apollo, it is as if he stepped outside of civilization itself to question its very foundations. He is the only one who stops forging ahead, sure in his own rightness, to reflect with a mind open to the idea that he might have done wrong. He directly questions Apollo—an act of defiance in early classical Athenian society, where faith and obedience to the gods was required for citizenship. Later Socrates would die for no less. Apollo has a few points to back up his instruction. Ultimately, they fall flat, though for Orestes. Apollo can't be bothered with truly deep questions of right and wrong and tells Orestes he needs to go to Athena, like a distracted father watching the football game might tell an inquisitive child, "go ask your mother" when the child queried, "where do I come from?" Athena does far more to help Orestes than Apollo, it is true. Orestes is free from the endless cycle of vengeance as justice.

Yet, she has no real answer to the question Orestes put to Apollo. She smooths things over and makes them neat, orderly, peaceful—Aeschylus even has her invent democracy in the process. She is far more generous and willing to extend some mercy to Orestes, but what is good, what is right, what should Orestes, or anyone, have done to keep whole what was broken? That question she never answers. The Furies try to make her answer, to find a resolution, to make wrong right. With angry, repetitious insistence, they demand it. But even the Furies come to realize what they want from Athena, Athena can't give. She admits she can't even relate to the strangely human suffering for which they remonstrate; she has no mother, having been born only from a father. Athena's father is Zeus himself, the one who promulgated the contradictory laws in the first place. So the question remains unanswered.

Contrary to Meier's interpretation, it is also possible to envision reconciliation between the Furies, symbolizing justice for the oppressed, and Apollo, symbolizing a male and wealth-dominated power structure. Athenian citizenship was the closest and earliest version of true democracy history credits, yet the requirements were stiff. They did not allow women, foreigners (those born to non-Athenian parents), slaves or freed slaves citizenship. Really, the number of people in Athens exercising democratic rights constituted no majority. The weak and disinherited Furies stand for the rights of the unrepresented with the only power available to them. Coupled with the role of Athenian women in the final triumphant procession celebrating the legal ascendancy of moderation over vengeance, Aeschylus makes a statement against inequality.

The *Divine Comedy*

"For Rome, which made the world good, used to have two suns; and they made visible two paths--the world's path and the pathway that is God's."

—Dante, Purgatorio 106-108

Just as in one sense the *Orestia* serves as a political treatise, the *Divine Comedy* offers Dante's comments on the political state of affairs in thirteenth century Florence and Europe in general. Further, each work argues for a particular style of government. In the midst of violent political upheaval, each author changes his initial views on good government; like their heroes, through suffering and experience, Aeschylus and Dante evolve politically and persuade audiences or readers to do the same. They persuade from perspectives of existential threat to an orderly society. In the quotation above, cosmic traveler Dante recalls a time he perceives the world had been ruled well; Rome provided sound temporal justice and the Church provided righteous spiritual guidance. In contrast, throughout the *Divine Comedy*, Dante laments the condition of his own city, Florence. The strife created by the Guelphs, with their support of the Pope against the absolute rule of the Emperor, and the Ghibellines, with their support of the Emperor against the Pope, follows the traveler's odyssey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. The murders, wars, betrayals and family feuds associated with this Florentine conflict bring Dante continued sadness and anger.

Though a member of a Guelph family, Dante the author builds a case for a degree of absolute rule as the only possible remedy for Florence, which he saw as just one of the sadly corrupted political and moral conditions among the Italian city-states. Dante the

character longs for a time when a just yet strong Holy Roman Emperor would emerge as a new, christened Julius Caesar, divinely guided, who rules all of the known world with classical justice and Christian values. This new Christian Roman civilization would have theological significance; it would reflect the heavenly City, where all practice justice and Christian values naturally, and God reigns as the one eternal Emperor. In fact, Dante's figurative citizenship in the Eternal City is in question, and this is what necessitates the entire journey: "because that Emperor who reigns above, since I have been rebellious to His law, will not allow me entry to His city" *(Inf.* II 124-126). As Dante condemns or praises certain political and clerical figures, he expresses his wish for a Christian Rome, a temporal City of God Augustine himself did not deem possible.

The she-wolf who stands in the way of the traveler's ascent in Canto I first symbolizes a corrupt society, representing avarice. Greed is often at the core of the sins that corrupt the figures of leadership Dante condemns. In the third circle of Hell, where the gluttonous are assigned their places, the Florentine Ciacco "languishes in the rain" and tells of other Florentines, even though thought to be from a more virtuous time in their republic, who are in lower levels of Hell, since "they are among the blackest souls" (*Inf.* VI 85). Ciacco also predicts Florence's two parties will war against and successively exile one another. As greedy as they are for power and prestige, Dante the poet assigned them an additional punishment that must have given his contemporary Florentines pause: Ciacco's request to Dante to keep his memory alive on earth shows that those in Dante's Hell are not well-remembered in the temporal world, where they tried so hard to forge a legacy.

In Canto X, Farinata, who exerted political and financial influence on the papacy because of his family's support of Frederick II, suffers punishment with the heretics, since he was declared one by the pope, yet Florentine politics consume him even in Hell (*Inf.* X 32-64). He idolizes political gain and fame, and perhaps idolatry is his true heresy. Here Epicurus, unlike the other pre-Christian Greek philosophers residing in Limbo, is punished as a heretic along with the scheming Florentine, juxtaposing two who would put their own pleasures ahead of virtue, thereby condemning Florence's sense of virtue (*Inf.* X 13). Epicurus did not believe in an afterlife, and perhaps Dante condemns Farinata, who also lived only for earthly reward. Additionally, John Ciardi proposes that Dante defines heresy solely as denial of the soul's immortality (86). Epicurus differs from other non-Christians in Limbo, like Socrates and Plato, in that he does not acknowledge any absolute standards beyond those of the individual's experience. Since each individual must satisfy only himself or herself, there is nothing objective to provide guidance. An absolute, external system of justice, generally agreed upon, is an essential point in Dante's scheme. This stems from his beliefs about justice, law and government. Alternatively, Dante respects Roman stoics, like Cato, who did accept universally transcendent ideals, who stands at the entrance of Dante's Purgatory, even though Cato lived before the Christian era.

In addition, Dante's scheme of what entails "justice" and "injustice" reflects the realities of the medieval world, where all offenses against justice can be reduced to violence or fraud (*Inf.* XI 22). Violence can be considered a sin against the commandment not to murder, and fraud is a sin against the commandments not to bear false witness or

steal. This view of justice really reflects the classical view of ethics (Mandelbaum on *Inf.* XI 23). Drawing on either tradition, Dante shows the sin of fraud to be violence against nature, and Florence to be guilty of it. In Canto XI, Dante provides an extended application of the sin of violence, "man's peculiar vice," to the practice of usury. Here Dante condemns Florence's economic base as a banking center. Dante compares the usurious city of Cahors in France to Sodom as two examples of sins against nature. Here, perhaps Dante asks how much more the corrupt leadership in the Italian city-states profit from the practice of usury, and how much more they deserve damnation, compared to Cahors or Sodom.

Dante condemns many powerful Italians to the eighth circle of Hell for sins against something Dante calls "higher than nature," breaches of personal trust. Dante calls this sin fraud: "this latter way seems only to cut off the bond of love that nature forges; thus nestled within the second circle are: hypocrisy and flattery, sorcerers, and falsifiers, simony, and theft, and barrators and panders and like trash" (*Inf.* XI 55-59). There languish two corrupt politicians of Lucca, the Fra Gomita, who took bribes in Sardinia, and Ciampolo, who exploited his kind lord of Navarre (*Inf.* XXI). In the next level, the hypocrites of Italian society are well-represented: two Bolognese Franciscan Friars who meant to bring peace between their warring families through appointed offices, only to push the political aims of their respective Guelphs and Ghibellines, suffer the same punishment as Caiaphus the High Priest and the Pharisees (*Inf.* XXIII).

Dante the traveller finds figures he knew and respected in life appearing as polite as Dante remembered them. The traveller seems struck by the fact that someone he

admires, Ser Brunetto Latino, deserved Hell. Dante recalls his kind paternal image and wishes he were still alive (*Inf.* XV 83). Yet, Ser Brunetto sinned against nature and God and suffers Hell, among many well-respected Florentines with the same offense. Perhaps Dante condemns himself and all popular and influential Italians for sins so ubiquitous they forget them as sins. This causes Dante to rant against the sinfulness and base corruption of Florence in general:

> That malicious, that ungrateful people come down, in ancient times, from Fiesole...the world has long since called them blind, a people presumptuous, avaricious, envious; be sure to cleanse yourself of their foul ways...let the beasts of Fiesole find forage among themselves...and leave the plant alone...in which there lives again the sacred seed of those few Romans who remained in Florence when such a nest of wickedness was built. (*Inf.* XV 61-79)

This castigation sounds much like the chastisements of God against Israel throughout the Old Testament, for example, in the book of Hosea. Just as biblical Israel sins, falls away and repents, in need of a savior, Dante sees Italy as a corruption of the formerly virtuous and, to him, divinely guided Rome, in need of a savior or the Greyhound of Canto I (*Inf.* I 101). According Dante, he made use of the medieval method of biblical exegesis (Dante, "Letter" Epistola X). Dante himself says the work must be read in light of this fourfold method in his "Letter to Cangrande," though scholars have various views on the true authorship of this letter (Nayar 16). Still, traditionally, scholars read Dante with this framework in mind. Four senses of a text may exist according to this

method: the literal sense, the allegorical sense, the moral sense and the anagogic sense, which concerns the spiritual progress of souls (Ruggiers 130). According to this interpretation, Dante tells a story about real people; yet he also wants readers to see themselves in the stories. Commonly held to be a type or symbol of the Christian Church, Dante sees Old Testament Israel as having a special and providential relationship not only with the birth of Christ, along with the Church, but also with the Roman Empire.

Dante condemns many individual Church leaders to horrible punishments in Hell. In Canto XI, the image of a pope burning in his coffin is hard to forget, as is the image of a pope with his head buried in the ground while his feet are in flames for the sin of simony in Canto XIX. It seems to Dante that the root of the papal corruption relates closely to Italy's corruption. They go hand in hand, and Marco, a Lombard in Purgatory, sums up the problem:

> Misrule, you see, has caused the world to be malevolent...For Rome, which made the world good, used to have two suns; and they made visible two paths--the world's path and the pathway that is God's. One has eclipsed the other; now the sword has joined the shepherd's crook; and the two together must of necessity result in evil, because, so joined, one need not fear the other. (*Purg.* XVI 106-112)

To Dante, the Church must be outside temporal concerns and risks corruption by political involvement. The pope, symbolized in the shepherd, errs by looking to control both the temporal and spiritual spheres. In the Valley of the Rulers, a repentant Philip the Fair awaits purification of a related sin in the Babylonian Captivity at Avignon (*Purg.* VII

109-112). He tried to exert political influence over the Church and is mentioned as sinful in all three canticles. Even though he is saved from his sins by the grace of God and so is guaranteed Heaven, Philip's sins are serious to Dante, since they are mentioned so many times. In fact, Philip would be in Hell without the grace received through faith in Christ and repentance. Frederick II, for example, committed the same sin, and even though Dante would normally laud him as a strong Emperor, he tried to extend his strength into the spiritual sphere, so that he suffers in Hell along with other abhorrent rulers. Frederick's sin, in addition to his affinity for Islam and apparent lack of repentance in contrast to Philip, condemns him to Hell (*Inf.* X 119). Simon Magus himself, one who wanted to buy from Peter the power given him by God, resides in Hell, along with Pope Nicholas III, in the eighth circle of Hell, symbolizing both laypersons and clerics alike who would try to use church offices for temporal power (*Inf.* XIX 1, 50). Dante condemns the whole system of blurring the lines between church and state when, in response to Marco's observation, Dante comments, "you can conclude: the Church of Rome confounds two powers in itself; into the filth it falls and fouls itself and its new burden." Further, Dante notes, "and now I understand why Levi's sons were not allowed to share in legacies" (*Purg. XVI* 127-132). This Old Testament reference again recalls God's relationship with oftentimes errant Israel, which, in Dante's world, foreshadows God's relationship with the Church as the now frequently errant bride of Christ.

Dante paints a sad picture of medieval government and church as "fallen and fouled" in the words of the repentant Marco, and this can be interpreted on the practical, temporal level as well as the theological level pointed out in Dante's letter. Dante asserts

the need for a strong ruler in medieval Europe. This is the opening canto's Greyhound, who was to defeat the she-wolf of avarice, make peace, and rule justly. While in the Valley of the Rulers, the traveler hears this assertion from Marco, a saved soul in Purgatory, who explains the need for government in a world where souls have free will. "Therefore, one needed law to serve as a curb; a ruler, too, was needed, one who could discern at least the tower of the true city" (*Purg.* XVI 94-96). The reference to the "true city" here can be seen as a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem, or the City of God that medieval Christians believed was to supplant the "City of Man" that was pagan Rome.

Yet, Dante does not see pagan Rome as something bad. He sees it as a providentially guided, virtuous Republic which, according to the divine plan, became an equally virtuous Empire just in time for the salvation of humankind, in order for there to be peace and justice in the world at the time of the Birth of Christ. Just as Israel played a special role in mankind's salvation, Dante affirms Rome also had a role. According to Mandelbaum's notes on the opening canto, when Virgil addresses the first ruler of Rome with the title "Imperator," "good Augustus," Dante references Rome's providential place. Just as salvation was worked out through Israel, God also used Rome as a tool of salvation. Really, the Lord and savior of the world, Jesus of Nazareth, is a Jewish Roman (Mandelbaum 544-545).

Dante reveals his preference for a new Roman Empire in his praise for several figures in the *Divine Comedy,* where he shows reverence for the Roman Republic's virtues. Though not the era chosen by God for the birth of the savior, Dante respects virtues many classical Romans exhibited better than many Christians in Hell. In the

second canto of the *Inferno*, "he who fathered Sylvius," or Aeneas, the Trojan Virgil links to Rome's founding, is "the enemy of every evil" and the one God chose as the father of Rome, which was "destined to become the sacred place, the seat of the successor of Peter" (*Inf.* II 13-24). Virgil ascribes Troy to the founding of Rome in his great epic poem, thus linking Greek and Roman history. In Purgatory's Valley of the Rulers, Athens and Lacedeamon, or Sparta, serve as examples of good, sound government in stark contrast to the rulers of Florence and those repenting in the valley for their shortcomings (*Purg.* VI 127-151, 139). Significantly, Dante notes the superiority of Athenian government, famous for democracy, unlike Sparta's dual monarchy. Dante does not seem to dislike democracy or republicanism; he just seems to deem empire a superior government for imposing justice. Why else would he include Athens as a worthy example of good government?

Still, more evidence exists that Dante was not a purely imperial thinker. In Canto VI, he argues that every Italian city-tyrant soon becomes a Marcellus, a reference to an anti-imperial, anti-Caesar consul of the Roman Republic of 50 BC, as if Marcellus were bad. Yet, by the grace of God, Cato, the one who upheld the Republic's ideal against Caesar's aims, ends up in Purgatory himself, among the few saved pagans in the *Divine Comedy* who is also a real historical figure. All other virtuous pagans, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and even Virgil, reside in Limbo because, according to medieval theology, no pagan, no matter how virtuous, could believe in Christ, so none could be saved. Notably, Dante's scheme saves a historical pagan, a republican, not an imperialist, at heart. Another pagan is Orestes, though some interpret the character as Orestes's friend

Pylades, and the character appears only in a moving picture, not bodily (*Purg.* XIII). Perhaps based on a real historical figure of the Bronze Age, Orestes is best known through literature as a benevolent monarch. Significantly, though, Aeschylus's Orestes places his fate in the hands of democracy. While Dante did not read Greek, he read widely in Latin, in particular, the works of Cicero, who resides in Dante's Limbo with the other noble pagans (*Inf.* IV 141). The pagan Emperor Trajan appears in Heaven as well, though Dante has him convert to Christianity before death (*Par*. XX).

Cicero, the famous orator and defender of the Roman Republic, spoke out against Julius Caesar and as a result, pro-Caesar Antony later had Cicero killed, vengefully displaying his severed head and hand in Rome. Yet in the *Divine Comedy*, Caesar's enemy Cicero enjoys discourse among classical greats, including Caesar, while Caesar's murderers end up in Hell's absolute depth, two of the three Satan devours continually (*Inf.* XXXIV 61-67). So for Dante, expressing political opinion, even dissent, does not equal the most heinous sin, betrayal or treason. On the contrary, Dante's system rewards political voice. In *On the Laws*, Cicero explains in Neo-platonic terms the origin of law and the political right to rule. He claims all human beings have a divine element, unlike non-human living things. In Neo-platonism, the *Logos*, divine wisdom, orders the universe. According to Cicero, since God is "right reason" and all humans have it, it follows that all humans have equal capacity to make laws. Cicero argues that the more people involved in making laws the better (Cicero, "On the Laws" I and II). Julius Caesar's actions got in the way of the Roman senate's operating as a truly representative law-making body and threatened the Republic itself, thus Caesar erred. Leading to his

great fame and inciting his assassination, the argument makes Cicero a martyr for republicanism and, in Dante's scheme, one of history's heroes.

Interestingly, Cicero uses Orestes and his friend, Pylades, in two separate pieces, *On Moral Ends* and *On Friendship*. In Aeschylus, Pylades simply encourages Orestes, reminding him Apollo ordains Orestes must kill his mother. In a lost play by Roman dramatist Pacuvius, though, Pylades has a larger role. During Orestes's trial, as Cicero recounts from Pacuvius, Pylades says "I am Orestes," attempting to take Orestes's place and punishment. To this, Orestes replies, "It is I, let me tell you, who am Orestes," insisting only he, not Pylades, must accept whatever punishment comes (Cicero, "On Moral Ends" V 63). In Dante's *Purgatorio* XIII, a voice exclaims precisely "I am Orestes," repeating the line of the lost Roman play (31-33). Here on Purgatory's terrace where the faithful expiate envy, in a kind of moving, audible icon, Orestes and Pylades serve as examples of love, the antidote to envy. Cicero also exemplified love using these two characters in *On Friendship;* though*,* in *On Moral Ends* he explicates Orestes's and Pylades's words at length as examples of ideal justice, both clearly sources for Dante's moving picture. Dante had only Cicero as a source for these lines. Democracy and republican government obviously do hold esteem in the *Divine Comedy,* contrary to some political interpretations.

Still, Dante's model ruler remains an emperor. Dante paints a majestic picture of the Emperor Justinian as the best example of a ruler who might bring peace and justice to Italy: an absolute ruler who is also a devout Christian. Through the disorder and

corruption in Italian politics contrasted with a lofty portrayal of Justinian's imperial justice, it becomes clear in practice, if not in theory, that Dante favors absolute rule.

The ambivalence reflected in the figure Cato, who risked his life in order to save the republican form of government in Rome, serves as an interesting contradiction. What is the relationship among order, equality and freedom to Dante? Is it a hierarchy? To what extent was Dante's political theory more complex than simple absolute monarchy? Rome itself allowed the conquered to keep local laws that did not contradict Roman law; perhaps Dante advocates such a federal system. In *Dante as Political Thinker,* A.P. d'Entreves suggests that the evidence for Dante's truly supporting an "Emperor of Italy" in the modern sense is lacking. Sovereignty, he argues, belonged to the city-state to Dante, even though he clearly outlined in *Monarchia* the rights of a possible emperor. As D'Entreves notes, the point is hotly debated. Interestingly, Aeschylus also portrays a more federal system in the *Orestia*, with the balance between the Areopagus and democratic representation.

Perhaps the Roman Republic also holds a place in Dante's religious view of Rome's role in salvation history; perhaps the Republic was one step necessary to God's plan in his design for the Roman Empire. In *Paradiso*, Dante lists several heroes of the Republic and praises those who exhibited bravery and self-sacrifice. In *Purgatorio* XX, Dante praises the "good Fabricus," who, as a third century Roman consul, refused bribes even at a time in Rome when wealth and luxury were highly admired. In *Purgatorio* VI, Quincitius, or Cincinnatus, wins praise in the Valley of the Rulers, for example, because he left his simple farmer's life to serve the Republic, yet, he assumed the power of a

dictator for no longer than necessary to avert a crisis. Why praise him? This is the exact opposite of what Julius Caesar, hailed by Dante as the founder of the world empire of Christ's birth, actually did. Brutus and Cassius suffer with Judas in deepest Hell for trying to stop him. Yet, Cato the republican, not Caesar the dictator, escapes Limbo. Dante clearly shows admiration for the republic. However, it was not the republic in which the savior of the world was born, but the empire. It was the birth of the Church during the empire that allowed the seat of Peter also to be the seat of empire, as Dante notes in praising Sylvius and "all he would cause" (*Inf.* II 18). Also, as much as he admired republicans, in the end, he must have felt that form of government alone never could provide solid justice to pathetic Florence and the other Italian city-states.

What condition did Dante find in medieval Florence that convinced this Florentine lover of republican government his city's only hope was the rule of a strong emperor? Even Justinian, basking in heavenly glory, has Florence's corruption on his mind, according to Dante. Of the Roman eagle standard, he says, " let Ghibellines pursue their undertakings beneath another sign, for those who sever this sign and justice are bad followers. And let not this new Charles strike at it with his Guelphs...this little planet is adorned with spirits whose acts were righteous, but who acted for the honor and the fame that they would gain" (*Par.* VI 103-114). Actually, Justinian lambasts Florence for falsely trying to bear Rome's eagle standard under Ghibelline rule, when they were not true lovers of a Christian Empire.

Yet, under the eagle standard, ancient symbol of Imperial Rome, Justinian in Heaven announces the empire as God's will on earth. "The sons have often wept for a

father's fault; and let this son not think that God will change the emblem of His force for Charles's lilies" (*Par.* VI 109 to 112). Dante's Justinian enjoys greatness in Heaven. In *Paradiso* VI, Justinian wins praise for his codification of Roman law. Justinian "removed the vain and needless from the laws" (*Par*. VI 12). Justinian's code served as a model for other European law codes even down to Dante's time. Clearly, the *Divine Comedy* asserts Christian imperial rule was divinely inspired; Justinian in Heaven asserts, "beneath that standard, Scipio, Pompey—though young—triumphed; and to that hill beneath which you were born, that standard seemed most harsh. Then, near the time when Heaven wished to bring all of the world to Heaven's way—serene—Caesar, as Rome had willed, took up the standard" (*Par*. VI 52-57). Additionally, in *Paradiso* VI, Justinian speaks of Octavian Augustus closing the doors of Janus's shrine to indicate a unified empire at peace. To Dante, this symbolized the climax of the divine plan, for it announced the period of peace that would usher in the savior's birth during Augustus's reign (*Par*. VI 81).

Who could fit the mold for this just, courteous, virtuous Christian monarch? In *Purgatorio* XXII, Statius mentions Virgil's prediction of a "new progeny" to "restore mankind." Later in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, Virgil's prophecy of the reform of Italy by the "greyhound" appears. As mentioned before, not only must this emperor be strong and exceedingly just, he must above all remember to "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." He cannot be swayed by the error of Constantine, who through the Donation of Constantine, later shown to be a forgery but accepted in Dante's time, caused the popes to assume temporal powers (*Par*. VI). He cannot be like Albert of

Habsburg, for whom Dante wishes punishment for neglecting his duties by not assuming the role of Holy Roman Emperor in Italy (*Par*. VI 97). He cannot be like Rudolph of Habsburg, also condemned for leaving empty the seat of Holy Roman Emperor in Italy (*Par*. VII). He must be like Charlemagne, who respected the pope's role in aiding the Church against the Lombards, yet was a strong and just political ruler (*Par.* VI 95).

In *Paradiso* XXX, Dante looks to Emperor Henry VII to serve as this virtuous Christian emperor who finally restores peace to Italy, like Virgil's "greyhound." Yet, ironically, the corruption of the other "sun" in Dante's scheme thwarts the plan. Pope Clement V, though at first supporting Henry's Italian invasion, later tried to reassert his imperial control (*Par*. XVII 81-82). Dante expresses anger at this line-crossing between church and state; he predicts Clement's future place in Hell for simony, and the problem goes unresolved. Thus it continued, since historically the Holy Roman Emperors remained in Austria throughout the Renaissance and never came to truly rule Italy or Europe. They never imposed the strong Italian rule he longs to see, and the kings and popes continued to meddle in each other's business for a long time. Indeed, the position of Holy Roman Emperor only becomes less and less significant over time, with severe blows coming to the title after the wars of religion and finally Napoleon, who changed the name from Holy Roman Empire to Confederation of the Rhine. Italy would unite eventually, but under a government attempting further secularization rather than embracing Christianity.

In Dante's *Divine Comedy,* he reveals his belief that Rome, like Israel in Judeo-Christian typology, has a divine mission as the the savior's birthplace. He was influenced

by the horrible state of affairs in Florentine politics and elsewhere in Italy and Europe, to believe that republican government was not sufficient to return Italy to the peace of Augustus's time. Only another Augustus, well-versed in classical and Christian ethics, could give any hope to those wishing for Italian peace.

In Dante's scheme, society must attend diligently to both faith and government, because, in synergy, each fosters the good of the other. Furthermore, church and state must always remain independent of each other, yet each must justly rule its own sphere, attentive to the needs of souls who are also citizens. Only then could medieval Christendom resemble the heavenly City of God. The interrelation between church and faith on the one hand with government and reason on the other must be perfectly harmonious in the *Divine Comedy,* while they could not be more at odds in the *Orestia*.

"...all acts of virtue can pertain to justice, insofar as it directs man to the common good."

—Thomas Aquinas (ST, II-II, 58.5)

Political conflict and dangers internal and external plagued both Aeschylus's Athens and Dante's Florence. Through this struggle, Aeschylus and Dante forge their ideas on justice and, in turn, government. Influenced by Thomas Aquinas, in Dante's Christendom, faith and reason are seamless and both contribute to good government, though the two should be separate spheres. Aeschylus portrays an Athens where the characters believe only the gods can create a political system entirely reasonable and fair, but in the end this belief proves wrong. In contrast to Dante's scheme, in Aeschylus's Athens, faith and reason prove incompatible. While Athena gives voice to all parties and reconciles those at odds, she falls short of providing definitive answers. Political decision comes from the people of a democracy, through an impartial jury of citizens.

In historical Athens, before the last reform of Ephialtes, the Assembly removed all political power from the Areopagus, in which only landowners previously held power. The lower classes ascended to prominence in both the Assembly and Council of 500 as the Areopagus lost all political power. Just as in Florence, where Farinata, allied by Sienese foreigners, attacked his own city, in Athens the aristocracy considered conspiring with Sparta to take over Athens and reinstate aristocratic dominance. Before the last reform of Ephialtes in Athens, the Assembly removed all political power from the Areopagus. Meier surmises the aristocrats must have raged loudly and publicly against

this demotion as a grievous violation of ancient rights and tradition (Meier, “Greek Discovery” 83). This revolution rivaled in scope even the democratic political reforms of Cleisthenes. Aristocrats orchestrated Ephialtes’ murder and civil war loomed in Athens at the same time Aeschylus wrote the *Orestia*, just as civil war ravaged Florence in Dante’s lifetime, where Dante’s party, the victorious Guelphs, divided into Whites and Blacks. The White Guelphs, Dante’s side, wanted to limit the Pope’s power. The Whites included the lower class guildsmen and middle class as well as many aristocrats. The mostly aristocratic Blacks supported the Pope. The Blacks won and disenfranchised Dante’s Whites. In political exile, Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy*.

While Aeschylus, an aristocrat, had to accept the new power of the lower classes, Dante had to suffer complete disenfranchisement and exile at the hands of the Black aristocrats. Both Aeschylus and Dante saw their own political class lose influence in their cities as they wrote these works. Aeschylus's hero Orestes left his home and country as a boy, cast out by his own mother, an informal but perhaps more painful kind of exile, having been put away by family. Dante the author lived in exile while Dante the fictional traveller starts out lost in an unfamiliar, dark wood. Both characters struggle as outsiders in strange territory. Both Orestes and Dante know from experience the sorrow shared by outcasts. Both fell from status and privilege. Before the events of the *Orestia,* Orestes lives his early life as the eldest son of the greatest of Bronze Age kings who would lead the Greeks to victory over Troy. Dante enjoyed success as an author and in 1300 served as prior of Florence. In 1302 he was thrown out of the city he fought for and led, his home. Still, though intentionally robbed of their positions, histories, identities and self-

worth, Orestes and fictional Dante purposefully submit to further trial. They both seek a return home. For Orestes, home is literally the city-state from which he was exiled, restored as heir. For Dante, it's more. Though Dante never returns to Florence and dies in exile, his character in the *Divine Comedy* journeys to the ultimate final home to which he aspires, Heaven. Through exile's loss, Dante gains humility, which allows him to learn from his journey rather than wallow in anger, as do some of the figures in Dante's Hell. Similarly, in humility, Orestes questions his own actions and submits to a trial, in contrast with Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus and Electra, who perpetually assert their own justification. Dante and Orestes, no less than most, admire humility, yet hate humiliation. Ironically, humiliation's agony softens their wills and facilitates their homecomings. From the vantage point of total personal devastation, both Orestes and Dante journey toward a view of good government and both change points of view concerning government after the agonizing experience. Both of them have had their original views of good government and ideal justice shattered. What replaces these ideals for the authors? In both works, the answers result from their character's struggles. The answers are foundational and cosmic.

Chapter Two: The Transcendent in the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy*

The Orestia

"Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us."

—Pericles in Thucydides

In the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy,* violent threats to society's peace and prosperity urge the authors to contemplate good government. To understand good government both authors start with questioning what is good. Aeschylus and Dante explore this question to an even greater extent than they do government, because there can be no discussion of a "good" government without this foundation.

In classical Athens as well as in the *Orestia*, how legendary gods behave leads not only to questions about a well formed government, but to questions about what is just, what is moral, what is "good," in any situation. If the gods can't be reliable here, who or what can? What touchstone exists for the good society? This was a hotly debated question in classical Athens, eventually inspiring the work of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In Aeschylus's day, though, such philosophical clarity awaited future generations. Yet, the enemies and malcontents of Aeschylus's Athens would not wait for Socrates's wisdom. Before an Athenian audience well aware they enjoyed a precarious peace, the *Orestia* presented Bronze Age Greeks who, above all else, also desired a just and ordered society. After the work of Plato and Aristotle, that idea became eloquently rooted in the idea of an ordered universe. While this notion did gain ascendancy, it never went completely unchallenged.

In Aeschylus's early classical Athens, two philosophical worldviews coexisted: one saw the universe as a single, intricate, elegantly ordered entity and one saw it as bits of matter swirling in chaos. While philosophers continued to clarify each view throughout the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., in Aeschylus's time, they reached no consensus. Simultaneously, the Greek religious myths held sway and they offered a certain worldview as well. First in *Agamemnon*, characters suffer as they demand justice or order, because characters never demand both together and only want personal justice. Until reconciled in the end, justice and order conflict throughout the trilogy. By the end of the *Eumenides*, however, Athena persuades characters to integrate justice and order, and this happens through Athenian democracy. For the classical Greeks, the polis served as the civic, religious and political center; when the polis, or the city-state, perfectly orders society and provides real justice, according to the values Aeschylus presents in the *Orestia*, society reaches absolute goodness, the transcendent. The perfect society is not heavenly, but earthly; the gods may symbolize transcendent goodness but they never do it perfectly.

In fact, according to Hesiod's *Theogony,* the earth, or Gaia, gave birth to Uranus, or the Heavens, as well as the immortal Titans. One of Gaia's immortal children, Cronus fathered the immortal Olympians who appear in the *Orestia*. Gaia asked her son Cronus to rebel against his father, Uranus, or the Heavens. Cronus did, but then Gaia's son by Cronus, Zeus, the father of the Olympians, rebelled against him. The story affirms two important points about the Olympian gods. Foremost, the earth reigned over the Olympians and created them. Consequently, to rule the earth the Olympians became

illegitimate instigators, nothing more. Though each Olympian has control over a particular aspect of nature, their positions can't be viewed as permanent or everlasting. Moreover, the Olympian gods are upstarts who rebelled against their father and overcame the older Titans, though not so completely that the Titans lost all. The Olympians still must deal with them; the Furies are Titans who demand respect despite having been supplanted by the Olympians. The portrayal of the Olympians as almighty is belied by the very existence of the Furies.

Aeschylus portrays the Olympians with this understanding: they rule the Furies but, being incapable of eliminating their influence completely, Zeus gave them the job of punishing those who kill blood relations, particularly matricides. Further, since Gaia, the source of creation and all goodness, is earthly, the earthly *polis*, or city, can achieve the transcendent, even if Zeus and all the gods cannot. The Olympians must contest each other for power, while the source of all things, including the transcendent good, originates on earth and in the *polis*. Aeschylus might agree with Pericles, whom Aeschylus knew: "because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us," Pericles declared, decades after the *Orestia*'s first performance. Zeus and the Olympians may claim dominion over all the universe, including the transcendent good, but like European kings after the French revolution, they know their reign is tenuous and the people hold latent power.

Scholars agree Aeschylus practiced religion and subscribed to the Greek myths. Yet, clearly his imperfect gods speak of transcendent ideals such as justice, right and goodness, but can't understand them any better than the human characters. If

transcendent ideals exist in Aeschylus's religious scheme, they exist apart from the world that gave birth to these gods. In the *Orestia*, Aeschylus presents competing worldviews just as his Greek contemporaries debated them. The philosophical-scientific views of order and chaos clash with each other as well as with the religious view in the *Orestia;* the three collide in a dramatic crucible of a trial, forcing them into peaceful coexistence through democratic processes. Each view envisioned law and government differently. Through this trilogy, Aeschylus says to the religious and the two philosophical proponents in Athens, you must decide. Do you want society to revert to the law of vengeance, or will you work together, aristocrats and commoners, inherited and new money, rich and poor? Athens is the light of Greece; we must compromise.

A century before Aeschylus, Greek philosophy began to take shape in two camps. Does the trilogy reveal Aeschylus sided with one or the other camp and mixed these views with the ancient religious views of the Greeks? How did Athenian audiences explain reality and how did Aeschylus appeal to ideas already circulating among educated and wealthy Athenians? Both schools of thought theorized about the physical make up of the universe and, as a result, each reasoned the gods' stories in Homer and Hesiod weren't plausible. Does Aeschylus express this religious skepticism, even as he continues to worship the gods?

Scholars differ widely on whether or not Aeschylus meant to convey a message through the drama. Meier and Podlecki concur in affirming that Aeschylus's message is mainly political and deny any philosophical theory underlies Aeschylean plays. Otis sees mostly a religious doctrine in which Aeschylus uses sounds of words and poetic meter to

express his belief that Zeus teaches wisdom through suffering and to provide "dramatic-liturgical significance" (55). Both Otis and Podlecki explain the changes in the figure of Zeus, within the *Orestia* and also over time in all Aeschylean tragedy, as symbolic of an old and new religious dispensation, similar to the old and new covenants in Christianity. For Otis and Podlecki, this explains the early harsh punishing Zeus of *Agamemnon* eventually relenting and accepting compromise in the *Eumenides*.

Herington provides another scholarly perspective. He believes the *Orestia* expresses frustration with the radical democratic changes in government since Aeschylus's youth, when the dramatist lived a political life essentially no differently than he would have as a devoutly religious aristocrat in the Bronze Age kingdoms. Herrington summarizes the position that Aeschylus "was not, and in the climate of pagan Greek religion could not have dreamed of being, a systematic expositor of a fixed theology," and that his plays "cannot be received as having the philosophic or dogmatic force of the conclusion to a Thomist syllogism" (163). But if Aeschylus is a political and religious conservative fearful of new ways, yet with no answer to the political and philosophical questions of the day, why bring resolution and light through the democratic court at Athens and through Athena? Surely Athenian audiences would see a purpose. If Aeschylus did not want them to do so he would have achieved that goal using another setting, without Athena's involvement and without the Areopagus.

In *Form and Meaning in Greek Tragedy*, H. D. F. Kitto argues the change in Zeus's behavior represents an evolving Zeus, becoming more and more symbolic of ideal or transcendent justice over the course of the trilogy and over the course of all

Aeschylean tragedy. A "progressive Zeus…removes all these difficulties and explains perfectly the structure and treatment of the trilogy, further…it is a conception perfectly natural to Greek thought, one which would not in the least dismay or puzzle the audience for which Aeschylus wrote" (Kitto 71). Kitto proves the idea of a progressive Zeus would not confuse classical Greek viewers, but that does not definitively mean Zeus's actions represent progress toward perfect justice in the trilogy. In the end it is not Zeus's justice and benevolence that brings resolution; this only happen when the Furies accept the court's vote through Athena's persuasion. The Furies abandon Zeus's orders to punish murderers of kin; Zeus's own daughter talks them into it and Zeus is silent on the matter.

Finally, George Menake argues "Aeschylus, as his plays reveal, believed the ancient view that Zeus supports the laws of the state" (113). Zeus renders unto Caesar what is Caesar's, so to speak. Menake follows up by noting Euripides's Zeus is more relativistic and that Aeschylus represents the early classical view of an eternally just Zeus, while Euripides reflects the late classical view. There is no doubt Euripides's view is more relativistic; in Fragment 19, he has a character ask, "what action is shameful if it seem not so to the actor?" (Euripides in Menake 114). However, this fact does not prove Aeschylus's Zeus was not relativistic at all. While it is true such a transition happened in classical Greek culture, it is not clear Aeschylus presents an eternally just Zeus in the *Orestia*. If Aeschylus presents a Zeus who supports the laws of the state at all times, here demanding Orestes be punished and there demanding he is innocent, then it is not Zeus who is steadfastly true in Aeschylus; the people themselves decide these matters and Zeus

can only back them up. In the *Orestia,* most characters come to awareness of the gods in this fashion slowly over time and Orestes realizes it first.

The *Orestia* begins in darkness, confusion and murderous disorder, a condition that lasts throughout *Agamemnon*. It continues into the start of the second play, The *Libation Bearers*. Here one mortal, Orestes, stops and asks how this can be, raising the first, small glimmer of hope. Even Electra, Orestes's sister, also feeling her father's murder must be avenged, doesn't speak with the tone of selfish hubris expressed by Agamemnon, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra seen in the first play. Electra prays her actions be pure before the murder, which calls to mind the opposite, when Clytemnestra burns many sacrifices, manipulating divine help for an act she deems just already. Unlike the darkness surrounding the first play, Electra's words lighten the dark mood a bit as well, as she is more humble. Electra won't ask the gods for what is not righteous, unlike Clytemnestra, who burns sacrifices all over the house to coerce the gods into calling her just.

When the leader of the chorus urges her to pray for vengeance, Electra says "how can I ask the gods for that and keep my conscience clear?" and "hear me, make me far more self-possessed than mother, make this hand more pure" (*L.B*. 124 and 145). For the first time a character wonders about the transcendent, not sure what she wants to ask for is aligned with the transcendent good. She believes the gods represent the transcendent good; they can make her pure. Orestes is the first character in the trilogy who questions whether or not the gods' actions and orders reflect the transcendent good; he even questions whether or not the gods know the transcendent good at all.

Yet, before Electra and Orestes enter the trilogy, the majority of characters, especially the chorus of elders, the old men of Argos in *Agamemnon*, see Zeus as ineffably transcendent. Zeus is all knowing and all powerful. Without exception Zeus embodies eternal justice; he rules in accord with eternal justice perfectly, punishing hubris and excessive, power-grabbing violence, in the process making humans suffer into truth:

> Zeus, great nameless all in all,
> if that name will gain his favor,
> I will call him Zeus.
> I have no words to do him justice,
> weighing all in the balance,
> all I have is Zeus, Zeus. (*Ag.* 161-168)

Clearly the old men of Argos see Zeus as a name for the "all in all," the transcendent good, the ultimate ideal, the source and summit of all things. Zeus personifies all righteousness. His ways escape the understanding of mere mortals because of human inadequacy, not any failure on Zeus's part. Yet, to the old men, Zeus does wish mortals to grasp the ultimate truth, so he established a universal law, one in which, through suffering pain and violence, a mortal may come to understand the truth; a mortal may earn wisdom:

> Zeus, Zeus—
> raise your cries and sing him Zeus the Victor!
> You will reach the truth:

> Zeus has led us on to know,
>
> the Helmsman lays it down as law,
>
> that we must suffer, suffer into truth.
>
> We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heart
>
> the pain of pain remembered comes again,
>
> and we resist, but ripeness comes as well.
>
> From the gods enthroned on the awesome rowing-bench
>
> there comes a violent love. (*Ag.* 174-184)

The chorus of elders can even see justice in the cruel demands of a goddess, Artemis, who wants a human sacrifice to make up for Agamemnon's troops killing a hare. The elders look for symbolism beyond the horrid fact and deduce, since Artemis must be supremely just and all-knowing, this call for a life must be a punishment not simply for the hare, but for the rampant, excessive violence and destruction Agamemnon would inflict on Troy. The elders explain and repeat that "Artemis, lovely Artemis" may "cry, cry for death, but good win out in glory in the end" (*Ag.* 140, 139 and 160). Perhaps having this in mind, even after they witness the murder of their king, they can say to Clytemnestra, who praises the curse of the Atreus family, hinting at the justice of Agamemnon's death as a result of Agamemnon's father feeding Aegisthus's father his own children:

> Praise the insatiate doom that feeds
>
> relentless on our future and our sons.
>
> Oh all through the will of Zeus,

the cause of all, the one who works it all.

What comes to birth that is not Zeus?

Our lives are pain, what part of it is not from god? (*Ag*. 1511-1516)

In fact, for every victim of violence in *Agamemnon*, someone explains how the victim was actually receiving Zeus's justice. Apollo allowed Cassandra to be murdered because she rebuffed his advances; Agamemnon struts on crimson robes like a god, revels in the total destruction of a city and caused the deaths of countless Greeks, so his death was just too (*Ag*. 900, 1085). Troy was destroyed because of Priam's pride; his sons "convicted of rapine…pay the price twice over"; Iphigenia died because of her family's curse (*Ag.* 525). According to the herald, in Troy, the Greeks themselves made "the shrines of her gods and the high altars…gone," surely an impious act, though the herald praises it as just punishment for Troy's hubris (*Ag.* 518). Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus's hubris blind them to the nature of their crimes, but the elders know Zeus's law and warn the self-righteous pair, "soil justice, while you can" (*Ag.* 1704). When there appears to be no immediate punishment for a transgression, the elders know to look for one: as the chorus leader learns Cassandra deceived Apollo, he wonders in amazement, "and Apollo's anger never touched you?—is it possible?" The elder is not disappointed as Cassandra confirms, "once I betrayed him I could never be believed" (*Ag*. 1217-1218).

Everyone in *Agamemnon* believes Zeus equals Justice and Justice equals Zeus, but in the *Libation Bearers*, Orestes's experience doesn't bear out this view. Until immediately after he murders Clytemnestra in the *Libation Bearers,* he did see Zeus and Apollo standing for justice. As Electra prays, "Power and Justice, Saving Zeus, Third

Zeus, almighty all in all, be with us now," Orestes, still innocent of bloodshed, adds, "Zeus, Zeus, watch over all we do," and "Apollo will never fail me, no" (*L.B.* 248-250 and 271). Electra assures they are "led by gods and Earth and all the rights that bring us triumph" if they follow the divine commands (*L.B.* 152). Orestes shares her pure intentions. He reminds her they are in danger for their lives, "our loved ones, well I know, would slit our throats" if the siblings failed to act on Apollo's will (*L.B.* 236). This knowledge exonerates Electra and Orestes to an extent none of the other characters in *Agamemnon* share.

The two believe they are innocent and the evidence supports their belief. Their very lives threaten the positions of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as usurping rulers of Argos; Orestes should rightfully rule and the conniving pair know the people would support him. Orestes is in danger like Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, had they never usurped power, were not. So, Orestes's guilt does not rise to the same level of Clytemnestra's when he commits murder. Moreover, Orestes reveals exactly how Apollo told him to kill his mother and what would happen to him as punishment if he failed to follow through. Clytemnestra received no such command from a god; she strikes out on her own. The change of heart Orestes feels after killing his mother deepens in significance; while he is less guilty than the other murderers in the play, he is the only one who questions his own guilt and the law of the gods. Orestes dutifully obeys Apollo's command, believing he has no choice, believing Apollo tells only the truth and the gods know all:

> He revealed so much about us,

told how the dead take root beneath the soil,

they grow with hate and plague the lives of men.

He told of the leprous boils that ride the flesh,

their wild teeth gnawing the mother tissue, aye,

and a white scurf spreads like a cancer over these,

and worse, he told how assaults of Furies spring

to life on Father's blood…

You can see them—

the eyes burning grim brows working over you in the dark—

the dark sword of the dead—your murdered kinsmen

pleading for revenge. And the madness haunts

the midnight watch, the empty terror shakes you,

harries, drives you on—an exile from your city…

You never see your father's wrath but it pulls you from the altars…

A pariah, reviled, at long last you die. (*L.B*. 282-299)

Orestes believes every word. He kills his mother, then everything Apollo said would happen to him if he did not happens precisely because he did. Upon killing his mother, the Furies immediately terrorize Orestes. These are the Furies who, Apollo said, would "spring to life on Father's blood" if Orestes did not avenge his father's death and kill his mother. Apollo warned Orestes he would be exiled from the city and his father's wrath would cast him away from the altars in a perpetual guilt-sentence if he did not obey, but what happened when he did obey? Exactly that; still in exile, Orestes now

hopes at least the people would remember him well as Menelaus, his father's brother, presumably would inherit the throne Apollo told Orestes was his if he killed his mother. Immediately the horrendously fearsome Furies described by Apollo beset Orestes. In the early classical age, the evil irony of Apollo, god of light, luring an innocent suppliant to murder for fear of the same terrors Apollo should have known would result surely baffled Athenian audiences.

Was this blasphemy on the part of Aeschylus? Could a sublimely just Zeus truly order, through Apollo, a god-fearing man to commit a crime Zeus intended from the start to punish? Perhaps yes, if Orestes was guilty all along, but Aeschylus assures viewers Orestes was innocent. In *Agamemnon* Zeus routinely causes those who break his law to commit crimes for which they would be severely punished. The victims of those crimes were guilty themselves, which is why Zeus allowed them to be victims, for such is just punishment. All the characters believe it and always note when a transgressor of Zeus's law stumbles, meting out Zeus's justice upon someone else and in turn facing the same justice. No mortal could avoid Zeus's justice and Zeus's justice is right. Even the slave women of the house can articulate the eternal rule, bolstering Orestes's resolve to obey. As Orestes, too, proclaims his faithfulness to the law, the slaves profess:

> Powers of destiny, mighty queens of Fate!
>
> by the will of Zeus your will be done,
>
> press on to the end now,
>
> Justice turns the wheel.
>
> 'Word for word, curse for curse

be born now,' Justice thunders,

hungry for retribution,

'stroke for bloody stroke be paid.

The one who acts must suffer.'

Three generations strong the word resounds. (*L.B*. 311-321)

But Orestes should not have incurred guilt as all the victims in *Agamemnon* did. He dutifully obeys a god's command; he does not act on his own. The trilogy turns on this moment: in desperation, hounded by Furies, Orestes runs all the way to Delphi, the navelstone of the earth, to Apollo's temple. Stunned by his own actions and terrorized by Furies, weighed down by guilt, yet still in disbelief that a god was wrong, Orestes seeks help from Apollo. Apollo remonstrates without surprise, which only makes him more the liar. Or, are the Furies, sent by Zeus, liars? Or, is it possible: is Zeus a liar? Is Zeus, the All-in-All, wrong? Are there forces beyond the power of these gods? Nothing Apollo said would happen actually happens; the exact opposite does. How can the supreme, transcendent gods be so far off the mark? This is Orestes's crucible and he has no leisure to ponder it; the Furies won't let him.

Why did Aeschylus portray the gods this way, at best as weak figureheads or bumbling incompetents, at worst as callous liars? Was there any precedent for such a perception of the gods in Aeschylus's day and could Aeschylus have accepted that view? As noted previously, a century before Aeschylus's day, philosophers theorized physical causes for natural phenomena and human behavior and this led to skepticism concerning the gods of Greek myth. It is possible Aeschylus presented to Athenian audiences each

worldview as it was framed in his day: the religious view of Greek myth, the cosmos-in-chaos view of most Ionian philosophers of the Milesian school, the monist view of an ordered cosmos, and a new fusion of these in which the gods only personify ideals in the "mind" of a "first cause" or "first mover," which some philosophers saw as the real God. Aeschylus is said to have believed in the Greek gods. The trilogy reveals Aeschylus was influenced by the first and last views, but not convinced; the fact that the gods make only confusion in the *Orestia* precludes it.

Many scholars accept the view that Zeus learns and evolves over time, earliest among them H. D. F. Kitto. This view is meant to account for the seemingly contradictory decisions Zeus makes over time in the *Orestia* and elsewhere in Greek literature, particularly in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound,* in which Zeus does seem to symbolize justice compared to the *Orestia,* though some doubt Aeschylean authorship of *Prometheus* for that reason. While it is true that Aeschylus increasingly portrays Zeus as perfect Justice over the body of his work and that in Aeschylus's *Prometheus*, written after the *Orestia*, Zeus is completely benevolent and just, the *Orestia* reflects the Ionian school's view. Not all Ionian philosophers saw disorder in the universe, but some did. This worldview explains salvation and enlightenment as coming not from the gods, but from the democratic court at Athens. Aeschylus may have been religious and, by the end of his career, may have seen Zeus as a symbol of the absolute good, but the message of the *Orestia* is that if absolute good exists at all, neither the gods nor man can achieve it. After the Furies and Apollo voice their long deliberative arguments, even the goddess of wisdom concedes she does not understand; she must rely on persuasion and human

deliberation. As all Greeks had, Electra and Orestes err: the gods are not omnipotent; rather, they are feeble and confounded, in a word, wrong. Only society, the *polis*, is left to make order out of chaos; humans forge law and civilization on their own. As the sophist Protagoras would say later, "man is the measure of all things." The transcendent is not beyond the *polis*, it *is* the *polis*.

Among the Greek colonies along the coast of what is now Turkey lies Miletus, in many ways the birthplace of Greek philosophy. A trading partner with Egypt since before the eighth century B.C. when written language first appeared among Greeks, Egyptian papyrus allowed for the exchange of ideas across the Mediterranean, including the Greek city of Miletus (Van Doren 31). In 625 B.C., two centuries before Aeschylus, the ancestor of Greek philosophy, Thales, was born in this city. Together known as Ionia, these Greek colonies along the coast of the Anatolian peninsula gave rise to Greek philosophy's Ionian tradition. Here first it was thought in a systematic way that physical causes made change in the universe, not the mythical gods.

Though on many topics they differed, the thinkers of the Ionian school assumed the Olympian gods and those preceding them were fictional inventions, created by man to satisfy their fears and curiosities in a changing and hostile environment. They did not explain away the unknown with stories of gods, they looked for physical explanations evident to the senses, based on natural observations. Miletus was the birthplace of rational, scientific thought. According to author John Burnet, "it is an adequate description of science to say that it is thinking about the world in the Greek way. This is why science has never existed except among peoples who came under the influence of

Greece" (Van Doren 33). Famous for originating theorems of geometry and predicting an eclipse, Thales's big idea was to consider the simplest element underlying all matter, concluding it was water. His major contribution is the idea that the world is accessible to reason and man can understand its composition (Van Doren 33).

Next, Anaximander further developed the concept of a single basic substance within all things. Coming from a fragment possibly quoting Anaximander:

> Of those who say that it is one, moving and infinite, Anaximander, son of Praxiades, a Milesian, the successor and pupil of Thales, said that the principle and element of existing things was the apeiron…he says it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other apeiron nature, from which come into being all the Heavens and the world in them. (Simplicius in Menake 55)

While Anaximander did not define or explain the substance, his primary element is infinite, caused the planets, and caused such opposites as hot and cold. According to Anaximander, the universe is held in balance because of opposites and the balance is called justice; imbalances result in injustice and must be overcome (Menake 55). Notice that with no logical conflict, Anaximander's conception might be held together with myth in the minds of intelligent, religious Greeks, because according to Greek myth, the earth gave birth to the gods. In this case, the apeiron, the source of everything, might be viewed as beyond the gods, or the creator of the gods as well as people. This view might have influenced Aeschylus since he presents the gods as incapable of comprehending or controlling the rules of the universe and ideal justice. It seems to fit with the views of the

religious characters, as when pious Electra implores, “dear gods be just” as if the gods are not always just, but must choose justice as something separate from themselves (*L.B.* 500). Yet, there is still the fact that no one in the trilogy, neither a god nor a human, grasps ideal justice.

Whether or not Anaximander’s transcendent justice “apeiron” exists in the minds of Athenians, the court must hash it out for themselves; the gods are no help. Born 585 BC, 60 years before Aeschylus, Anaximenes of Miletus continued pursuit of the one substance underlying everything and settled on air. Both Anaximander and Anaximenes believed it was possible the one substance making up the universe could be divine. Anaximenes was more “thorough, rigorous and scientifically inclined” than those who came before and had a secular outlook, yet he thought, “if there were gods they too must be formed from air” (Barnes in Menake and Menake 58).

Menake notes scholarship by Francis Cornford, among others, who sees the mythic-religious view fading gradually and mixing with the scientific view for a time. Speculation exists as to whether or not Homer and Hesiod themselves both have some influence from a more rational view compared to versions of the myths from prior oral tradition lost to history (Menake 59). But for the Milesians, the one foundational substance was not thinking or conscious and there was no design to the universe. “Design and intelligence could only be found on the human plane and not on the divine. The primary element or the divine operated according to mechanistic laws of necessity with nature having within itself generative powers,” according to Menake (60). This concept is

reminiscent of the speech of Apollo in which he defends the rights of males, fathers and husbands over women and mothers:

> Here is the truth, I tell you—see how right I am.
>
> The woman you call the mother of the child
>
> is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,
>
> the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
>
> The *man* is the source of life—the one who mounts.
>
> She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps
>
> the shoot alive unless god hurts the roots.
>
> I give you proof that all I say is true.
>
> The father can father forth without a mother.
>
> Here she stands, our living witness. Look—
>
> *Exhibiting* ATHENA
>
> Child sprung full-blown from Olympian Zeus,
>
> never bred in the darkness of the womb
>
> but such a stock no goddess could conceive! (*Eum.* 665-674)

Apollo describes life coming from naturalistic processes, independent of the god's will. Gods must physically "hurt the roots" if they intend to harm expectant life; they don't control the natural process any differently from humans. This seems to be the one bit of an argument that persuades Athena, who agrees with the natural process of birth described by Apollo. Athena tells Orestes:

> I will caste my lot for you.

No mother gave me birth.

I honour the male, in all things but marriage.

Yes, with all my heart I am my father's child.

I cannot set more store by the woman's death—

she killed her husband, guardian of their house.

Even if the vote is equal, Orestes wins. (*Eum.* 750-756)

Aeschylus's Athena abides by the mechanical workings of nature; she is subject to them too. If Aeschylus presents a more rational view of the gods than traditional Greek society accepted, separating the gods from ideal justice, then perhaps he supported the Milesian outlook. This would allow him to present the gods as real, yet imperfect, which fits with the trilogy.

Pythagoras began a competing rational philosophy approximately one century before Aeschylus's birth. Born on Samos, an Ionian island colony only thirty miles from Miletus, Pythagoras influenced Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics with his view of a unified, logically designed universe (Menake 63). The idea of intelligent design separates Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics on one hand from the Milesians, who saw the universe as made up of one substance, yet any unity stopped there. To the Milesians, matter collides with matter in no discernible pattern. The Pythagoreans' intelligent design did not imply a personal God as in the Judeo-Christian sense. Pythagorean thought sees the world as one unified system with laws governing both physical matter and non-physical aspects of the universe, such as "mind" and "form,"

while the Milesians did not think non-physical "forms" existed, only permutations of the one material substance.

For Pythagoreans, "science and morality were part of a unified world view. Contemplation of the universe's order revealed a model for ordering the human soul. They integrated empirical, mathematical and metaphysical thinking into a united system" (Menake 65). Pythagoras left Samos and moved to Kroton, a Greek colony in southern Italy, to escape a tyrant's rule. He may have written a constitution for Kroton and ruled it for two decades until he was overthrown, possibly as a result of the secrecy of his small society of philosophical brothers. Eventually, Pythagoreans expanded throughout southern Italy and Greece, and Plato knew members of the group. Their beliefs were similar to those of Hinduism, that the soul is immortal and transmigrates to new bodies after death (Menake 66).

The Pythagoreans may have kept their ideas secret because they discovered irrational numbers; since they believed numbers were things and all things were numbers, they thought they had discovered evidence indicating that the universe also contains irrationality. They believed this to be dangerous information for society, so kept it secret. Their goal of life was to purify the body, enmeshed in material imperfection, by contemplation of mathematical rules and strict moral asceticism. The soul had to reflect the order in the universe before it could have release from physical reincarnation and unite with the soul of the universe. In Pythagorean philosophy, "mathematical and geometric thoughts were…exercises of the mind transcending…if the world of sense did not fit one's mathematical or geometrical assumptions so much the worst for it…this

view…influenced the whole philosophical tradition" of '*a priori* reasoning'" (Menake 66). Where would science and mathematics be today if previously proven tenets could not be accepted as fact but needed new proof in every experiment or equation?

In the *Orestia,* Apollo does seem to use *a priori* reasoning when defending the rights of husbands and fathers. *A priori* deductions were common in the theories of the pre-socratic philosophers; it is difficult to find examples of Greek philosophers testing their theories using inductive reasoning. Though his evidence does not prove accurate today, in the previously quoted lines by Apollo from the *Eumenides,* he attempts to use established facts of biological reproduction to prove his point, yet he backs up his biological argument with one bit of inductive reasoning: the example of Athena having only a father. While Apollo speaks with cool reason, the Furies transition to reasonable *a priori* argument, even though immediately before the trial they use irrational, emotionally charged arguments meant to instill fear, the opposite of *a priori,* deductive argument. Before the trial, the Furies emote:

> Here, now, is the overthrow
> of every binding law—once his appeal,
> his outrage wins the day,
> his matricide! One act links all mankind,
> hand to desperate hand in bloody license.
> Over and over death strokes
> dealt by children wait their parents,
> mortal generations still unborn.

We are the Furies still, yes,

but now our rage that patrolled the crimes of men,

that stalked their rage dissolves—

we loose a lethal tide to sweep the world! (506-517)

Yet, as the trial begins the Furies focus on facts alone. They also refer to rights: that rights are an established fact comes from *a priori* knowledge. The Furies also use inductive reasoning. While most pre-Socratic philosophers did not use inductive reasoning as a formal system to test their theories, Plato later identified inductive reasoning in the work of Parmenides, but the vast majority of pre-Socratic evidence is *a priori* knowledge. Later, Aristotle in particular considered it an advancement to test a theory using both inductive and deductive reasoning; the Furies do use induction, though from only one case:

LEADER:

Answer count for count, charge for charge.

First tell us, did you kill your mother?

ORESTES:

I killed her. There's no denying that…

LEADER:

But *how* did you kill her? You must tell us that.

ORESTES:

I will. I drew my sword, more, I cut her throat.

LEADER:

And who persuaded you? Who led you on?

ORESTES:

This god and his command.

indicating **APOLLO** (*Eum*. 592-599)

Athena agrees with Apollo's reasoning and casts her vote for his side, though the jury is equally divided. Here Aeschylus portrays Athenian society at the tipping point between rationality and anarchy; Apollo and the Furies each have strong, logical arguments. Aeschylus seems to suggest the former is the better course, since Athena's choice effects peace and progress, though the Furies must be persuaded to put down their arms. Perhaps Aeschylus wrote the winning argument based mostly on deductive reasoning from *a priori* evidence because that is exactly what the pre-Socratic philosophers did up to his day, both camps, orderly and chaotic universal theorists (Barnes 138). Further, Athena chooses Apollo's argument for a simple reason: she has no *a priori* knowledge concerning motherhood; she has no mother, only a father. Without *a priori* knowledge from which to deduce anything about motherhood, logically she must go with Apollo's *a priori* reasoning about fathers:

Orestes,

I will caste my lot for you.

No mother gave me birth.

I honor the male in all things but marriage.

Yes, with all my heart I am my Father's child.

I cannot set more store by the woman's death. (*Eum*. 750-754)

Athena casts the final vote for Orestes, breaking the tie. Before the vote, though she admonishes the jury by using the Furies' one bit of *a priori* reasoning, though enmeshed in irrational threats, from just before the trial. The Furies warned:

> There is a time terror helps…
> If there is a man who knows no fear
> in the brightness of his heart
> or a man's city, both are one,
> that still reveres the rights?
> Neither the life of anarchy
> nor the life enslaved by tyrants, no,
> worship neither.
> Strike the balance all in all and god will give you power…
> we Furies plead for measure. (*Eumenides* 536-542)

The Furies urge all to respect rights four times in this poetic verse set aside in the text. Clearly it resonated with Athena, though the weight of Apollo's *a priori* evidence won her over, as she admonishes the jury. Notice she uses the Furies' same words and reasoning:

> Neither anarchy nor tyranny, my people.
> Worship the Mean, I urge you,
> shore it up with reverence and never
> banish terror from the gates, not outright.
> Where is the righteous man who knows no fear? (*Eum.* 709-713)

However, the jury has no standard of justice that might be reflected in a *logos* or intelligent law giver, equally ordering the physical and non-physical realms. Throughout the trilogy, while characters refer to justice over and over, these characters never mean the same thing, no matter how many times justice is invoked. While evidence shows the rationalism of various Greek philosophical schools influenced the *Orestia's* trial arguments, still, none of the rational arguments for an orderly universe appear. The characters who express faith in an ideally just Zeus have only that, faith, with no reasoned arguments backing it up. Various scholars, including Herington and Otis, suggest Aeschylus's gods symbolize ideal justice and clearly, Aeschylus's gods can reason in the style of the latest philosophical schools as well as people, but they still act erratically and contradict their own orders. Neither the gods nor the jury have a picture of a unified, ideal justice clearly before them and agreed upon by all. Pythagoras provides one but the arguments in the play don't reflect it. That Aeschylus doesn't use an ideal *logos* in any argument during the trial proves nothing *per se*, but proof is still lacking for the argument that Aeschylus's gods represent ideal justice. Like Nietzsche's madman, Aeschylus casts the jury adrift, left to define justice themselves.

Xenophanes, an Ionian poet and philosopher, held religious views similar to Aeschylus. Xenophanes wrote, "both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind: theft, adultery, and mutual deception" (Xenophanes in Menake 71). He believed in one god, though like the Milesians' god, Xenophanes's had materiality; his god was all good, eternal and identified with the universe (71). Xenophanes saw this god as living and conscious,

sublime and ineffable. Xenophanes influenced the sophist view that an ideal good may exist, but humans can never understand it; people must decide themselves. True knowledge may exist but we will not ever know it with certainty (Guthrie in Menake 72). First among philosophers, Xenophanes classified two realms of knowledge, knowing and opinion.

While Herington explains seeming philosophical contradictions in Aeschylus by saying Aeschylean tragedy has this quality, Aeschylus is a poet, not a philosopher, it seems the ideas of Xenophanes may have influenced the *Orestia.* Menake notes Xenophanes' idea is evident in Aeschylus's *Prometheus* in that Xenophanes held history is progress and a result of human effort (72). Prior Milesians held ideas commensurate with evolution; Xenophanes first considers progress may come as a result of human choice and behavior: "truly the gods have not revealed to mortals all things from the beginning; but mortals by long seeking discover what is better" (Xenophanes in Menake). In Agamemnon the chorus of old men say "Persuasion grows with years" (114). Perhaps the best example of the trilogy conveying Xenophanes tenet occurs across all of the *Libation Bearers* and the *Eumenides*, as Orestes learns hard-won truths only through his ordeal and trial.

What is Orestes' ultimate lesson? He learns the gods lead men astray and the Athenian democratic trial system transforms the violent law of vengeance through human cooperation; in sum, human government surpasses rule by the gods. He would not have learned this lesson without the Furies trying his conscience, forcing him to rethink Apollo's orders. Hard work brings progress; fear, a catalyst for hard work, instigates

learning and advancement. In this context, Athena's final admonitions to Athenians to "never banish terror from the gates" means the struggle to protect against dangers, terrors, brings new learning (*Eum.* 711-712). As analogy, Aeschylus employs wrestling imagery throughout the trilogy. Orestes must wrestle truth from the gods and finds none, so he agrees to trial by a jury of his peers, having learned the people must execute justice where the gods fail. In the *Libation Bearers*, the slave women tell Orestes, "Up, like a young god, Orestes, wrestle—let it be to win" (855). Electra asks, "who outwrestles death?" and as the Furies interrogate Orestes in the trial, they warn him, "three falls in the match. One is ours already" (*L.B*. 342 and 595).

The sculptor Myron of Eleuthera's perfect forms highlight this key classical Athenian value: strive for the ideal, strive for perfection; one will never reach it because it transcends our abilities, which provides all the more reason to strive for it. Worship the Mean, or the ideal balance in all things, but how? Never banish terror from the gates: never eliminate all fear because fear stimulates progress. One must "suffer into truth," a constant theme throughout the *Orestia*. Aeschylus explains this view best through the chorus in *Agamemnon*. In his translation of the *Orestia*, Ted Hughes brings the idea to the fore best:

> And Zeus, or the greater one
>
> Who wears Zeus like a mask for man to imagine,
>
> Has given man this law:
>
> The truth
>
> Has to be melted out of our stubborn lives

By suffering.

Nothing speaks the truth,

Nothing tells us how things really are,

Nothing forces us to know

What we do not want to know

Except pain. (177-184)

Here are all the tenets of Xenophanes: the Olympian gods are fictions; they wear masks only for the benefit of man's imagination; the true God is one and completely transcendent; yet, humanity on its own learns and progresses, through work, through suffering.

Xenophanes and the Pythagoreans each espouse a unified order, whether or not the order is discernible on earth, as in Pythagoras, or not at all discernible, as in Xenophanes. Heraclitus of Ephesus and some of his philosophical descendants called the order, or universe-designer the *logos*; it was not seen as having personal characteristics, yet each of its proponents often used the word "God" to describe it, in addition to words such as "first mover" or "prime mover." The idea is so influential that six hundred years later Aramaic speaking writers of several Christian New Testament books used it, as the Gospel of John, written in Greek, refers to Jesus of Nazareth as the *logos*. In using the term *logos* referencing order in the universe, Heraclitus influenced Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. However, the similarity stops there. First, Heraclitus saw the *logos* as always changing, something with which Aristotle and Plato disagreed. Debate exists as to whether or not the *logos* of Heraclitus is exactly the same as Plato's immaterial, constant

version. Jonathan Barnes translates it "account" and explains the complexity of trying to reconcile Plato's metaphysical *logos* with the *logos* of Heraclitus:

> Most scholars have found in *'logos'* a technical term, and they have striven to discover a metaphysical sense for it. It does not, of course, follow from this that Heraclitus had no 'metaphysical' theory to propound, no 'Logos-doctrine,' as the commentators have it. On the contrary, [Fragment] **33** makes it clear that his 'account' must include or embody something like a general 'law of nature': 'everything happens' in accordance with the account. (Barnes 44)

Aeschylus may have intended Heraclitus's sense of the *logos* in his representation of Zeus, and it seems one *Orestia* translator, Richmond Lattimore, saw that sense in *Agamemnon.* Lattimore translates words of the old men of Argos:

> Surely it is a huge
> and heavy spirit bending the house you cry;
> alas the bitter glory of a doom that shall never be done with;
> and all through Zeus, Zeus,
> first cause, prime mover.
> For what thing without Zeus is done among mortals? (*Ag*. 1481-1487)

Clearly, Lattimore's translation reflects the idea of the *logos* here, since he uses the philosophical terms "first cause" and "prime mover." Yet, Heraclitus differs from others who espoused an ordered universe; he posited all things are in flux; all things are ever-changing. For Heraclitus, the reality of the *logos*, or divine reason, can only be

experienced through strife (Menake 79). Heraclitus also said things can be and not be at the same time, which Plato and Aristotle later called a logical fallacy because it breaks the "law of contradiction." Plato and Aristotle also criticized Heraclitus because if all things change, knowledge could not be accumulated. Like the Milesian philosophers, Heraclitus believed the universe is made of one substance, fire; he said all things are one. Another examination of Heraclitus interprets no contradiction in his two tenets: the law of unity and the law of flux. If he meant matter exchanges place with other matter, not matter transforms into something else, there isn't a contradiction, though Johnathan Barnes has reasserted that Plato and Aristotle were correct (Barnes 52). Another aspect of Heraclitian thought was the law of harmony: the universe is made up of opposites in balance. He referred to the order in the universe using the word "cosmos," which originally simply meant order.

In Xenophane's incommunicable order and Heraclitus's habitually fluctuating universe, a philosophical picture takes shape of a universe in chaos; in this world, people choose among subjective opinions, making their own order. In contrast, the Pythagoreans represent the pre-Socratic tradition of a highly ordered universe. Integrating both material and immaterial aspects in one knowable system, a sublime, immaterial God patterns the design of the whole universe; humans follow the pattern too and, through contemplation, discern the order. The characters in the trilogy who identify Zeus with this transcendent, reasonable God are all disappointed; even Orestes, who reaches transcendence despite Zeus. Like the Heraclitian *logos*, the *Orestia'*s Zeus changes his mind and issues contradictory rules, while characters expect consistent judgments. Does the tradition of a

universe in chaos, in which humanity creates its own order, emerge in the *Orestia*? Does Aeschylus support a chaotic universe in the trilogy, or does he simply juxtapose both schools of thought, without bias, reconciling them in the final consensus-forging trial?

Three more philosophers of great stature—Parmenides, Empedocles and Anaxagoras—whose lifetimes overlap with Aeschylus's, add weight to the arguments for and against an ordered universe in the *Orestia*. Before Aeschylus wrote it, he took an extended visit to Sicily, where Empedocles resided (Herington, "Aeschylus" 29). Anaxagoras lived in Athens and was a friend of Pericles at the time when he reformed the Areopagus, made an alliance with Argos and produced Aeschylus's *The Persians* for the Dionysian Festival.

In stark contrast with Heraclitus, Parmenides held that change is an illusion. Parmenides' universe is one, united in being, and in it nothing is becoming. Since his one universe is material, not "mind" or immaterial consciousness, some scholars see him as a precursor of the atomists, who see no order in the universe. This view is held by John Burnet, but W. K. C. Guthrie and Menake see Parmenides in the tradition that includes Pythagoras and Plato, who held to an ordered universe, though with an immaterial *logos* (Menake 80-81). While the Milesian philosophers were mostly secular, Parmenides agrees with Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, who see the order in the universe as divine. Parmenides begins the Eleatic school of philosophy, named for Elea in southern Italy. He saw universal moral absolutes, which drew attack from the Sophists later because the Sophists believed in relativistic morality and nominalist views, arguing the arbitrary and subjective names we give things don't signify absolute realities.

Parmenides is famous for dividing knowledge in two, including sense and reason. Since the senses perceive change, yet change is an illusion, the senses deceive. Nothing comes into being; on the contrary, being stays the same always. Only reason leads to the truth; clearly here he influenced Plato (Menake 78-82). In Aeschylus's lifetime, Parmenides represents the most advanced synthesis of the unified cosmos view.

Empedocles and Anaxagoras iterate the cosmos in chaos tradition as it stood in Aeschylus's time. Aeschylus may have met Empedocles during his extended stay in Sicily. After he won first prize for the *Persians* in 472 BC, the ruler of Syracuse, Hieron, invited Aeschylus to restage the play there (Herington, "Aeschylus" 28). He could have been in Sicily for any length of time between 472 BC and 468 BC. Concurrently, Xenophanes, the dramatist Epicharmus, older Greek poets and dramatists such as Phrynichus, Simonides and, some say, Pindar spent time at the court of Hieron of Syracuse. Many Pythagorean mystics familiar with the Orphic mysteries resided there, as did the young philosopher Empedocles (Herington, "Aeschylus" 29).

Contrary to Parminedes, Empedocles held that change is a universal constant. Four basic elements—fire, water, earth and air—comprise everything that exists. On the question of being and becoming, he wrote, "it is impossible for there to be a coming to existence from that which is not, and for what exists to be completely destroyed cannot be fulfilled, nor is it to be heard of " (Empedocles in Menake 83). Two eternal forces exist, strife and love; these forces act on the four elements, producing change. No immaterial *logos* exists, just continual reconfiguration of the four elements through strife and love. Love causes the mixture of the elements and strife causes their dissolution.

Thus, like the intellectual descendants of Pythagoras, laws govern the universe, but unlike Pythagorean intelligent design theorists, the laws are physical and do not determine ethics or morals. Knowledge and sense-perception are the same thing.

Also according to Empedocles, "the gods themselves appear to have been created in the process of becoming" (Menake 84). This view of Zeus changing, learning, and "becoming" may be one explanation for his behavior in the *Orestia*. Zeus can promulgate contradictory decrees, telling Apollo to make Orestes kill his mother or be punished and also sending the Furies to punish him, yet later he takes credit for reconciling Orestes and the Furies, creating trial by jury and democratic rule in the process. Athena does give Zeus all the credit after the Furies give up pursuing Orestes: "thanks to Zeus of the Councils who can turn dispute to peace—he won the day" (*Eum.* 983-984). Athena seems to have forgotten already that the people of Athens chose Orestes's fate, not Zeus. Through Athena, Aeschylus gives voice to the possibility of Zeus's evolving, but ultimately paints a picture of an absent and ineffectual Zeus. Aeschylus chose the people to resolve the perpetual cycle of vengeance.

Throughout the *Orestia,* characters express Empedocles's notion that love and strife drive all events, an idea that permeates the trilogy. Characters who prove wrong about Zeus's powers assert it, true. However, Aeschylus affirms its validity when both Athena and the Furies concur in the final accord between the Furies and Athens. This repeated phrase sums it up: one must "suffer into truth." The chorus observes it first in *Agamemnon,* even before the murders, as Clytemnestra busies herself making sacrifices all over the house, feigning gratitude for her husband's return and preparing for the real

sacrifice (179). The idea persists to the end, when after the trial the Furies observe, "it helps, at times, to suffer into truth" (*Eum*. 531). In elegantly compact language, the old men of Argos bemoan that from the gods, "there comes a violent love" (*Ag.* 184). Pitifully, the men recount Iphigenia's horrendous sacrifice and at the same time recall her singing to her father, "Atreus' offspring throbbing out their love" (*Ag.* 247). As Orestes fulfills his filial duty and "ignites the torch of freedom" for his father's house, the slave women urge him to fight on, "Orestes, wrestle—let it be to win" (*L.B*. 850 and 855-856). Perhaps the view's strongest affirmation comes from Athena and the Furies, since it occurs shortly before the women of Athens celebrate the joyous reconciliation, processing with "holy light" (Eum. 1013). Athena extols the worth of the Furies:

> But he who has never felt their weight,
> or known the blows of life and how they fall,
> the crimes of his father hail him toward the bar,
> and there for all his boasts—destruction,
> silent, majestic in anger,
> crushes him to dust. (*Eum.* 944-949)

Agreeing with Athena, the Furies reply, "yes…hear my love, my blessing" (*Eum*. 949-951). Finally, Empedocles's strife sheds light on Athena's strange admonition to the Athenian jury: "never banish terror from the gates" (*Eum*. 712).

Still, understanding Empedocles seems complex because he also believed in the Pythagorean transmigration of souls and escape through asceticism. Some scholars reconcile these by claiming Empedocles espoused Pythagoras in youth and later changed

his mind. The Sophists used Empedocles's thought later to assert human artifice as the determining factor of change, not a higher god-like entity. Human knowledge increases with experience, not contact with a divine source. Plato, a proponent of an ordered universe, denounced the human artifice theory implied in Empedocles because it reduces law and morals to human opinion (Menake 85).

Later, Anaxagoras posited new answers to the questions of the make-up of the universe. Anaxagoras lived from 500 BC to 428 BC and was the first of the Greek philosophers to establish residence at Athens. A friend of Pericles, by some accounts, the statesman helped Anaxagoras leave Athens after the philosopher-scientist received public condemnation for atheism. Aeschylus is approximately two decades older and died when Anaxagoras was about forty; Aeschylus, an acquaintance of Pericles, could have known Anaxagoras. That is not to say he must have been influenced by him, but that Aeschylus had opportunity to be well acquainted with his ideas. Aeschylus definitely knew the philosopher-scientist's teachings; in the *Eumenides,* Apollo defends fathers' rights with Anaxagoras's notion on human conception (*Eum*. 665-671).

Anaxagoras agreed with Empedocles that matter coalesces and separates, accounting for real change, but where Empedocles employed "love and strife," Anaxagoras believed the guiding principle was *Nous* or "Mind" (Barnes 229-249). Nous was separate from other matter, but was material. This view of *Nous* keeps him with the Milesian school's belief that everything is made up of physical matter. While "*Nous*" sounds like an immaterial Pythagorean *logos*, Plato and Aristotle analyzed Anaxagoras's *Nous* and found it was another material part of the universe, just a "thinner" and more

rarified matter (Barnes 229-249). Anaxagoras did not believe *Nous* consciously designed the universe, something Plato and Aristotle wanted to see in Anaxagoras's writings on *Nous* but could not find. So, when Aeschylus likens Zeus to the *logos* as Richmond Lattimore's translation suggests, very likely the author used this sense. In fact, in Plato's day, Sophists used Anaxagoras' and Empedocles' vision of a material universe as evidence for a changing cosmos without purpose or design, a relativist's view, open to personal interpretation (Menake 333).

Finally, the atomist view gained ascendency among Greek philosophers. Leucippus, credited as the first atomist, left few writings and consequently, some philosophers have doubted his existence. If he did exist, though, his views would have been known in Aeschylus's lifetime. Philosophers and scientists now accept Leucippus as a real figure and the teacher of the atomist Democritus, contrary to Aristotle's long accepted opinion. Malcolm Schofield argues convincingly the two are not the same person by uncovering a distinction between the use of the phrase "no more" by Democritius alone (Schofield 254-263). Also, through examining the ancient secondary sources, Daniel Graham notes a difference in the qualities of atoms and void between Leucippus and Democritus (Graham 352). To atomists, starting with Leucippus, reality consists of small bits of highly divisible matter interacting in a void. There is no unity or eternal being in the universe, only constant change signifying nothing. While some sources have the early life of Democritus overlapping with the later years of Aeschylus, most have Democritus born just a few years before Aeschylus's death. Echoes of atomism in the *Orestia* seem to support the view that Leucippus lived and spread the atomist view

during Aeschylus's lifetime. While scholars have identified Aeschylus's message with Heraclitus, Empedocles and even Parmenides, evidence suggests an atomist cosmology, since, in Aeschylus, the Athenians must solve society's problems without the help of the gods or any type of universal order. Zeus and Apollo work at odds and ultimately fail to show they embody, or even understand, any universal order. Even Athena, who, among the gods, goes the longest distance to meet the needs of Orestes, admits her weakness and the people's strength:

> Too large a matter,
>
> some may think, for mortal men to judge.
>
> But by all rights not even I should decide
>
> a case of murder. (*Eum*. 484-487)

The goddess concedes, "it defeats me" (*Eum.* 496). At the climax of impending resolution, with Orestes thinking, now, finally, someone will help me, Aeschylus's Athena admits defeat; she admits complete powerlessness. What is the only recourse she has, according to Aeschylus? He has Athena rely on the people: "but since the matter comes to rest on us, I will appoint judges…I will pick the finest men of Athens" (*Eum*. 497-498 and 503).

Audiences of the *Orestia* were left with a strong message that must have been intended by the author: the ideals represented by the pantheon, if they exist, prove difficult to discern. The gods in the *Orestia* can't grasp them any better than the humans. We are left with one guiding light to help us comprehend whatever truth exists: ourselves. Moreover, what we comprehend as truth, we create. As noted before, the very origin

myth of the Greeks portrays the gods in a bad light. Not only is their behavior very human, gods and humans share the same mother, Mother Earth. Humans and gods are creatures of the creator and, both have the same capacity to decipher what is “true” and “just.” People are on their own to decide what is just. Unless we want to regress to the law of vengeance, so that every Agamemnon meets his Clytemnestra on and on forever, the polis descending into chaos, we must cooperate, put aside our religious, scientific, gender and class differences and create order.

A veteran of the battle at Marathon, Aeschylus saw great changes take place in Athens, pitting rich against poor, aristocrats against tyrants here and democratic reforms there. According to Herington, Aeschylus was just as skeptical of democracy as he seems to be about the gods. With the Persian threat still palpable, unity was essential. Perhaps democracy is messier than aristocratic rule and perhaps less efficient. The democratic reforms, all within Aeschylus's lifetime, are new and potentially unstable. Many powerful, respected aristocratic Athenians, like Aeschylus, had been displaced and perhaps dishonored, but events led them to this in Athens and it is all they had to use if they wanted the rule of law. As the trilogy played before Athenian audiences, Aeschylus poses the question: did Athenians want rule of law or continual violence and chaos? Aeschylus reminds the Athenian aristocrats that the ancient Areopagus is still in place and continuity with past heritage remains; it is time to concede and work with the people.

By Aeschylus's time, philosophic schools stood opposed. Later analysis characterized the conflict as “the one or the many.” To presocratics, reality’s true nature was either that all is being or all is becoming, not both. Pythagoras and Parmenides

passed on the view of reality as one and never changing: sheer being alone. Truth is eternal, thus when one attempts to parse truth, or analyze it for characteristics, one misunderstands. Truth can't be broken down and analyzed according to our observations. Our observations will be wrong because they attempt to look in from outside the one truth; such observations can't exist and are meaningless. Language itself becomes meaningless according to this logic, since one can't ever articulate something meaningful without falsely isolating, and therefore dividing, reality. Yet, for many scientific thinkers and philosophers in Aeschylus's day, the theory of the one, highly ordered, unchanging universe contradicts information gathered through senses. It contradicts common sense. We see seasons change; we see birth and we see death. On the other side of the divide, Heraclitus, Empedocles and the atomists Leucippus and Democritus rejected the Parmenidean conclusions of the one. They espoused a more scientific view, accepting as true what we see and what we experience, as does Aeschylus.

The philosophy of ever-changing flux culminating in atomism has its flaws, too. If constants don't exist and any characterization of a supposed natural process or "truth" is fleeting, why do we expect the sun to rise each day? Why do we study science, if knowledge can't be accumulated? Why do pregnant women expect they will give birth to children and not ducks or bears? What is a "duck" or a "bear" if the universe is simply matter colliding with matter in no pattern and according to no order? If words themselves have no constant definitions, if language is simply the product of custom, how do we know we understand what others write and say? (Sugrue "Parmenides"). If there is no sure definition of words and if language has no meaning, why do we use it as

if it does? When someone yells "fire," why do we run, expecting that "fire" has certain universal characteristics dangerous to life?

The answers, in this school of thought, vary. Heracletians will affirm the "unity of opposites" and say fire is both dangerous and life-supporting, as Athena praises Athenians' "terror and reverence" advising Athens, "neither anarchy nor tyranny, my people. Worship the Mean" (*Eum.* 703 and 709-710). Sophists, influenced by atomism, might say all language comes from generally accepted custom, as does law, but we really don't know if others share our definition of "duck," "bear," "fire" or "law." Our only recourse is persuasion. In fact, the atomist Democritus, very difficult to distinguish from Leucippus, had this to say about persuasion:

> One will seem to promote virtue better by using encouragement and persuasion of speech than law and necessity. For it is likely that he who is held back from wrongdoing by law will err in secret but that he who is urged to what he should by persuasion will do nothing wrong either in secret or openly. Therefore he who acts rightly from understanding and knowledge proves to be at the same time courageous and right-minded. *Those with the ability to persuade mold our views of custom, language and law*. These too are ever-changing. (Democritus in Taylor 21)

Persuasion, then, according to atomism, is the arbiter of truth, and it serves as Athena's final clincher in bringing the Furies to her side, saving Orestes from their terrors. Athena instructs the polis to worship the mean, yet persuasion arbitrates wherein lies the mean. Yes, in the *Eumenides*, persuasion saves the day. But characters with

murderous intentions use it too. Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon* believes she can use persuasion to direct the power of the gods to her advantage as she lights fires, seemingly only for relaying the outcome of war but also as sacrifices to enable her murderous intentions: “The gods breathe power through my song, my fighting strength, Persuasion grows with the years—“ (113-114). She sees persuasion as a force of her own, strengthened by the gods. As Electra and Orestes plot their mother’s murder, the chorus supports them and evokes the earth goddess against Clytemnestra, whom they see as the personification of Persuasion: “Down to the pit Persuasion goes with all her cunning” (*L.B.* 714-715). As Athena argues in the *Eumenides,* the only way to assuage the Furies and end barbarism is through persuasion. She asks the Furies, would they show reverence for Persuasion? (890-889). Finally, they do and Athena exults: “I am in my glory! Yes, I love Persuasion; she watched my words, she met their wild refusals” (*Eum*. 981-982). Murderously manipulative in *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers,* yet conciliatory in the *Eumenides:* in Aeschylus's trilogy, persuasion is power.

Just as Aeschylus witnessed a combined philosophical and political revolution and fashioned a poetic synthesis of the two, so did Dante. A sea change took place in philosophy after Aeschylus and before Dante. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle each played a part and together they picked up the broken shards of a mirror the presocratics thought was never of one piece. These three philosophical giants saw both views as extreme, one sided and illogical: the monists, who saw one, ordered, unchanging and intangible universe and the atomists, who denied eternal being and truth as their senses affirmed only constant physical flux. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle systematized a view that

accepted both the unity of abstract eternal truth and the corporeal particularity of constant flux, two interconnected aspects of one cosmos.

The three philosophers each wanted, first and foremost, good societies with virtuous citizens. Socrates stood up to the atomists of his day, the sophists, refusing to accept a lack of moral standard beyond human beings or a fixed idea about what a good society does. He refused to accept the notion that chaos characterizes nature. Equally, each of the three philosophical greats considered nonsensical the Parmenidian view that all matter is illusory; change does not exist; only a fixed, abstract law of nature exists. Our senses tell us matter exists and a good deal of knowledge had already been accumulated showing matter did behave according to natural laws. Plato, the student of Socrates, sought to systematize these ideas. He called the order in the universe *logos* as the presocratics had before him, but he did not claim matter was not real, only that the *logos* ordered matter and was more perfect than matter. Aristotle created his own synthesis, and where Plato leaned closer to the abstract, Aristotle focused more on the senses. To know the universe's Unmoved Mover, one must study carefully sense observations, because matter is just as real as the abstract *logos*; since matter finds its order in the *logos*, one gets to know the *logos* only when engaging with matter. Together these three bridged the philosophical divide between the one and the many. The great philosophers of China never achieved such a synthesis; the monist, matter-denying Buddhists never reconciled with the practical observations of the Confucians. Western civilization would never be the same. In the universities in place in Europe by the the twelfth century, the natural sciences, including translations from Arabic and Greek of

Aristotle, spurred study in the natural sciences, considered the "handmaiden of theology" (McNeill 302). These universities were often supported by the Church, yet had free inquiry. They had enough freedom, in fact, to discover some of Aristotle's conclusions were wrong. For example, Aristotle thought there could be only one world and medieval scientists postulated this was not true (McNeill 305). Philosophy matters because ideas guide actions and actions have consequences.

Because medieval Christians, Dante included, adopted Aristotle's iteration of this new synthesis, a great Aristotelian revival served as the backdrop for the *Divine Comedy*. Simultaneously an epic, violent clash among monarchists, papists, republicans, land-owning nobility and a new merchant class played out among city-states, as if all of modern European history were compressed into a real-life century-long tragedy on an Italian stage. Just as Aeschylus's Athens witnessed a clash of classes and international threat, so did Dante's Florence. Just as conflict, physical and philosophical, preceded the great Greek Classical Age centered on Athens, so did Dante's Florence experience such conflict on the cusp of the Renaissance. Perhaps Mediterranean cultures are the ones most apt to conclude "there is nothing new under the sun" just as Solomon, a Mediterranean king, once observed (*The Bible* Eccles. 1:9).

The *Divine Comedy*

"*...my desire and will, like a wheel that spins with even motion, were revolved by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars."*

—Dante (Par. XXXIII 142-145)

In *Paradiso* XXXII, Dante approaches the supreme goal of the journey, a vision of God's face. Ultimately, the good temporal empire has one purpose, to prepare citizens for the beatific vision. The sense of exile, of being lost in a dark wood and the ensuing struggle all prepare the climber, Dante, for this vision. Dante chooses St. Bernard and Mary, Mother of God to aid in the final prayers necessary to prepare the poet traveller to see God. Examining this preparation, as well as Dante's view of deep Heaven, clarifies the link between classical Aristotelian reason and Christian faith. Heaven is wholeness. Things divided on earth, even in Purgatory, unite here.

Both faith and reason prove essential for the final ascent to behold the ineffable. While in the *Orestia,* relativist atomism coupled with persuasion leads to reconciliation and transcendence*,* in the *Divine Comedy* human reason does play a role but only love brings a soul to the heights of transcendence. Since in Heaven, faith lacks purpose, rather than speak of faith and reason, more and more love and reason dominate. Finally, reason fades to the background. Though Dante portrays the beatific vision in Aristotelian terms of accident and substance, only love remains.

In Dante's late medieval cosmology, a faithful Christian recognizes his impurities when faced with examples of heavenly virtue; thus, God's grace purifies, as a person suffers the consequences of repented sins here in earthly life or in Purgatory. Once

purified, the soul achieves perfect reason and beholds the face of God. Thomas Aquinas, a great influence on Dante, emphasized the necessity of faith and reason. Aquinas reinterprets this view, initially Aristotle's, in a Christian context. Like Socrates and Plato, Aristotle saw unity among abstract truths and physical reality, laying a foundation for modern science. That this unity existed and explained everything from the origins of the universe to the nature of reality was the hallmark of Socratic thought. Plato and Aristotle created logical systems reflecting this view. While Plato's emphasized abstract truth, Aristotle's focused on physical observation.

Though western thought never completely abandoned the platonic view, Thomas Aquinas, as Jewish and Islamic thinkers did before him, emphasized Aristotle's system and synthesized it with his theology and worldview. In accordance with this view, Dante's system asserts that only love of God reconciles faith and reason, and God is love. To behold the face of God is to have reached the fullness of transcendent truth, beauty and goodness, all facilitated by God's love for the person and the person's love for God. No one can behold the fullness of truth, though, without traversing the depths of physical reality, as Beatrice tells Dante in Heaven:

> From this you see that blessedness depends
>
> upon the act of vision, not upon
>
> the act of love—which is a consequence. (*Par*. XXVIII 109-111)

Dante learns love expressed and received on Earth also exists in Heaven; to him, love represents the crux of the cosmic unity Socrates, Plato and Aristotle proposed. While in the *Orestia,* the transcendent depends on human designs, such that no discernible order

or logic exists, in the *Divine Comedy*, transcendent love reveals perfect, transcendent logic, order and reason; Dante describes it using Aristotelian terms.

Thus, in Dante, love reconciles faith and reason, and in Aeschylus, persuasion reconciles justice and order; both love and persuasion elude the characters in these works; yet these values represent the transcendent, the absolute or ultimate truth for classical Athens and medieval Europe.

In the first parts of each work, *Agamemnon* and *Inferno*, characters grasp desperately in darkness at only one part of transcendence. Blinded by selfishness, they reach for the only part they see, the part they desire. Consequently, the characters deny most of the transcendent, willfully suffering the ultimate punishment. In each work, one person seeks, though can't grasp, transcendence. Only through willing purgation can these characters achieve it; yet, the purgation requires more suffering and humility, prices many deem too high. Those willing to pay it stop to question their actions, knowing they might be wrong. They purge themselves of selfishness, of "missing the mark," in *The Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio*. After purgation, some characters achieve transcendence, finding peace and light in *Eumenides* and *Paradiso*.

In *On Loving God,* St. Bernard speaks of four degrees of love, "...our love shall have its beginning in the flesh. But rightly guided by the grace of God through these degrees, it will have its consummation in the spirit" (XV). Dante goes on an odyssey through the stages of love in *The Divine Comedy.* From his recognition of the quality of his own love in the story of Paolo and Francesca, to his final ability, through grace, to see God's face, Dante reaches love's last degree according to St. Bernard, that of pure love of

God and love of self solely for God's sake. Perhaps this is why Bernard takes over as Dante's guide. Surely Beatrice, enthroned near Mary and the Old Testament's faithful women, could continue as Dante's guide, yet Dante chose one who wrote so clearly on heavenly love; Bernard encourages Dante's quest for pure love, which the quest to see God's face demands. In *Paradiso* XXXII, Bernard prepares Dante for his reception of the grace needed to behold and love the Trinity of love. After seeing the faithful saints inhabiting the tenth Heaven's rose, the words Dante gives Bernard express clearly the two major theological points stressed throughout the *Divine Comedy.* These are the inseparable relationship between grace and merit and the superiority of love over reason.

The canto begins and ends with Mary, the perfect example of the one "full of grace." Faith's exemplar, Mary accepted the angel Gabriel's message, believing even before the Word's incarnation in her own body. Mary, full of all graces, asks Bernard's intercession, and Dante praises her for the merit achieved by her willful acceptance of God's grace. Like love and reason, in Heaven merit and grace act as two sides of the same coin, not separate entities, as some believe on earth. Virgil, the sage of Rome, symbolizes pure intellect and pure reason. Yet, Virgil's intellect fails him when Dante's odyssey brings him closer to God's love. Reason and intellect alone, without love of God, lack potency here. At this point in the journey only one who loves God in the sense of Bernard's fourth stage of love can guide Dante. In tenth Heaven's rose, only those with perfect love for God and faith in Christ, before or after His historical redemption, reign as the "patricians of the empire" (*Par*. XXXII). Intellect and reason still abide here; however, in Heaven, joy rains on Mary from "holy intellects," while residents in Hell

have “lost the good of the intellect” (*Par.* XXXII and *Inf.* III). As God’s creature with the most grace and the most merit, Dante learns grace’s and merit’s synergy, the faith of the saints in the rose, and the necessity for faith and love to precede reason, yet not replace it.

Canto XXXII has four sections. First, Bernard shows Dante those of note who occupy the rose, calling special attention to Mary, described as the one who closed the wound Eve opened. Here also, the rose’s organization appears. Those who believed in Christ before his earthly life separate from those who believed after it. Second, Bernard explains predestination as impossible to understand through reason alone. The third section looks closely at those who are the “patricians of the empire” and their positions in the rose in relation to the empress of Heaven, Mary. Finally, in section four, time brings sleep to the traveler, as he and Bernard stop to rest before turning to Primal Love. Dante hears that he must implore grace from Mary, the one closest of all creatures to her Son. In the last line of the canto, the reader anticipates St. Bernard’s prayer to the Virgin on Dante’s behalf. Each section sheds lights on one or more of the themes concerning the soul’s journey toward perfect love of God, Mary, grace and merit, faith and reason.

At the start of the canto, the sight of Mary and the rose enraptures the contemplative, Bernard. He exclaims, “the wound that Mary closed and then anointed was the wound that Eve--so lovely at Mary’s feet--had opened and pierced” (*Par.* XXXII 4-6). Though in history it was not so, Mary precedes Eve. While she is beyond doubt “full of grace,” these words imply Mary took action to cooperate with the grace and her action had merit in order to close the wound of Christ, the figurative wound Eve’s sin caused, and the real wounds of the cross that redeemed what Eve’s action corrupted. Like

Solomon's queen mother, Mary, the closest creature to Christ, the queen mother of Heaven, holds the place of honor. In *Paradiso* XXV, Dante learns that among those in Heaven, only Mary has a glorified body as does Jesus, while the other saints await the resurrection. Grace bestows this honor.

Eve ranks second in position to Mary, entirely through grace, emphasizing the love and forgiveness of God toward his creation. Rachel and Beatrice rank third. Rachel symbolizes the contemplative life; compared to her sister Leah, busy with seven children, Rachel remained without child for a time, and then had only two. Leah represents the active life (Mandelbaum on *Purg.* XXVII 110-108). Also, her husband chose Rachel above Leah, just as, in the New Testament, Jesus favors Mary's choice above Martha's. Mary chose devotion and contemplation while Martha, her sister, chose active service.

Dante places Beatrice, a modern Christian woman, among the faithful Hebrew women of the Old Testament; perhaps he emphasizes all believers' ultimate equality, since all dwell with God in the highest Heaven, even if only their images appear in varying levels. Next Dante sees Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth. Sarah believed God's promise of a son, though she laughed at first. In faith, Rebecca went without question to marry a man she had not seen. Judith thought little of her own safety in slaying the enemy of God's people. The great-grandmother of King David, Ruth, expressed faithfulness toward her Jewish mother-in-law beyond what was was required; though not born Jewish, Ruth adamantly cleaves to the law and the One God. All these, except for Eve and Rachel, represent women of action as well as recipients of grace.

Mary's throne sits on the side these women occupy; this side, "there where the Rose is ripe, with all its petals, are those whose faith was in the Christ to come" (*Par.* XXXII 22-23). Mary believed as soon as the angel Gabriel announced to her God's intention, placing herself among the Hebrew women who believed before Jesus's full mission on earth. Significantly, on this side of the rose, Dante chooses first only women, while on the other side he chooses only believers after the historical redemption, and only men are mentioned first. Perhaps Dante implies the faith of men and women differ, that women's faith is stronger and needs less evidence, though other male Old Testament believers, Adam and Moses, appear later in the canto. Equally, here Dante may evoke the gospel, where Mary Magdalen believes first, while Peter and John must investigate the tomb and Thomas must touch Jesus before they believe.

Among those who believe after the incarnation, John the Baptist, who leapt in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's voice, appears first. Next appear Francis, Benedict and Augustine, down to the center of the rose. Francis loved the poor and embraced poverty and active service for love of God, while Benedict's rule modeled early communal contemplative life. Benedict and Francis receive honor equally, though, in contrast to Rachel's place over Leah. Augustine, a leading intellectual church figure, refuted major early heresies and championed grace, God's free gift. All strove to love God: Francis through God's creatures, Benedict through prayerful monasticism, and Augustine through doctrinal defense. Augustine's position might make one question why Dante left out Dominic, also a fighter against heresy, since earlier in *Paradiso,* Dante

juxtaposes Francis and Dominic. Augustine, like Dante, envisioned two cities, one completely devoid of love for God and one entirely dedicated to it.

Finally, in section one of the canto, Bernard first alludes to predestination in the nature of God's judgments, pointing out the number of saved souls on both sides will be equal and the vacant spaces for souls later to arrive already prepared. However, in this first reference Bernard calls it "foresight," implying God only sees what others will choose, rather than "predestination," which he does use later in the canto. "Now see how deep is God's foresight: both aspects of the faith shall fill this garden equally" (*Par*. XXXII 38-39). Between the rose's two divisions reside babies' souls in Heaven "for merits not their own but--with certain conditions--other's merits" (*Par.* XXXII 42-43). In the second section of the canto, Bernard answers Dante's unspoken question.

Here, Bernard explains predestination. "But now you doubt, and, doubting, do not speak, yet I shall loose that knot" (*Par.* XXXII 49-50). According to St. Bernard in Canto XXXII, nothing at all exists by chance in Heaven. Dante must satisfy himself with the explanation that God gives grace diversely and at his own discretion. To illustrate, Bernard uses the example of Jacob and Esau. From their mother's womb stirred to hatred, no works at that point could have earned their merit or damnation. Bernard says God assigned certain ranks already. Yet, in the first section of the canto, he clearly states some babies without merit of their own appropriate the merits of others, thereby giving some value to individual's action, though not the individuals receiving the grace. Throughout the *Divine Comedy,* grace and merit share relationship. All three canticles refer to this relationship, though in the *Inferno,* merit operates as more necessary for eternal life. Later

in the *Divine Comedy*, Dante increases the references to both grace and merit. Ultimately in *Paradiso* XXXIII, one finds it difficult to see where Dante separates intention and God's grace:

> I searched that strange sight: I wished to see
> the way in which our human effigy
> suited the circle and found place in it—-
> and my own wings were far too weak for that.
> But then my mind was struck by light that flashed
> and, with this light, received what it had asked.
> Here force failed my high fantasy;
> but my desire and will were moved already—like
> a wheel revolving uniformly—by
> the Love that moves the sun and the other stars. (*Par*. XXXIII 136-145)

Dante searched on his own, yet found himself incapable of grasping how a human form could be one with God. As soon as he realizes his powers are insufficient, he receives light that clears up his misunderstanding. His own will and desire operate, yet Divine love moves his will. Examples abound of alternating explanations for the good things that happen to souls in the *Divine Comedy*. Sometimes the author uses merit and sometimes he uses grace as explanation. In Canto I of the *Inferno*, Dante tells the reader it was he that abandoned the true path and rebelled against God's law. It was his fault. Yet, rendered helpless without a guide, Dante needed one to help him out of the dark wood. Throughout the *Inferno*, Virgil must warn the journey's detractors that Heaven wills it; in

other words, God ordains it, and Mary prays for it. Those in *Inferno*'s first level suffer without disgrace and without praise; they made no efforts for merit. In *Inferno* XXIII, Dante carves *contrapasso's* law (that the punishment fits the crime) into the reader's memory with the images of Caiaphas crucified on the ground and the capes of Cluniac monks, gilded outside and leaden inside. These clerics enjoyed being seen in fancy garb, now they must wear leaden garments, weighing them down forever. What these people did mattered, and through their actions they distanced themselves far from God's love. Even if St. Francis were to travel to Hell to save someone consigned there, as he does in *Inferno* XXVII, God doesn't forgive unrepented sin. The damned soul's inaction matters. As the travelers move further along on the road to God's perfect love, the issue complicates. All the souls in Purgatory receive saving grace, though they sinned.

Yet, in many instances, their salvation comes only as a result of the prayers of others. In *Purgatorio* VI, Virgil explains that prayers do not change Heaven or justice, yet through prayer love somehow expiates sin. Purgatory's visitors see three great examples of humility, and they all exalt personal action on earth: Mary proclaims herself the Lord's handmaid, David dances before the ark, and Trajan helps a common woman, in stone images for all to see. Yet, in their actions, Dante learns, their Maker acted too.

Just when it might seem God predestines all human action, the reader may remember that in Purgatory, Dante learns from Marco that people try to assign all causes on earth to Heaven, but "if this were so, then your free will would be destroyed, and there would be no equity in joy for doing good, in grief for evil" (*Purg*. XVI 70-72). In keeping with Bernard's four levels of love, each one a superior love to the last, those in Purgatory

often have as the root of their problems love misdirected, weakly pursued, or excessively directed at one thing to the exclusion of others, all these clearly chosen on earth. Yet, in Purgatory free will is not entirely free. In *Purgatorio* XXI, a soul spends five hundred years in Purgatory before he feels his free will urging him to a higher level, one step closer to Heaven and God. He has a free will, yet not an operational one, for five hundred years. At the end of *Purgatorio*, Virgil crowns Dante and informs him his will is free and whole, so that it will no longer be defective and will guide him in the right way. All these examples show an interrelationship between grace and merit. Merit, or its lack, dominates the *Inferno*, while souls aware of grace as well as real personal choices dominate *Purgatorio*.

Paradiso continues this view of grace and merit, and here Dante explains further. In *Paradis*o IV, Beatrice explains one bears responsibility in the afterlife for his or her actions, even when forced to do something wrong against the will. One has the choice to yield much or little. In *Paradiso* V, she informs Dante that God's greatest gift is free will; yet in canto VI, Justinian's great accomplishment of the legal code is credited to God's inspiration. Dante provides an interesting juxtaposition of predestination and merit in *Paradiso* VIII, where he learns that God providentially created humanity diversely, each made for a specific vocation. Yet one must choose this vocation freely, and refusing it causes trouble in the world. Dante employs St. Thomas Aquinas to clear up any confusion here: in *Paradiso* X, he explains love begins in a soul first through grace and it grows as the person chooses to love. Later in Canto XVII, Dante's relative explains God sees things as one sees a ship moving, but does not cause them, just as the viewer of a ship

does not move it. By the end of *Paradiso*, though Dante strives and strives to see God's face and only grace allows him to do it. He needs the great graces entrusted to Mary, and he needs the grace and light from God to see and understand the Trinity, though Dante, again, must do the seeking. Just as Peter, who first called Jesus the Son of God through grace, and James, who said faith is dead without works, dance together in *Paradiso* XXV, grace and merit move in unison.

Further, in the second section of *Paradiso* XXXII, as Dante contemplates the souls in the rose, Bernard must dispel Dante's confusion over predestination, a confusion that comes from a strange source: reason. "I can release you from the bonds of subtle reasoning," says Bernard (*Par.* XXXII 50-51). As with the theme of grace and merit, in the *Divine Comedy,* Dante stresses reason's lesser role compared to faith. Reason, though, is not bad in itself. When one loses love of the good, demonstrated in *Inferno* III, one enters Hell. Dante himself has trouble understanding the sign above the gate of Hell; perhaps early in his journey, living so far away from the love of God clouds his intellect. In fact, Dante needs the help of one with strong reason and intellect, Virgil, even though early in his journey Dante boasts of his intellectual prowess, deeming himself equal to the classical giants in limbo.

In *Purgatorio* III, Virgil explains to Dante that human reason can't explain the suffering in Purgatory, so that he should not even try. If humans could understand everything, says Virgil, the cross would not have been needed to save them. He then specifically mentions those who seek knowledge above all else, like Plato and Aristotle, who will be seeking it forever in limbo, yet never find true peace or love. Virgil sees

himself in this image, as Dante saw himself in Paolo and Francesca, and for the first time Virgil is the one who needs encouragement. Virgil displays pure reason's impotence when he, the symbol of classical intelligence, fails to explain how love expiates sins through prayer; he needs a simple girl, Beatrice, who can explain it easily and simply since she's a Christian in Heaven. Supreme in the *Divine Comedy*, love and the primal love's vision serve as the journey's true goals. Virgil can see how one thing leads to another, but cannot explain why. In Canto XIV, Virgil tells Dante spiritual giving increases the value of a gift, but not material giving. He sees this and can say it is true, but he must tell Dante that Beatrice, the Christian, will have to explain it later.

Yet, in *Purgatorio* XXV, Virgil explains that God created the soul with an intellect. While reason renders many things in Heaven indescribable, such as Beatrice's increasing beauty, divine justice, and predestination, nevertheless, in the rose Dante must use his intellect to understand what he sees. This follows with the rest of the *Divine Comedy*: "direct your intellect's sharp eye toward me," Dante hears in *Purgatorio* XVIII (16-17). Virgil explains that God created the soul to respond to what pleases it. Intellect takes in the image of an object, and intelligence can allow an interior council similar to that described by Aristotle's ethics. Here once again, however, Virgil's pure intellect fails to explain the soul's attraction to the object: love. Leading to joy, a person seeks love alone.

Beatrice must explain yet another aspect of love, since Virgil's pure intellect does not have her faith's force. She explains, in *Paradiso* I, that all nature, including the intellect, bears imprint of God's image, so that all nature, and all right reason, directs

toward God. By this point Virgil has left, his knowledge no longer sufficient to explain the pure love of Heaven. In *Paradiso* XIX, Beatrice explains that all humans have intelligence, one ray of divine light, but this is not enough to comprehend justice. Without grace, justice remains hidden. Thus, Dante cannot understand why an inhabitant of the Indus River valley, never having heard of Christ, could be condemned, as the medieval church taught. Beatrice simply tells him his question makes no sense if one has access to the scriptures. Perfect intellect accompanies perfect love of God, and understanding such matters as predestination can only be understood with perfect love, she adds in *Paradiso* XX. Later at the fellowship of Christ's supper, Dante learns all knowledge comes from one source, Christ, and those closest to him have the most (*Par.* XXIV). Human reason alone, then, fails, as Adam says; human reason has never produced anything permanent (*Par.* XXVI). Beatrice has answers to all questions, though lacking Virgil's classical knowledge, she has perfect intellect and can describe things about God. Dante learns she has seen the face of God, where all questions end (*Par.* XXIX).

Here too, Bernard condemns theologians and philosophers who use defective reasoning to explain matters of Heaven, and in the grip of hubris continue to elaborate on ideas full of error. In contrast, Dante describes Heaven as "pure light," and the "light of the intellect," while also "filled with love" in *Paradiso* XXX. Right intellect and Bernard's fourth stage of pure love of God seem to have another interrelationship similar to that of grace and merit. Grace always trumps human reason, though in the final canto, when Dante sees God's face, he attempts description using human reason's highest form on earth in his time: Aristotelian categories of substance, accidents, and dispositions. He

finds words to say these coalesce in God, yet he notes this way of explaining really is rudimentary. Here toward the end of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante humbly expresses his lack of words, in contrast to his proud boasting at the early stages of his journey. Primal love transcends reason, and Dante must receive light from Love to understand the Trinity.

The final portion of section two reinforces the doctrine of predestination. Bernard explains the differing modes of grace appropriate to each historical era. In early centuries, faith and innocence sufficed for salvation, the covenant of Moses requires circumcision for salvation, and the age of grace requires baptism. Heavenly matters prove difficult for human reason.

Section three is about the face of Mary and other faithful souls in the rose. Nothing Dante has seen to this point resembles God so. As the queen mother and empress of Heaven, closest to God, Mary represents the greatest conduit of grace. Because Bernard contemplates Mary, he can explain heavenly things to Dante. When Dante wants to apprehend for himself by seeing God's face, Bernard must first direct him to Mary. The great angel Gabriel sings her praises, echoing his biblical greeting to her that she is "full of grace."

In the rose, Dante sees other patricians of the empire: to Mary's left sits Adam and to her right rests Peter. Again, grace and merit work in harmony here, since Adam entered Heaven purely through grace, while Peter took action spreading the gospel in faith, but also needed grace. To Peter's right is John the Evangelist, who received Mary as his own Mother at the cross. Moses sits next to Adam, another of those from before the historical incarnation. Across the rose, next to John the Baptist, Anna, the mother of Mary, and St.

Lucia reside. Here Adam and Peter appear as the two roots of the rose, or the roots of Heaven: Adam caused the fall, while Peter, who first proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God, received the keys to further grace's spread.

Significantly, Dante employs an important metaphor, or type, that of the bride of Christ. The bride imagery causes the reader to see all in the Church, on earth, in Heaven, and in the rose intimately connected with Christ as his bride. Though hierarchy exists in the rose, those in the Church enjoy equality. Another seeming contradiction appears that, on some level beyond human reason, reconciles in Heaven. Just as pure intellect describes the light of Heaven, while at the same time heavenly things outrank intellect, and just as grace surpasses merit, yet merit must accompany grace, Heaven exalts those in the rose, yet the whole Church is Christ's Bride, living in the Empyrean, manifesting diversely at differing levels. Throughout the *Divine Comedy*, these seeming contradictions finally appear as no contradictions at all, when viewed through the primal love described by Bernard in *On Loving God*. Hence, Dante chooses Bernard for the traveler's final leg of the journey. Dante must have had more confidence in Bernard's capacities than St. Bernard had in himself on earth. Concerning the fourth stage of love in *On Loving God* XV, he writes, "I know not whether it would be possible to make further progress in this life to that fourth degree and perfect condition...let any who have attained it so far bear record; I confess it seems beyond my powers" (XV).

Finally, section three inspires the question, why did the author employ a rose as the heavenly, transcendent image? Perhaps the medieval courtly love poetry known as the"romance of the rose" had something to do with the choice of the rose as the saints'

Empyrean seat. The reader may question why Dante chose any recognizable and concrete image at all. All of *Paradiso* incandesces with various degrees of brightness. It lacks Inferno's tangible, visual, pungent, and physically present images. As mentioned before, only Jesus and Mary have physical bodies in Heaven: all the other souls are pure light, pending the resurrection. Yet, the rose represents a tangible image with physicality. According to Daniel Sargent in *Dante and Thomism*, Dante nods to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas by seeing Heaven communicated through the senses. A rose can be dissected, analyzed, and categorized (Sargent 263). Not all ineffable to human reason, though the most important understandings of Heaven are ineffable, the rose permits understanding.

The fourth and last section is brief. Time brings sleep to the traveler, for he still has his body and it still has its earthly weaknesses. This reminds the reader Dante doesn't reside in Heaven yet, and must receive sufficient grace to see it. It also may cause the reader to wonder if Dante will ultimately make it there as his own real eternal end, and may prompt some self-reflection in the reader, who may identify with Dante. Finally, as Dante rests before turning to the primal love, he hears he must request grace of the one full of grace, the Queen of Heaven and the Mother of the Primal Love, to behold God's face. This prepares him to hear the prayer to Mary by Bernard in the final canto, which, when answered, will allow Dante to see the primal love, so that he may reach the ultimate goal of life, perfect love of God. Thus, faith and Aristotelian, classical reason can operate independently, but perfect reason and perfect faith are interrelated and inseparable in Dante's scheme. In fact, when Dante sees the face of God, he uses the best form of

communication available to him to convey the image. He uses the language of Aristotle, explaining the vision in terms of "substances, accidents and dispositions" (*Par.* XXXIII). What is gathered on earth is scattered in Heaven, according to the vision described. Yet, he also notes that this Aristotelian logic, though state-of-the-art on earth for Dante's contemporaries, appears quite rudimentary in Heaven. Again, though the Empyrean manifests entirely as light, as "pure light of the intellect," the vision appears concrete. In concentric circles, in physical form, Dante sees a flash of a human face (*Par.* XXX, *Par.* XXXIII). In it appears Christ Incarnate, fully accessible to the senses amidst an effusion of ether-like, light-filled images, the only other concrete image in Dante's Heaven besides the rose.

But Aristotle remains in limbo, the outer limit of Hell. For Heaven requires faith, aided by classical Aristotelian reason. The two cohere; each has its place according to the will of God. To ignore this is to be like Aristotle, Socrates or Virgil: intelligent, accomplished, and ultimately lost. Forever. At the same time, to comprehend the rose and God's face, one must have use of the senses; Dante retains his body throughout his journey. This is Dante's cosmic vision: a good Aristotelian, all causes reach their logical conclusion, yet love manifests the first cause.

Thus, people only reach the beatific vision, the transcendent good, entirely because of God's grace, through the gifts of faith and reason, accessed by love. God unifies all these things; to Dante and the medieval Christians, God reigns as the uncreated source of the universe and all in it, while to Aeschylus, the earth generates the Olympian gods and all that exists.

"Give joy in return for joy, one common will for love…"

—Aeschylus (Eum. 663-664)

Persuasion in Aeschylus and Love in Dante appear divine. In the *Orestia* and in the *Divine Comedy,* Persuasion and divine Love each connect the ideal and real for society. While in Dante divine love preexists, creates and provides ultimate truth for society, in Aeschylus, humans wield persuasion, born of necessity. Society creates the "gods" in their own image and the gods can change. In Aeschylus, the universe provides no link between supposed ideal and concrete realities; in fact, ideal reality does not exist because truth does not preexist society; society must fashion that too. In early classical Athens, Aeschylus honors tradition by giving voice to those who believe the gods do reflect ideal truths such as justice, but events in the *Orestia* show such belief as mere fantasy. In so doing, Aeschylus also acknowledges the two philosophical traditions of Parmenides and Leucippus, the abstract monists who deny physical reality for pure abstraction and the atomists who deny ideal truth for a formless reality devoid of purpose, right or wrong. Assuming a world in which ideal and real can't coexist, Aeschylus exhorts Athenians to create their own brave new world, to fashion a just system and become the gods of the civilized world. Persuasion may be divine, but people must harness its power.

Dante's Aristotelian synthesis provides a more hopeful outlook. Dante proposes society embrace the real and the ideal because an eternal God created both and reconciles them. Humanity's creator and redeemer is also Love with a human face. Unlike Aeschylus's Persuasion, Dante's divine Love emanates and preexists from far beyond

human scope, yet embraces people and allows them also to love. So, humanity must neither passively contemplate an abstract *logos* alone nor scurry about crafting its own universes alone; in an Aristotelian synthesis, everyone can love, yet love reigns supreme over everyone. Society should never attempt to bypass one for the other or deny one or the other, since to do so would result in great peril. The eternal God himself reflects particularity in the trinity, yet the particulars cohere in one eternal truth; out of love, truth descends to the concrete, the particular, unlike the the Greek gods Aeschylus presents as false. As Paul, whom Dante refers to as the Apostle, notes, divinity "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (*The Bible* (NIV) Phil. 2:6-7). This essential belief propelled medieval Europeans to great achievements in the sciences and humanities because it gave credence to the Socratic idea of a unified abstract *Logos* creating physical reality, with the two being intimately connected in love, in the Christian view. Socrates's affirmation, seconded by Plato and Aristotle, that ideal truth can be understood and utilized through the human capacity for reason, made sense to Aquinas and the medieval Christians, as it helped explain the Trinity, just as it made sense to classical Jewish and Islamic civilizations' monotheism. The additional Christian view that God is also Love provides a link, though, between the ideal and the real so that individuals coexist with both sides of the one universe, the ideal and the real. Still, they are not really "sides," but more like dimensions of one reality.

As much as classical reason resonates throughout the *Divine Comedy,* love's supremacy far outweighs reason's respect. Figures known for faith and love alone, like St. Francis, appear in Heaven, while figures known only for reason don't. Great classical philosophers exist in limbo, though without love, in the first circle of Hell. In Cantos IX and X of *Inferno,* however, a Greek philosopher appears in the circle of burning, entombed heretics. Why did Dante include Epicurus among the heretics, or Christians who refute some church doctrines, and not limbo with the other pagan philosophers?

Intellectually, Epicurus descended from the atomists. He accepted no order in the universe and taught that atoms in a void comprise all the physical world, including human beings. Upon death, the atoms separate and reassemble as something else. The person ceases to exist; there is no immortal soul. Absent an ordered universe, the Epicureans propose pain and pleasure should be the only measures of human action. Perhaps Dante counts Epicurus as a heretic because he had available the Socratic idea, systematized by Plato and Aristotle, that accepted an unseen universal order along with the reality of the physical world, but in part rejected the idea. Interestingly, in the same circle of Hell, Dante meets two figures known to be Cathars, who opposed the church's worldliness and the clergy's extravagant living. Dante does not name them as Cathars, but they are both actual historical figures Dante knew from Florence and were both part of that sect. Interestingly, Cathars and Epicureans each oppose exactly what the other affirms. Cathars deny any goodness in matter, including human physicality, and they resemble Parmenides in their single immaterial idea of being. Dante may have respected them for their sincerity, so did not name them, but another possibility exists.

Perhaps Dante equates Epicureans and Cathars because they both deny one aspect of reality, one aspect of God's creation. As mentioned before, the monist tradition asserts all matter is an illusion, like a bad dream, while atomists deny any order in the universe. At both extremes, all language and communication must cease. To an atomist or Epicurean, since there exist no standards or order in the universe, words can't have standard meanings; each individual constructs meaning and one person does not know if another shares the same idea about the words they use. On the other end of the spectrum, because nothing physical actually exists, to name anything makes no sense. Nothing exists in distinction from anything else, so what would words signify? In the end, by refusing to accept one part of reality, both the Epicureans and the Cathars refuse to engage and communicate in the world. In life each denied the other's existence, yet they must spend eternity together. What worse punishment could there be than to suffer eternally alongside others who deny the only reality one accepts? As the rule of *contrapasso* demands: the punishment gives the sinners the only thing in life they desired, and only that thing, for eternity. In denying God could enter the physical world, the Cathars also denied the incarnation and resurrection, Christianity's two fundamental doctrines.

When Dante meets Farinata, a Florentine Ghibelline and known Cathar burning in his tomb, Farinata rises up out of the tomb: a representation of what he denied (*Inf*. X). Significantly, no Waldensians appear in Dante's work. The Waldensians were a similarly heretical group. Like the Cathars, they shunned worldly excess, but they did not go so far as to say God would not enter matter (251 Johnson). While they denied God's grace in

sacraments and relics, the Waldensians affirmed Jesus's full humanity and full divinity and believed in the incarnation and resurrection. Dante would have been just as familiar with the Waldensians as the Cathars, yet chose only the Cathars who divided God's creation in half, denying one half, for Hell.

The Furies appear here just outside Dante's circle of heretics. Virgil has Dante cover his eyes when the Furies want him to look at Medusa, and Dante warns those of "sturdy intellect" to observe a hidden teaching; Virgil asks him to look with his "optic nerve" (*Inf.* II). These are not Aeschylus's Eumenides; Dante's Furies never give an inch to those against whom they hold a grudge. Dante includes them here because, just like Aeschylus's Furies before Athena's persuasion, they do uphold truth, but only a part. Like the Cathars and the Epicureans in Dante's scheme, they turn a blind eye to one side of the story; they uphold only one side of the truth. The Furies' causes are just. They may even love their causes as much as some inhabitants of Dante's Heaven love theirs, but the Furies only love their own causes and ignore all others, so they can't be in Heaven. Yet, they are too single-mindedly vigilant for distraction by lust, gluttony or greed. They don't lie, so they are not with the fraudulent in deeper Hell. They don't betray a friend or benefactor, so they don't appear in yet deeper Hell. They simply uphold only one side of the truth, right as it may be; they tell half truths. It seems several residents and visitors in Aeschylus's Argos may belong in Dante's Hell, despite their self-righteousness. If Aeschylus's cosmos reflects atomism, perhaps he might have ended up in Dante's Hell too.

In the end, Aeschylus presents two seemingly contradictory possibilities, that there is one order in the universe directing all action, or that there is free action within a chaotic universe. He sees no reconciliation between the two as Dante does. Dante's unity of grace and merit may limit humanity's freedom to an extent, yet Aeschylus's total freedom may lead to humanity choosing cooperation or mutual destruction.

Chapter Three: The Search for the Good City in the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy*

"...rejoice in destined wealth, rejoice Athena's people."

—Aeschylus (Eum. 1005-1006)

On their journeys to sublime transcendence and light, each hero consciously and strenuously throws off what the Athenians called "hubris" and the medieval Christians called "pride" and, as a result, their journeys succeed. Ancient Greece and medieval Christian society universally condemned hubris or pride as "arch-sins," though Greeks did not have the category "sin," as mentioned before; to the Greeks, hubris "misses the mark." Inextricably linked, personal salvation accompanies a community-wide transformation too, because personal purification necessitates relationship.

Both the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy* share a three part structure for their heroes' journeys. In the first parts, both *Agamemnon* and *Inferno* introduce the heroes as stuck, nature punishing, and the characters subscribing to harsh laws and rules by which they must live. In the trilogies' middle sections, *Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio* serve as crucibles, forcing the heroes to see themselves as part of a degenerating world, and they want escape. Through trial, both Orestes and the traveller Dante confront contradictions

they had come to accept in disordered Argos or Hell. Nature itself begins to regenerate in both *Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio*. Experiencing the disorder of the introductory parts, in the second parts, they willingly undergo trial because they recognize the contradictions, but really they are very much at home with them. Only after their ordeals do they truly see the wrong in the Argive palace or in Hell. Finally in the third parts, *Eumenides* and *Paradiso*, guides show the heroes the false "rules" of Bronze Age Argos and Hell. In the final sections of both works, nature emerges stunningly beautiful and fully regenerate, helpful and supportive. Human redemption implies nature's restoration, too. Harmonious, thoroughly reconciled communities, full of natural wonder, emerge in the *Eumenides* and *Paradiso*. With sporting imagery throughout the trilogies culminating in triumphant crownings for both heroes, Orestes and Dante emerge victorious.

Both trilogies turn on a trial. The Furies won't let Orestes go free without a legal reason to do so; the gods could not provide it but the city of Athens could. Dante wants to climb the mountain of Purgatory on his own, but his sins block his way, represented by the three beasts of the *Inferno's* opening. In order to ascend, he must descend and learn from those who failed the journey. He must learn how he resembles many of the figures in Hell; he must learn what caused them to fall in order to rid himself of the same faults. He can't make purification's ascent without those relationships, though one sided, and he can't commune with heavenly residents until the last "p," symbolizing his sin, fades from his forehead. Both Orestes and Dante experience personal triumph through relationship; no one saves himself alone. In Dante's Heaven, only God's grace saves, but the order of God's creation demands grace be received through others. Salvation requires relationship

because one can't achieve perfect happiness without Persuasion in Athens and Love in the heavenly city. Both of these require more than one person. People persuade or love other people; city implies community.

As the cosmic order demands relationship, each traveller has just the right guides. The guides, at first, capitalize on the fears and flaws of their charges because no positive way will work; through pride, both charges have rendered themselves lost. Early on, Orestes and Dante, mired in sin, fear and guilt, will only take the hard road if they have to, so they each must escape from something. For Orestes, it's the Furies themselves who serve as unwanted guides at the start, causing Orestes to run to Apollo and then Athena. In Dante's case, he enjoys equating himself with a classical literary giant like Virgil; he's willing to listen to Virgil, as Lucia and Beatrice knew. Just as the Furies urge Orestes on to Athena, Virgil encourages Dante until Beatrice takes over.

Aeschylus's Furies seem strange guides to fulfillment. To the powerful, the disenfranchised's righteous rage appears unattractive and frightening. Like Athena, the Furies use persuasion, though they persuade with fear. Depending on their charge's level of hubris, they seem disgusting, even revolting. Just as love made Dante's Hell, but those dwelling there suffer because they refuse selfless love, Aeschylus's Furies embody persuasion but it manifests as fearsome because those they pursue refuse to hear another's side. Once each hero "suffers into truth," he can experience love as pleasing or persuasion as productive. Suffering into truth involves descent into the absolute inversion of love or persuasion in a harmonious community. In Dante, the city of "Dis," or deepest

Hell, negates and even mocks all love. Aeschylus's "Dis" is a Bronze Age palace in the *Orestia's* first play, *Agamemnon*.

Agamemnon and Inferno: The Good City's Foils

"*Abandon every hope, who enter here.*"

—Dante (Inf. III 9)

In *Agamemnon*, characters use persuasion to their own advantage, which drives them onward; yet, being divine, persuasion metes out swift punishment, producing only more suffering. Just as characters in Dante's Hell experience divine love as suffering, in Aeschylus's Argos persuasion ruins evil plans, treading down those who abuse it. The chorus of old men know Persuasion's double-edge sword simultaneously advances justice and punishes wrong:

> Bastions of wealth
> are no defense for the man
> who treads the grand altar of Justice
> down and out of sight.
> Persuasion, maddening child of Ruin
> overpowers him—Ruin plans it all.
> And the wound will smoulder on,
> there is no cure. (383-390)

The entrance sign Dante reads as he begins the visit to Hell announces a similar rule:

> Through me the way to the eternal pain,
> Through me the way that runs among the lost.
> Justice urged on my high Artificer;

My maker was divine authority,

The highest wisdom, and the primal love. (*Inf.* III 2-6)

Love in the *Divine Comedy's* cosmology works the same as Persuasion in the *Orestia's*. In the inverted cities of the Argive palace and Inferno, inhabitants experience Persuasion or Love as divine, indomitable, perpetual and pervasive. In these inverted cities, characters stuck inside themselves, gazing only inward, feel the irresistible pull of love or persuasion that demands they look outward in relationship with those around them. Refusing to give up the inward gaze, these characters doggedly resist love or persuasion, requiring all their strength, causing themselves tremendous pain, as lack of relationship causes more pain. Only focusing on themselves, they can't see their own circumstances, so they blame it all on those who wrong them and never move from casting blame. Just as God's presence passing by would have killed Moses unless he hid in a cleft rock, love and persuasion are beyond the strength of these characters. Because they don't cooperate with either, only resist it, it destroys them.

Significantly, when cleft rock appears in Hell, Virgil hypothesizes its cause:

but if I reason rightly, it was just

before the coming of the One who took

from Dis the highest circle's splendid spoils

that, on all sides, the steep and filthy valley

had trembled so, I thought the universe

felt love (by which, as some believe, the world

has often been converted into chaos). (*Inf.* XII 37-43)

Virgil can't understand love completely; he lacks a heavenly inhabitant's grace. He does sense, though, that love caused the rock to break, possibly when Jesus harrowed Hell. John Sinclair notes that in *Inferno* Virgil refers to Empedocles's ideas(162). Since reason is Virgil's only access to love, he relies on his knowledge for explanation. Absent the grace of baptism, he too considers love a force powerful enough to destroy. Maybe echoing opinions of his classical cohabitants in limbo, Virgil surmises that those who don't know Jesus think that what Christians call the atonement actually threw the world into chaos. Only a heavenly guide can explain to Dante love's true nature, though. Empedocles thought tension between love and strife order the world; he postulated when love outweighs strife, chaos results. Love's effect in Hell manifests as painful and destructive. Yet, in Purgatory, the cleft in the rock aids climbers (*Purg*. X). The cleft has icons carved into it as emblems of humility, kindness, and self-sacrifice; rather than being destructive as experienced in Hell, here the cleft aids repentance by loving example. Love or persuasion operates in all three parts of each work, though its effects differ depending on the attitudes of the characters.

Each inverted city exists in relationship through love or persuasion. When characters turn in on themselves, rejecting love or persuasion, they suffer like fish out of water. Only an outsider can fully comprehend this. The old men of Argos, Virgil, and a physical sign must explain, because none of the real inhabitants of the inverted cities understands. Of the people in Hell, Virgil characterizes the sad inhabitants. Strangely,

individuals in both *Inferno* and *Agamemnon* fit Virgil's description: "miserable people… who have lost the good of the intellect" (*Inf.* III 16).

Characters in both cities believe they understand reality, but they only understand their own rage; they continually relive the wrong that drives them. Because Clytemnestra only thinks of revenge for her daughter, she tells Agamemnon she had to banish their son Orestes, but she really speaks of her daughter's murder, "by all rights our child should be here…Orestes. You seem startled…our child is gone. That is my defense and it is true" (*Ag*. 867-877). Because she only focuses on revenge, she continually double-speaks, pretending to be the dutiful wife and queen, yet always betraying her true motivations. She tempts Agamemnon to walk on royal tapestries, but she also means to say she will murder him: "Come to me now, my dearest, down from the car of war, but never set the foot that stamped out Troy on earth again, my great one" (*Ag*. 898-899). After the murder, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, absent all perspective, forget that the curse of the house now must come down on them. Clytemnestra remonstrates, "no more, my dearest, no more grief. We have too much to reap right here, our mighty harvest of despair…no bloodshed now" (*Ag*. 686-690). Aegisthus claims, "I was a marked man, his enemy for ages," as if he's no longer marked for death (*Ag*. 1668). Both blinded by their own rage, neither sees the rule "the one who acts must suffer" as the chorus does. The chorus, however, knows exactly what will happen next: "Orestes—if he still sees the light of day, bring him home, good Fates, home to kill this pair at last" (*Ag*. 1678-1680).

Similarly, as Virgil observes, in Hell, figures don't understand their plight; they give themselves completely to the selfish acts that condemn them, unable to see beyond

their rage. Turned inward to such an extent, they continually repeat the same action, stuck in place. Like Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, the very object of their desire is the thing that tortures them. In the eighth circle of *Inferno,* clerics, who only held church office to seem honorable in their priestly garb, infinitely process going nowhere, with gilded lead robes weighing them down; the finery they prized now tortures them (*Inf.* XXIII). Mohammed, whom Dante condemns as a divider, appears split open down the length of his torso (*Inf.* XXVIII). Given over to their utmost desire without limit, their understanding obscures. The heretic Farinata, noticing Dante's Florentine accent, wants to know where his family comes from. Still consumed with his venerable old lineage even in Hell, Farinata wants to trump Dante socially. In the same way, Agamemnon, who can't see his wife's fury, proudly bragging his royal line is lion-like, marches to his death:

> First, I salute my Argos and my gods,
> my accomplices who brought me home and won…
> The beast of Argos…
> crashing through
> their walls our bloody lion lapped its fill
> gorging on the blood of kings…
> now I go to my father's house. (*Ag*. 795-837)

Yet, forevermore, Farinata hails from Hell, the least illustrious address, while Dante, with his upstart, "new money" name, still may call high Heaven home. Here the reader learns something else about the loss of the intellect for those in Hell. Farinata wants to know about his son and about how the Ghibellines, his party, fare ruling

Florence. Dante must inform him his son is dead and the Geulphs, Dante's party, now reign. Farinata one-ups Dante with news from the future: the Geulphs will split and Dante's side will lose. In fact, Dante will be exiled. In Hell, they only know the past and future, never the present moment; like Agamemnon, they're all blind to present circumstances. But as the future turns into the past, by the end of time those in Hell will lose all awareness, perpetually wallowing in the past (*Inf.* X).

Like the chorus in *Agamemnon*, Dante as observer shares some similar characteristics with those in the inverted city, while he's there. Dante and the chorus don't simply serve as objective narrators, they need enlightening too. Often Virgil must direct his attention, as in Canto X, so Dante doesn't miss a lesson. Similarly in *Agamemnon*, the chorus can't understand Cassandra's retelling of the Atreus past, even though they know the story well. True, some of what she says is prophecy and Apollo rendered her unbelievable; yet the chorus doesn't recognize past events as they are, either. She reminds them of Thyestes's feast, in which Agamemnon's father fed Aegisthus's father his own children's flesh,"their flesh charred, the father gorging on their parts" (*Ag*. 1097). The chorus leader laments, "I can't read these signs" (1104). When Dante meets Paolo and Francesca in Canto V, he's overcome by their story. The pair ended up in an adulterous affair while they read love poetry, the very kind of poetry Dante writes: "One day to pass the time away, we read of Lancelot—how love had overcome him. We were alone…that day we read no more" (*Inf.* V 127 and 136). They were caught in the act of adultery by Francesca's husband and he killed them; thus they ended up damned.

About this pair Virgil questioned Dante, “What are you thinking?” (109). He wanted Dante to learn something here. It seems he did, “and while one spirit said these words to me, the other wept, so that—because of pity—I fainted, as if I had my death” (139). In the previous canto, his guide introduces Dante to the great classical poets, where Virgil regularly resides. He meets Homer, “the consummate poet,” Horace, Ovid and Lucan (*Inf*. IV 88). Dante fawns:

> Because each of these spirits shares with me
> the name called out before by the lone voice,
> they welcome me—and, doing that, do well…
> Soon after they had talked a while together,
> they turned to me, saluting cordially;
> and having witnessed this, my master smiled;
> and even greater honor then was mine,
> for they invited me to join their ranks—
> I was the sixth among such intellects.
> So did we move along and toward the light,
> talking of things about which silence here
> is just as seemly as our speech was there. (*Inf*. IV 88-93 and 97-105)

No more evidence need prove Dante’s esteem for his own poetic achievements at the start of his journey. Perhaps the reason Virgil looked so pale and sorrowful was not only his pity for the unbaptized with merit, but also that Dante, being baptized, should recognize in himself his excessive pride. He does not; Dante revels in ranking sixth, by his own

estimation, among such great intellects; he gushes over his conversations with them, too lofty to waste on those less intelligent and accomplished: the common readers of the *Divine Comedy*. Hearing what poetry like his did for Paolo and Francesca, though, immediately after relishing his own greatness as a poet, shocks Dante near-dead. He needs this journey. He hasn't been granted it because of his intellect, as Farinata supposes. Dante is in danger of ending up in Hell himself, being lost "in a dark wood," as John Sinclair translates the opening canto (*Inf*. I 3).

Similarly, Orestes needs his journey, or else he'll end up like his mother, perpetuating the curse of Atreus's house. The *Orestia* and *Divine Comedy* don't serve merely as studies in contrast between the inverted city and the good city, though they do that too. The works' heroes must struggle their way out of the inverted cities, acknowledging and purging their own faults. Otherwise, they can't arrive at the good city, strong enough to thrive in the elevated cosmic atmosphere of classical Athens or high Heaven.

In depth, the sublimity of Aeschylus's Athens and Dante's Heaven matches the depravity of *Agamemnon's* palace and *Inferno's* Hell. Just before entering Dis, deepest Hell, Virgil explains that crimes against nature belong here. The fraudulent and divisive faring worse than the violent confused Dante again, showing his need for more purification. Fraud misuses the creation in some way. Virgil scolds Dante; he should have learned more by this point and needs reminders on the philosophy of ethics. Usurers find their place here, to Dante's astonishment, because they don't earn their living from the creation, but gamble on other's misfortune. Likewise, in *Agamemnon*, characters use

nature to their own advantage, wanting to control it. Clytemnestra recounts how she used fire to turn the landscape between Troy and Argos into her personal message box, exclaiming, "I ordained it all" (313). Both the Argive palace and Dante's Hell see worse, though. The chorus of elders likens Troy's destruction to an unmerciful attack on a pregnant hare, "a mother bursting with unborn young—the babies spilling, quick burst of blood—cut off the race just dashing into life!" (*Ag*. 122-124). In both works, human depravity patterns, as well as causes, natural undoing.

By destroying Troy, Agamemnon and his brother interrupt the course of nature. But in this house, the unnatural occurs all too often. The Atreides' crime reverberates always, a constant reminder, casting darkness throughout the house. In the play's opening line, the watchman cries, "set me free from all the pain," setting the tone (*Ag*. 1). The retelling of another father, Atreus's son, sacrificing his own daughter to "charm the winds of Thrace" sickens the soul. It starts with the cry of a child for her parent, which is supposed to warm the heart with an image of a loving parent embracing his child, protecting his child, comforting his child, not as this story is told:

> Her father called his henchmen on,
>
> on with a prayer,
>
> 'Hoist her over the altar
>
> like a yearling, give it all your strength!
>
> She's fainting—lift her…
>
> here, gag her hard, a sound will curse the house. (*Ag*. 227-236)

The idea that her cry would curse the house, not the act of a father murdering his own daughter, outrages all that is normal and decent. It mocks the sacred, religious and familial, as does Clytemnestra's sacrifices to the gods for success in murder. Dante's Hell presents the same, with an allusion to another father cannibalizing his own children. Dante's Hell classifies treachery against a trusted or loved one deep inside the city of Dis, the ninth circle; as in Atreus's palace, so Dante describes it such that the language containing "mama" and "papa" can't be used here (*Inf*. XXXII). Dante observes two frozen together, one gnawing on the other's head or brain (*Inf*. XXXII). Both of them are traitors to their country. They betrayed their country together, and then one, Archbishop Ruggieri, turned the city against the other, Count Ugolino. Imprisoned with his children, the door was locked and they all starved to death. Ugolino recounts how his children cried for their father to eat their flesh, then died. He says his grief was overcome by his hunger; some interpret the scene as Ugolino cannibalizing his children (*Inf*. XXXIII). At the bottom of Hell, at the center of the earth, Lucifer dwells, also devouring human beings, Judas, Brutus and Cassius, betrayers of Jesus and Caesar. They subsist unmoved in every way; encased in ice. Those in Hell don't benefit from the cleft in the rock, a poetic expression of the crucifixion simultaneously destroying death and causing a great earthquake. In *Inferno*, the cleft breaks ground throughout Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, yet Hell's residents remain paralyzed, frozen in their sin, just as Clytemnestra and Agamemnon remain unmoved in their righteous rage.

The watchman's opening lines in *Agamemnon* mention the stars, as if everything exists ordered under them normally, because he knows nothing different. The beauty of

nature can't be seen in Dante's Hell, though; not until Dante leaves does he see the stars. The reader knows from the beginning that Dante has already seen Heaven when he begins to recount the journey through Hell.

An important transformation happens by the time Dante descends into Dis; he sees corruption for what it is and he even thinks to himself his own party has a hand in it as much as others, deserving loss; he acknowledges Florence, too, an inverted city. In fact, the damned recognize it as "the great city" *(Inf*. XXVI 1-6 and 10-12, XXIII 94-96). It was Dante who called it that half way through Hell, but before he leaves, he understands its corruption and his part in it. In another notable change before he departs Hell, Dante halts his curiosity in shame, finds the falsifier's words disgusting and turns away (*Inf*. XXX 136-138). He finally questions his own sins, so he's ready for purification. As St. Francis hears when he tries to retrieve a friar from Hell, it can't be done without final repentance (XXVII 112-119). Orestes has a similar change just before the second play.

Libation Bearers and *Purgatorio*: The Hard Road to the Good City

"*…he cleft the rock, and waters welled forth*."

—*The Bible* Jer. 21

As the Israelites escaping Egypt's enslavement endured the wilderness in order to lose their taste for Egyptian finery, so Dante and Orestes must tour a kind of wilderness. More purposeful than in *Agamemnon* or *Inferno,* their midway journeys prove arduous, yet productive. By the end of these two midpoints, the characters have direction rather than wander lost. While utter darkness pervades the inverted cites and bright light infuses the good, at their midpoints, the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy* alternate between sporadic incandescence and shadow. Scholars note the ephemeral tenuousness of both mid-pieces. Darkness punctuated with faint glints of light pervades *Libation Bearers:*

> The action of the Choephoroi, in terms of the imagery of light and darkness, is a struggle to bring light back to the darkened house of Atreus. A hateful, sunless gloom has shrouded the house. The shadowy chariot of night is driven forth as the avenger enters the house. (Peradatto 391)

Similarly, *Purgatorio* represents a struggle out of the darkness without the despair of Hell and yet without the clear bright light of Heaven. The darkness only begins to cede to hopefulness:

> In the Christian-Platonic sense, Hell is the semblance of reality, and Heaven, reality itself; Purgatory is the memory of the one and the anticipation of the other, an ephemeral experience totally different from the well defined error of

> the first and the clear truth of the third canticle. It is a world of shadows and images, a hazy autumn day. (Paolucci 2)

Orestes and Dante use the shadow points as springboards for self-reflection, making all the difference between them and the darkness-entrapped inverted city dwellers. As those in Dante's Purgatory relinquish disordered love, yet love nonetheless, Orestes reexamines his actions, as pure as his intentions may have been. Of all the *Orestia*'s human characters, only Orestes stops and takes a look around, finding himself fooled by Olympians and wrong. Dante sees anew his beloved poetry and his admired skill, still committed to his art, yet with full knowledge of his once excessive pride. Like other characters in Purgatory and as Orestes, Dante exchanges what he privileges, self-defense, for truth. They willingly suffer, yet not forever as those whose lot remains in Argos or Dis do. Because they accept it, this suffering has a purpose and will end in peace. Each work thus invites viewers or readers to take a similar journey, no matter the difficulty, for the same peaceful result. Throughout both journeys the cosmos sets the stage; no action has implications divorced from cosmic forces, nature, personal salvation or just government; all is interconnected.

As the settings for the shadow-worlds tinged with fleeting lights, Aeschylus chooses Agamemnon's tomb while Dante envisions Purgatory. In the *Libation Bearers,* as Orestes arrives to dutifully honor his father's grave*,* the chorus sets the tone of alternating darkness and light:

> But Justice waits and turns the scales:
>
> a sudden blow for some at dawn,

for some in the no man's land of dusk

her torments grow with time,

and the lethal night takes others. (61-65)

As Dante climbs the purgatorial landscape, an earthly mountain rising toward Heaven, he nears more and more creation before the fall. After leaving deepest Hell's utter darkness and cold, Dante's first glimpse of the mountain's atmosphere consoles him:

The gentle hue of oriental sapphire

in which the sky's serenity was steeped—

its aspect pure as far as the horizon—

brought back my joy in seeing just as soon

as I had left behind the air of death

that had afflicted both my sight and breast. (*Purg*. I 13-18)

How did Dante envision the creation before the fall of Adam and Eve? Similarly, what role does the natural landscape play as Orestes's ordeal proceeds? Dante and Orestes come to life in *Purgatorio* and the midpoints of the *Orestia,* and so do the natural elements and landscapes surrounding them. Often expressed through vivid natural depictions, each work's cosmic reach expands at these midpoints.

In the *Libation Bearers*, nature contends against Electra and Orestes by punishing them. In *Purgatorio*, nature proves an arduous climb, but does not punish. In the *Orestia*, nature seems to animate the pent up energies in the Atreides' family's every evil act and it threatens to thrash Orestes and Electra all the more; here Electra likens her near-entrapment in the house to storms and floods:

It's sweeping over me too-- anguish like a breaker--

a sword ripping through my heart!

Tears come like the winter rains that flood the gates--

can't hold them back, when I see this lock of hair. (*L.B*. 185-189)

Similarly, the *Libation Bearers'*s characters embody nature, ever imminent, ever threatening:

Here once more, for the third time,

the tempest in the race has struck

the house of kings and run its course. (*L.B*. 150-154)

Often nature embodies the gods, as Orestes says of Apollo:

I can still hear the god --

a high voice ringing with winters of disaster. (*L.B.* 275-276)

The chorus gives homage to the menacing, chaos-breeding mother goddess, whom they see as earth and nature in one:

Marvels, the Earth breeds many marvels,

terrible marvels overwhelm us.

The heaving arms of the sea embrace and swarm

with savage life. And high in the no man's land of night

torches hang like swords. The hawk on the wing,

the beast astride the fields

can tell of the whirlwind's fury roaring strong. (*L.B*. 572-578)

Overwhelmingly, nature conspires against Electra and Orestes. Yet, the themes of rebirth, regeneration and healing emerge slowly out of the shadows through the midpoints of both pieces, also seen through nature. One small glimmer of light shines through the clouds here:

> We call on the gods, and the gods well know
> what storms torment us, sailors whirled to nothing.
> But if we are to live and reach the haven,
> one small seed could grow a mighty tree. (*L. B*. 201-205)

Libation Bearers does not see nature completely renewed, though; that only happens in *Eumenides*. It seems that light and salvation come fully only at the end of *Eumenides*, whereas it begins in *Purgatorio*, though tainted and not yet perfect as in *Paradiso*. Interestingly, throughout the first half of *Eumenides,* nature hardly appears; the discussions among Orestes, Apollo, Athena and the Furies exist, it seems, on some elevated plane. Though the Furies appeal to Earth as a goddess, near constant references to nature in *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers* cease in *Eumenides,* until Athena succeeds in persuading the Furies to mercy.

In contrast, nature appears beautiful and full of life throughout most of *Purgatorio* compared to nature in *Inferno*. Consider the first sunrise Dante sees early in *Purgatorio*:

> …above the shore that I had reached,
> the fair Aurora's white and scarlet cheeks
> were, as Aurora aged, becoming orange. (*Purg.* II 7-9)

Awe-inspiringly beautiful, the sunrise contrasts starkly with natural references in *Inferno*, such as this:

> No ivy ever gripped a tree so fast
>
> as when that horrifying monster clasped
>
> and intertwined the other's limbs with its. (*Inf*. XXV 58-60)

While nature in the *Orestia* storms chaotically or shines with life, sometimes in accord with the gods' whims and sometimes with no rule at all, in *Purgatorio*, nature abides by a strict order. No cosmic entity in the entire *Divine Comedy* strays from one inter-woven system. Even the time in Jerusalem, the location of Inferno's entry, patterns the time at its polar opposite in accord with what appears as the stars' movement; Dante writes, "already the four handmaids of the day were left behind, and at the chariot-pole, the fifth was tilting up the blazing tip" (*Purg*. XXII 118-120). While the Aristotelian-ptolemaic system erred on the position and movement of the Earth relative to the sun, the position of the sun in relation to the Earth did reveal times of day and Dante never lets nature stray from that law.

One may ask, how did he know about the southern cross, the four prominent stars of the southern hemisphere? Only centuries later would European explorers reach that far south. He could have used information that came from the Egyptians, by way of Aristotle, from a time when these stars were visible in the northern hemisphere, or perhaps from Marco Polo's writings (Schildgen 105-106). That awareness of the seeming movement of stars in the sky gave credence to the belief that the world was round. To Dante, the smallest detail must remain true to observable, scientific fact about the universe's order.

If Dante describes the southern hemisphere, it must be with scientific accuracy, as best he could find it. Though personally ignorant of the true landscape of the southern hemisphere, his depiction of time relative to the known hemisphere remains correct. Why include such seemingly extraneous detail throughout the *Divine Comedy* if not to reflect the unity of scientific and spiritual fact? This sums up the natural law of *Purgatorio*:

> The natural is always without error,
> but mental love may choose an evil object
> or err through too much or too little vigor. (*Purg.* XVII 94-96)

People may abuse nature or abandon its laws and experience harsh effects, but natural law remains. In fact, as Dante ascends, once past Purgatory's gate, nature produces no ill effects at all:

> Below this mountain, land and water vapors,
> which follow heat as far as they are able,
> produce their perturbations; to prevent
> them from molesting man placed here, this mountain
> rose up this close to Heaven; from the point
> where its gate locks, it's free of such disturbance. (*Purg*. XXVIII 97-102)

Even before reaching this gate, though, the valley of princes' breathtakingly vibrant beauty bursts forth:

> Gold and fine silver, cochineal, white lead,
> and Indian lychnite, highly polished, bright,
> fresh emerald at the moment it is dampened,

> if placed within that valley, all would be
>
> defeated by the grass and flowers' colors,
>
> just as the lesser gives way to the greater.
>
> And nature there not only was a painter,
>
> but from the sweetness of a thousand odors,
>
> she had derived an unknown, mingled scent. (*Purg.* VII 73-81)

In the *Orestia*, such sublime natural depictions don't appear in *Libation Bearers,* only in *Eumenides'* very end.

Ultimately, as the cosmos bursts forth before the reader's or viewer's eyes, Dante and Orestes work out their freedom alongside nature in full bloom and vigor, mostly life-giving for Dante in *Purgatorio* and only later for Orestes. More than attractive settings for each tale, the same message beckons readers and viewers: literally so in Dante and figuratively in Aeschylus, no worthy trial happens cleanly excised from the physical, natural world—progress is incarnational. Inextricably woven with the individual's and community's story, natural-cosmic depictions reveal the journey's direction and destination; precisely for this reason, the cosmos's order and organization play a major role in the character's journeys. Dante and Orestes travel a difficult road toward freedom for the very reason that the cosmic rules, or lack of rules, make it so. These middle-lands explore the fundamentals of the cosmos and their authors depict nature vividly in each work.

Nature appears even more vivid, and more beautiful, in the last parts of each trilogy, though in *Paradiso* mostly in the planetary and heavenly realm. However, as the

heroes just begin to put together a path toward redemption, nature enables them to take their first steps. Each work assumes a relationship between individuals and nature that demands balance; each work assumes individuals must participate in community. In both works, crucial relationships exist among cosmos, nature, individuals and society. *Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio* seek to balance these relationships in a good society. If there is one question Dante and Aeschylus share in these works, it is "what makes a good society?" Both find answers in the very cosmos itself.

As Dante begins the purgatorial tour, his lack of humility still shows, "to course across more kindly waters now, my talent's little vessel lifts her sails, leaving behind herself a sea so cruel" (*Purg.* 1-3). Sinclair translates it, "the little bark of my wit now lifts her sails." Here Dante doesn't count himself among the greatest philosophers and authors ever known, as he did at the start of the trip through *Inferno;* yet, in both translations (Mandelbaum and Sinclair), a twinge of arrogance remains. Even in Canto I, just in the reference to the four visible stars in the southern hemisphere's sky, nature's power and beauty strikes. No longer underground, the open air and sky beckon, "Heaven appeared to revel in their flames: o northern hemisphere, because you were denied that sight, you are a widower!" (*Purg.* 25-27). New hopefulness resounds.

Yet, equal in importance to hopefulness and beauty, the canto reveals a cosmos with spherical planets and an understanding of movement among them. Though accepting of Aristotle's error that the earth itself does not move, the description of the universe includes the most up to date scientific view. Only in later centuries would the heliocentric view prevail. Equally important, seen as equally scientific, Virgil must explain how souls

who seem to have come from Hell could now appear at the doorstep of Purgatory, and the only satisfactory answer in the cosmos is the one he gives to Purgatory's guide, Cato, that Dante still lives and Virgil is simply guiding him. Later Beatrice would chastise Dante for dwelling too much on science as a purely intellectual pursuit and his talent as his road to fame. She, too, would use scientific and theological explanations but she aims to increase Dante's faith and love. Dante will continue to revel at the cosmos's unity, beauty and scientific precision even in *Paradiso,* but he will know the one goal is love of God.

Just as *Purgatorio's* stars glimmer brightly against the past dark scenery of *Inferno,* in *Libation Bearers* the exile Orestes returns to the house of Atreus as small flashes of light begin to punctuate its darkness. "Look, a company moving towards us. Women, robed in black... so clear in the early light," and, "Electra, I think I see *her* coming, there, my own sister, worn, radiant in her grief," notes Orestes (*L.B.* 12-13, 20). The chorus of Trojan slaves portray it as well: "But Justice waits and turns the scales: a sudden blow for some at dawn, for some in the no man's land of dusk" (*L.B.* 61-63). Aeschylus, too, connects natural, cosmic phenomena with the actions of individuals and communities. Here the slave women taken from Troy after Agamemnon's conquest console themselves in their lot:

> And the blood that Mother Earth consumes
> clots hard, it won't seep through, it breeds revenge
> and frenzy goes through the guilty,
> seething like infection, swarming through the brain.
> For the one who treads a virgin's bed

there is no cure. All the streams of the world,

all channels run into one

to cleanse a man's red hands will swell the bloody tide. (*L.B*. 66-73)

Like Dante in *Purgatorio*, Orestes continues pridefully at the start of *Libation Bearers*: "Apollo will never fail me, no, his tremendous power, his oracle charges me to see this trial through" (271-273). But the road ahead for each character will change them for the better. Key to their growth, each character knows his need. At these midpoints, unlike characters in *Inferno* or *Agamemnon*, they turn to community for answers. In Canto I, Virgil tells Purgatory's guardian that Dante searches for liberty. In Purgatory, souls travel in groups and engage in repentance in small communities. In *Inferno*, characters turn in on themselves alone, constantly agonizing over what transpires on earth for their families, or really for their own names. Those in *Inferno* can see the future, but they know at some point history on earth will end; they will be forever unaware and isolated. Purgatory is different, a way station for repentance, souls in Purgatory have a destination: life in Heaven's community. Similarly, in *Libation Bearers*, Orestes seeks freedom from exile. He doesn't turn in on himself, seeking answers only from within his own anger like Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. Orestes turns outward for answers, to Apollo and his sister. The slave women hold sway with Orestes too. As they reiterate the liberty he seeks, the Trojan women could be speaking in hope that Orestes's freedom may also mean their own:

Agamemnon's house goes down—

all-out disaster now,

or a son ignites the torch of freedom,

wins the throne, the citadel,

the fathers' realms of gold.

The last man on the bench, a challenger

must come to grips with two. Up,

like a young god, Orestes, wrestle—

let it be to win. (*L.B.* 849-856)

Enslaved in their conqueror's house, these Trojan women yearn for freedom, and so does Dante's purgatorial gate-guard. Cato of Utica stands out as one of the few pagans to reside beyond the limits of *Inferno*. The fact that he committed suicide should have earned him a place in Hell, but he intended to achieve freedom: he refused to live under Julius Caesar's dictatorship. He sought liberty, just as the others do in *Purgatorio*. Upon seeing Dante and Virgil, Cato immediately refers to the law of Heaven, thus questioning their entry. He has a long beard and, with reference to law, he evokes the lawgiver Moses who led the Jewish people out of slavery. In Canto II, the penitents sing Psalm 114, which references the biblical exodus, an arduous journey toward freedom (Sinclair, "Purgatorio" 43).

Each author borrows language from athletic contests. In *Purgatorio* and *Libation Bearers*, Dante climbs a majestic, steep mountain and Aeschylus, as noted before, presents Orestes's journey with wrestling imagery. Dante finds the road ahead steep, but discovers that as he ascends, the climb feels more like play or sport rather than danger as it did in *Inferno (Purg.* II 65-66). Yet, when Dante becomes too comfortable, Cato, the

stern guardian of freedom, rebukes him to take the journey more seriously (*Purg*. II 119-120). As Dante notes the sheer vertical ascent and wonders how they will ever make the climb, the gap, or cleft in the rock appears; “we struggled upward through that broken rock, using our hands and feet to climb” (*Purg*. IV 31-33). The same gap that menaced in Inferno, here in Purgatory aids the travellers. As the captive women press on Orestes, so Virgil encourages Dante’s athleticism: “his words incited me; my body tried; on hands and knees I scrambled after him until the terrace lay beneath my feet” (*Purg*. IV 49-51). The cleft in the rock recalls the rift at Delphi that Orestes runs to for Apollo’s purging.

> Apollo wills it so!--
> Apollo, clear from the Earth's deep cleft
> his voice came shrill, 'Now stealth will master stealth!'
> And the pure god came down and healed our ancient wounds,
> the Heavens come, somehow, to lift our yoke of grief--
> Now to praise the Heavens' just command. (*L.B.* 944-949)

In both pieces, the natural landscape of the broken rock comforts the travelers. Both the chorus and Virgil see the rifts as a divine mercy, though only Dante experiences mercy. No good came from Orestes’s trip to Delphi; though Orestes too received purging, while the Furies still pursued him for his guilt. The cleft at Delphi, the location of Apollo’s shrine and the oracle of Delphi, fails to help Orestes. In Purgatory, Virgil explains the rift’s cause. At Jesus's crucifixion, the redemptive act tore a rift down into the rock in deep Hell and up through the giant purgatorial mountain at the opposite side of the earth’s sphere, allowing Jesus to bring those historical faithful stuck in Limbo to

Paradise (*Inf*. XII 38-39). Ironically, this very rift aids Dante's purification from pride, among other things. Through moving and speaking carved exemplars of biblical and classical virtue, the rift itself explicates humility, generosity, peacefulness, diligence, and temperance, all the way up the purgatorial mountain. Recall how Virgil explains the rubble's and cracked boulders' cause in the midst of *Inferno,* where the violent boil. Love caused the rift:

> the steep and filthy valley
> had trembled so, I thought the universe
> felt love. (*Inf.* 40-42)

As Sinclair notes, this explanation calls to mind the pre-socratic philosopher Empedocles discussed earlier, who said that conflict between love and strife causes a disorder in the universe ("Inferno" 162). Virgil can only explain the phenomenon using classical intellectual knowledge. As the reader learns, the full implications of God's love render Virgil, Dante's intellectual icon, confused and speechless. From the paradisal point of view, the reader will see the cleft as one act of divine love, which pains and entraps those in Hell, but helps those in Purgatory, part of an ordered plan. Here Dante shows Virgil's lack of understanding; Virgil accepts the philosophy of a disordered universe, lacking the paradisal view. Here in Purgatory, the rift simply provides a bit of footing for what is still an arduous climb; only afterwards can it appear as the help it is. Even sooner can Dante express solace when looking back at how far he'd already climbed (*Purg*. IV). Moreover, Virgil explains how climbing this mountain differs from all others: at first the climb proves nearly impossible, but as it progresses, easier. Dante feels lighter as he progresses

too; he needs Purgatory's purification just as its temporary residents do. Like Orestes, Dante must suffer into truth, as Mark Musa translates, concerning wounds on Dante's forehead given him by an angel: "five wounds that suffering will heal, just as the other two have left no trace" (XV 81).

As the characters strive on, in both cases, they reflect on justice's true nature. In Canto VI, among the late repentants, Dante's Virgil explicates the nature of love and justice, two key themes in *Libation Bearers*. Perhaps as if to say Florence will be late in repenting, in this canto, Dante connects events in Florence to government, justice and salvation. In the *Orestia*, Athena makes such a connection later in *Eumenides*. First, Dante questions Virgil's notion that prayers don't change Heaven's justice. Why then, should the souls in Purgatory pray? Virgil answers no contradiction exists; love can cancel justice's debts. *Libation Bearers* has no such idea, but it anticipates the mercy Athenian citizens bestow on Orestes at the trilogy's end. Equally, Dante has difficulty understanding love's relation to justice and must wait until Heaven's resident Beatrice explains further. Interestingly, in the same canto Dante excoriates Florence and all Italy for a lack of justice in every way; love's and justice's juxtaposition imply that injustice in Italy connects somehow to a lack of love, though Dante can't understand it until he sees Beatrice again, just as Orestes must wait until Athena mediates his trial to understand such mercy. When Dante approaches the door to Purgatory itself, he says, as Mark Musa translates, "we had passed the threshold of the gate forever closed to souls whose loves are bad," but that could easily be said by Orestes leaving the palace at Argos (*Purg*. X

1-3). All the characters of *Agamemnon* and *Inferno* love good things, but in the wrong way or to the exclusion of other good things.

Noting a connection between love and justice, Dante exclaims to the city of Rome: "come, see how much your people love each other! And if no pity for us moves you, may shame for your own repute move you to act" (*Purg*. VI 115-17). Dante compares Italy's cities and Florence in particular to Athens and Sparta: "compared to you, Athens and Lacedaemon, though civil cities, had merely sketched the life of righteousness" (*Purg*. VI 139-141). Florence, in comparison, should have known better despite its utter corruption. Like classical Athens, the Italian cities had law, but

> Men, therefore, needed the restraint of laws,
> needed a ruler able to at least discern the towers of the True city.
> True, the laws there are, but who enforces them? No one. (*Purg*. XVI 94-96)

Only in *Paradiso* will Dante experience good government just as only in *Eumenides* Orestes will too. In the quote above, Mark Musa chooses to capitalize "true" in "True city," emphasizing the ideal nature of this truth which is hard to discern in earthy Purgatory, much less the rest of earth.

Athens and Dante's scheme of a perfect society actually have much in common. As mentioned before, Dante's conceives good government, like Pericles's Athens of Aeschylus's time, has democratic foundations. In Canto VII, the reader learns that while princes, once great on earth, inherit no true greatness in Heaven's eyes, a person's worth in Heaven is entirely individual, thus democratic (*Purg*. VII 120-121). Later in Paradise,

Dante learns that despite appearing in different levels, residents share equality through grace. Chased by the Furies, who don't consider his royalty at all, Orestes races to Apollo's door. In the *Divine Comedy*, though Dante the traveller favors the voice of the wealthy and noble, that is a tendency that needs purification, not the true order of the universe, which is blind to wealth or position.

As Dante's understanding of love and justice must evolve, so does it evolve in the *Orestia*. C.J. Herington notes multiple definitions of the greek word "justice." To the Furies, the word represents a name, the name of a goddess who seeks vengeance. Another sense of the word, though, according to Herington, is "trial," and that is the sense Aeschylus uses by the end of the trilogy, when justice is reached by an actual trial ("Aeschylus" 144). Dante, too, undergoes a trial in the arduous journey up the mountain and only learns justice's true meaning after that journey.

The reader may know that Dante the author rebukes Florence in particular, and, like Orestes in Argos, he does so as an exile. For Orestes, this is the first fact established at the start of the *Libation Bearers:* "I have come home to my own soil, an exile home at last" (4-5). Like Orestes, the disorder and corruption in Dante's city, which he likens to an old woman on a sick bed, reaches him personally and casts him out of his home (*Purg*. VI 151). In *Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio,* love and justice alienate both Orestes and Dante. Orestes, in particular, lacks Dante's firm foundation. Once Orestes finds Apollo untrue, Orestes believes he exists alone in a chaotic universe, as forces contend against him. Orestes lacks the idea, as Musa translates, "you are free subjects of a greater power, a nobler nature that creates your mind, and over this the spheres have no control" (*Purg*.

XVI 79-81). Dante never loses faith in this knowledge; in fact, Dante writes, "misrule, you see, has caused the world to be malevolent; the cause is clearly not celestial forces—they do not corrupt" (*Purg*. XVI 103-105). Here Mark Musa translates "celestial forces" as "Nature"; both senses see an ordered universe react passively as people act. By design, people's bad choices disrupt the naturally ordered universe, as Hamlet tells Horatio, the fault is not in the stars, it is in us. Of course, earth's troubles reflect an evil influence outside people's actions:

> At the unguarded edge of that small valley,
> there was a serpent—similar, perhaps,
> to that which offered Eve the bitter food.
> Through grass and flowers the evil streak advanced;
> from time to time it turned its head and licked
> its back, like any beast that preens and sleeks. (*Purg.* VIII 97-103)

The one who appears as a giant, hairy bat in Inferno manifests as the biblical serpent, slithering through earthly Purgatory. So, according to Dante, the ordered universe ultimately reacts as people act, yet their actions reflect evil's influence.

Not content to say simply how Satan affects people, Dante seeks a scientific explanation for the devil's interaction with nature. As much as possible, Dante seeks to reconcile Aristotelian logic and observation with Christian faith, as he does here:

> You are aware how, in the air, moist vapor
> will gather and again revert to rain
> as soon as it has climbed where cold enfolds.

> His evil will, which only seeks out evil,
> conjoined with intellect; and with the power
> his nature grants, he stirred up wind and vapor…
> The dense air was converted into water;…
> The angry Archiano—at its mouth—
> had found my frozen body. (*Purg.* V 118-124)

Evil forces can manipulate nature to a point, but in accordance with scientific, natural laws already established by God's design, as Dante can say himself later, "The natural is always without error, but mental love may choose an evil object or err through too much or too little vigor" (*Purg.* XVII 94-96). As he will come to know, Dante explains how love regulates humans' interactions with nature: love of bad things, or good things excessively, causes disturbances in the natural order.

In Dante, as well as Aeschylus, the reader can envision a cosmic scheme in which all interrelates: nature, celestial bodies, gods, love and government. In Dante, there is a scientific unity among each of these parts, as each fits into one unified, orderly system. Canto XVI of *Purgatorio* seems to speak to the problem facing Orestes and the house of Argos, as well as Athens. Marco of Lombardy informs Dante:

> Issuing from His hands, the soul—on which
> He thought with love before creating it—
> is like a child who weeps and laughs in sport;
> that soul is simple, unaware; but since
> a joyful Maker gave it motion, it

> turns willingly to things that bring delight.
> At first it savors trivial goods; these would
> beguile the soul, and it runs after them,
> unless there's guide or rein to rule its love.
> Therefore, one needed law to serve as curb;
> a ruler, too, was needed, one who could
> discern at least the tower of the true city.
> The laws exist, but who applies them now?
> …Misrule, you see, has caused the world to be
> malevolent. (*Purg.* XVI 82-105)

Apollo, too, in *Eumenides*, reflects similarly on love and disorder in the universe, perhaps reflecting Empedocles, when excoriating the Furies: "the queen of love you'd throw to the winds at a word, disgrace love, the source of mankind's nearest and dearest ties" (212-214). Also, when Orestes pines over the tragedy his mother initiates, he knows her crime has more than familial implications; since she killed the king, she committed a crime against the nation: "behold the double tyranny of our land! They killed my father… they had their power when they held the throne" (*L.B*. 964-966). Most of all the enslaved chorus observes the the cosmic unity: "All the streams of the world, all the channels run into one" (*L.B.* 70-72).

By the end of these midpoints, Both Dante and Orestes learn humility, which, for them, opens salvation's door. Recalling when Dante says he will "curb his talent," giving as the reason "that it not run where virtue does not guide," it sounds as though, still, he

esteems his talent a bit more than virtue (*Inf*. XXVI 21-22). The trip through Purgatory will make it the other way around. Orestes, sure of himself when he commits the murders, finds humility,

> Now look on me, armed with the branch and wreath,
> a suppliant bound for the Navelstone of Earth,
> Apollo's sacred heights
> where they say the fire of Heaven can never die.
> *Looking at his hand that still retains the sword*
> I must escape this blood . . . it is my own. (*L.B*. 1031-1036)

At the start of *Purgatorio,* Dante seems slightly more humble, though not much, about his writing: "to course across more kindly waters now, my talent's little vessel lifts her sails, leaving behind herself a sea so cruel" (*Purg*. I 1-3). Considering that he started the journey numbering himself sixth among the greatest classical writers in Limbo, this represents some progress. After seeing images of the proud painted on the stones beneath his feet, making all who pass look down, reflecting on their own pride, Dante can say, "Your truthful speech has filled my soul with sound humility, abating my overswollen pride" (*Purg*. XI 118-120). For Orestes, the race to Delphi, finally reached in *Eumenides,* begins to soften his pride, thanks to the Furies' causing him to rethink his actions. Upon his arrival, he can say,

> I have suffered into truth. Well I know
> the countless arts of purging, where to speak,
> where silence is the rule. In this ordeal
> a compelling master urges me to speak. (*Eum*. 273-277)

By *Purgatorio*'s midpoint, Dante's transformation speeds up through nature's ordered design. Dante finds that nature operates for a purpose: to draw people to the good by visible examples. In Canto XIV, Guido del Duca informs: "From what I've sown, this is the straw I reap: o humankind, why do you set your hearts there where our sharing cannot have a part," indicating human responsibility (85-87). Sinclair translates the last line, "why do you set your hearts where must needs be exclusion of partnership?" Dante sees a figure turned to stone for envy, seeing human partnership with natural law in operation. Dante moves closer to Virgil and Virgil explains,

> Heaven would call—and it encircles—you;
>
> it lets you see its never-ending beauties;
>
> and yet your eyes would only see the ground;
>
> thus, He who sees all things would strike you down. (*Purg*. XIV 148-151)

Here, nature draws toward heavenly contemplation rather than envious scrutiny of others. God rewards the former and punishes the latter. Concurrently, Dante's trip gets easier as the journey, and Dante's purification, continues: "My will on will to climb above was such that at each step I took I felt the force within my wings was growing for the flight" (*Purg.* XXVIII 121-123).

Looking back to *Inferno,* Dante has come far in learning humility. Consider how he retells Ulysses's story; Dante makes the reader admire Ulysses's intrepidness, leading his soldiers to sail to their deaths, in search of a great mountain (*Inf*. XXVI). Interestingly, Ulysses's desire to reach the unknown led to his doom and, at that point, Dante also values his own reach too much, as he uses the sailing imagery to describe his

own boundless desire to achieve. Concerning nature, in *Inferno* we understand that usury misuses creation and knowledge, whereas souls share in God's creation through wealth and industry. Defrauding for wealth or industry, or presenting a part of God's creation as something it is not by counterfeiting, all cause damnation (*Inf*. XI, XVII, XXX). Similarly, each involves knowledge's abuse, the besetting sin Dante confronts in himself. Beatrice will accuse him of it. His writing, the source his pride, relates it; his skill may exhibit only knowledge and lack love. As usury misuses creation, Beatrice will accuse Dante of his gift's misuse by following a certain "school." Again, the reader sees a connection among cosmic and natural forces as God created them and people's use of them; the consequences consign a person to Hell or to salvation. Finally, recall that Dante faints at Paolo and Francesca's story: they lost their souls as they read poetry similar to Dante's (*Inf*. V). He could not accept that his own skill might lead to tragedy. Orestes, too, bursts with pride before the Furies begin to chase him: "look once more on this, you who gather here to attend our crimes—" (*L.B*. 970-971). For Dante, once he passes beyond the antechamber to Purgatory, he feels external pressures upon his pride by way of others' plight, but now they move internally. So too for Orestes, once the Furies chase him, the struggle moves inward; in *Libation Bearers* only Orestes can see the Furies: "no dreams, these torments, not to me, they're clear, real" (1054 and 1055).

On the way to Purgatory, Dante hears his friend Casella sing Dante's poetry. Dante encourages it, yet he constrains his eagerness: only if the will of Purgatory allows the singing, he tells Casella, with newfound humility (*Purg*. II 106-110). By Canto II, Dante no longer fears sin and comes to a new understanding of his writing. Orestes

comes to such a realization only after his purging in *Eumenides:* "my murderous edge is blunted now, worn down at last on the outland homesteads, beaten paths of men" (236-237). As Dante learns one can't climb the mountain at night because the darkness implicates the will, darkness would not allow Orestes to rethink his actions in *Libation Bearers*. By *Purgatorio* Canto IX, Dante says he has to elevate his art, not that he wants to; he almost apologizes for appearing proud; the journey has changed him (70). In *Purgatorio* XIII, Dante admits his sin that needs purging remains pride. On the terrace of envy, he comments he never much envied others, but knows he indulged in pride (136-138). He will need to spend time on the terrace below when his turn comes to climb this mountain as a penitent soul rather than a visitor. Orestes's climb is real; he's not just visiting. As Dante climbs the terrace of envy and advances, though, he hears exemplars of envy and can recognize them as such, having seen the exemplars of generosity. Questioning his talent even more, an angel purges him of pride as the first "p" fades away. Interestingly, he must enter a cleft in the rock to have the p erased. Again, the break in the rock symbolizes God's mercy. Midway up the mountain, light glimmers,

> When sunlight struck directly at our faces,
> for we had circled so much of the mountain
> that now we headed straight into the west,
> then I could feel my vision overcome
> by radiance greater than I'd sensed before,
> and unaccounted things left me amazed. (*Purg*. XV 7-12)

On the way to purging, Dante learns from moving, speaking icons of humility (*Purg*. X 34-73). Images of Mary accepting the angel's annunciation, David dancing before the ark and a non-believer, Trajan, helping a poor woman confront Dante and prepare him to explore the terrace of pride. Did Orestes have similar examples to help humble him on the journey? The chorus of slave women might play this role. His sister Electra expressed humility as well. Even the Furies act proud, while their position in the Olympian system is relatively humble. The slave women say,

> we nurse our lives with tears,
>
> to the sound of ripping linen beat our robes in sorrow,
>
> close to the breast the beats throb
>
> and laughter's gone and fortune throbs and throbs. (*L.B*. 32-35)

Electra agonizes between wanting vengeance and doing right; a princess in the house, she asks advice of the slave women: "I'll need your help with this. What to say when I pour the cup of sorrow? What kindness, what prayer can touch my father?" (84-86). The Furies express their position in the Olympian scheme as they chase Orestes, "such is your triumph, you young gods, world dominion past all rights" (*Eum*. 162-163). Both Dante and Orestes must see humility as they become humble, a necessary hurdle to overcome in their journeys. As Orestes learns humility, his anger subsides, "under Apollo's orders I have come. Receive me kindly" (*Eum*. 233-234). So, too, Dante's anger must cool (*Purg*. XVI). Finally, Dante can speak of his "sweet new style" matter of factly, without embellishment, as Musa translates, "I am one who, when Love inspires me, takes careful note and then, gives form to what he dictates in my heart" (*Purg*. XXIV 51-54). At the

end of *Purgatorio,* Dante tells the reader he can't go beyond the limit of the canto's design:

> If, reader, I had ampler space in which
> to write, I'd sing—though incompletely—that
> sweet draught for which my thirst was limitless;
> but since all of the pages pre-disposed
> for this, the second canticle, are full,
> the curb of art will not let me continue. (136-141)

Here it must be said Orestes's struggle lasts nearly to the end of the trilogy, in the *Eumenides*, while Dante's struggle ends with *Purgatorio,* though, in both their endings, one more comparison of the two mid-pieces shows similarities. Before the ends of both journeys, light shines brighter:

> a sudden radiance that swept across
> the mighty forest on all sides—and I
> was wondering if lightning had not struck.
> But since, when lightning strikes, it stops at once,
> while that light, lingering, increased its force. (*Purg*. XXIX 16-21)

In *Libation Bearers* references such as the chorus telling Orestes, "I see you stronger, hope and light come on me" and beseaching Apollo, "light of freedom burst from its dark veil!" continue the theme (406-407, 801). Strangely, just after the murders, the chorus exclaims "look, the light is breaking!" (950). The two mid-pieces start with weak glimmers and end flooded with light. As arduous as the journeys prove, the struggle

results in new brilliance. Light also symbolizes the energy needed to progress, as in Canto VII when the reader learns one can't climb Purgatory's mountain at night, because darkness "implicates the will" (*Purg*. VII 57).

Both heroes' struggles end in a kind of "court." Orestes's trial literally transpires in a new court of judgment. Dante sees a kind of royal court approaching in a procession; yet, Beatrice refers to it as a court of judgment, divine judgment: "but when the condemnation of his sins bursts from the sinner's lips, here in our Court, the grindstone is turned against the blade" *(Purg.* XXXI 40-42). In other words, the court is merciful, as is Athena's court in *Eumenides*.

At the end of *Purgatorio*, Dante enters the earthly paradise, creation before the fall. Dante faces not only a great procession but also a mysterious tree. The tree represents justice and righteousness, and, in keeping with Dante's faith in a just Roman Empire, it represents, as most scholars believe, Rome. The tree is at once Rome and Eden's tree and grows wider at the top than below. Nature in all its beauty unfolds before him: "and thus the sky became a painted flow of seven bands of light, all the same shades as Delia's cincture or Apollo's bow" (*Purg*. XXIX 75-78). Dante learns that since no sin happens here, weather doesn't fluctuate, so the gentle breeze he feels emanates from the rotation of the earth. Again, Dante connects cosmic, natural, and scientific knowledge with faith.

The procession approaches with ladies symbolizing the four cardinal virtues surrounding a griffin-led chariot. The griffin, half lion, half bird with red marks, symbolizes Christ, with his two natures in one person. The griffin says only one thing,

"thus preserved righteousness," while he connects the chariot, representing Christ's church, to the tree of justice and righteousness. Thus, in the entire *Divine Comedy*, the only words Christ speaks directly joins the church to Rome, not as one new entity but two that must cooperate, as the next scene reveals. Beatrice tells Dante to write down what he sees and one day he will be citizen of Rome where Christ is Roman (XXXII). First, Dante sees an eagle accosting the tree and chariot, then a serpent breaking through it from the bottom, and a giant beating a whore. According to Mark Musa, the eagle signifies Roman persecutions of the church, the serpent symbolizes Satan, the whore is the pope and the giant is France, which will capture the pope and take him to Avignon, known in history as the church's Babylonian captivity (379). Beatrice scolds Dante for losing heart at the devastating scene and she tells him not to worry because all will be well with the Church.

Just as Athena gives hard-won wisdom to newly democratic Athens, giving double purposes, personal and public, to Orestes' journey, Dante's journey serves dual purposes, too. His struggle up the mountain purifies him, then also takes on a second goal: to inform others of what he saw, to know the church is being attacked, but to know empire and church, in equal partnership, neither dominating the other, will bring just rule. Unlike the next lesson, Dante understands.

He can't fathom the two strange attributes of the tree, its inversion and its great height (Purg. XXXIII 63-67). Beatrice attributes his confusion to the school he follows, perhaps suggesting misuse of his talent (*Purg*. XXXIII 69-87). He can't remember how he offended Beatrice. Because he drinks the river Lethe's water, he forgets his sins. Similarly, the Furies can't submit to Athena's persuasion, repeating their complaints, until

they forget their rage. Since Dante can't understand the significance of the tree or remember the cause of Beatrice's anger, he learns these failures are both related to his sins, sins he forgot in the river Lethe. Here, Beatrice resembles the Furies and Athena as she challenges and guides Dante to salvation. Just as the Furies upbraid Orestes to realize his error, so Beatrice upbraids Dante. Not merely because he lacked humility, though that could be one reason since he forgets his pride, she scolds him because he allows himself to be distracted from his purpose. Here Beatrice resembles Athena again, trying to get through to the Furies who can't understand her; they forget themselves due to their own sin and they desire vengeance. Earlier, Beatrice questions Dante:

> What benefits and what allurements were
>
> so evident upon the brow of others
>
> that you had need to promenade before them? (*Purg*. XXXI 28-30)

Similarly, Athena questions the Furies:

> And now you vent your anger, hurt the land?
>
> Consider a moment. Calm yourself. Never
>
> render us barren, raining your potent showers
>
> down like spears, consuming every seed. (*Eum*. 812-815)

While *Purgatorio's* pageant bears obvious resemblance to the procession at *Eumenides's* end, as a ceremony, it also resembles Electra's and Orestes's libations at their father's grave in *Libation Bearers*. According to Herrington, the siblings honor their father, "by means of a tremendous chant, dance and song around the funeral mound which is the most elaborately composed operatic scene in Aeschylus's surviving work…

the chanting and singing lead into an antiphony in unaccompanied spoken verse…in which their incantation rises to desperate urgency" ("Aeschylus" 127).

Both the ceremony in *Libation Bearers* and the pageant in *Purgatorio* begin in a positive light, but in both cases something interferes: an intent to kill and the serpent. Clytemnestra orders a procession to honor Agamemnon because of a bad dream, but she taints the ceremony because it only serves to work Orestes and Electra up into an angry frenzy, ending in double murder. Dante's procession, equally nightmarish, starts as an image of the church triumphant and ends with the horrifying scenes of the dragon, the whore and the giant. Note the similar ominous nature of the back and forth between siblings at Agamemnon's grave:

> **Electra**:
>
> Remember the all embracing net—they made it first for you.
>
> **Orestes**:
>
> Chained like a beast—chains of hate, not bronze, my father! (L.B. 479-480)

Both the pageant and the ceremony serve as dark spots in the ever increasing light the authors express over the course of the *Libation Bearers* and *Purgatorio*. They serve both as visual spectacle and evidence that all is not right, even with the increasing light. Both stories need resolution. Despite Beatrice's assurances, in *Purgatorio*, the reader is left with an image of both church and government despoiled. So too, the threat Orestes and Electra execute on the reigning king and queen throws the small nation into disorder.

Rather than cleanly preparing for Orestes's coronation, he runs for his life, expecting, perhaps, his father's brother will come to take the throne.

Eumenides and *Paradiso:* Persuasion's Kindly Ones and Love's Paradise

"*…but you shall be with me—and without end—Rome's citizen, the Rome in which Christ is Roman."*

—Dante Purg. XXXII 100-103

As Sinclair observes in his notes on *Inferno*, in Dante's Hell, the worst sins are the most anti-social (223). Betrayal, for example, is worse than violence because it affects more people. Dante, like Aeschylus, wants a well-governed city; they each provide a vision of one in the third parts of their works, where they present perfected cities in which rightly ordered relationships selflessly abide, reaching throughout the cosmos. On the *Orestia*, Herington notes:

> the drama of Aeschylus is unique (at least in the Western world) in that, to the end, he worked in and through the language, the shapes, and the symbolism of the ancient mythology in all their dreamlike strangeness; and yet through that very medium he tried to come to grips with the great fifth-century transition from the very old to the very new. ("Aeschylus" 138)

Arguably, Dante does the same in the *Divine Comedy.* He, too, reaches even farther back to the same ancient mythology and re-presents it in a Christian context. In Dante's Christian Heaven, the courageous ones, like crusader Cacciaguida, inhabit Mars's heavenly sphere, while the supremely just, such as Justinian, reside in Jupiter's sphere. Yet one God reigns at the center of this mythological universe: the God who made these very real planets and everything else. Dante's reader must imagine a universe in which a

good deal of ancient mythology still holds true in a Christian framework, a potentially dangerous idea in Dante's day.

Further, as Herington observes of Aeschylus, Dante takes all the history between the ancient and the modern and presents it as one; like Aeschylus, Dante reconciles all particulars in one. Both authors present their perfect governments in the trilogies' final pieces where sublime transcendence reigns. In so doing, they not only show governments as ideal, but also very earthly and real. From within the sublime, the authors impel their contemporary viewers and readers to take their political advice or perish. They do this in such a way that the entire universe seems to impel the same.

The final pieces invite the viewers and readers to something better than normal experience; they lead by example and seem to ask, "see what is possible, don't you want it?" The journeys progress out of necessity; the heroes must see a complete lack of the beautiful before they can fully appreciate its final consummate vision. The visions represent nothing less than ultimate beauty, human accord and divine revelation. In both final pieces, blood-stained palaces and cramped caverns give way to natural open-air beauty. In Aeschylus, Orestes travels to a timeless Athens and in Dante, the hero traverses the universe's most beautiful outer limits to a still point in the Mind of God.

For the latter parts of Orestes's and Dante's journeys, new guides emerge. Virgil gives way to Beatrice, and Athena, with the Furies' help, replaces Apollo. Beatrice serves Dante with what both Athena and the Furies provide Orestes, and more. Often Beatrice has a maternal concern for Dante:

> after a sigh of pity, she

settled her eyes on me with the same look

a mother casts upon a raving child,

and she began: "All things, among themselves,

possess an order; and this order is

the form that makes the universe like God. (*Par.* I 100-105)

At times, when Beatrice scolds Dante just as the Furies scold Orestes, both Dante and Orestes benefit; Beatrice and the Furies excoriate because they believe their charges should know better and can do better. Even though Beatrice speaks in Aristotelian terms, in part agreeing with Dante's philosophical perspective, she berates him because his philosophy is lacking. He thinks childishly; he only wants to know the philosophical and scientific slant, so he misses the truth entirely because he doesn't consider love as part of it. Concerning those who took vows but did not fulfill them, Beatrice says:

your mind misguides you into emptiness:

what you are seeing are true substances,

placed here because their vows were not fulfilled. (*Par*. III 28-30)

She tells him further:

but you'll see no such discord in these spheres;

to live in love is—here—necessity,

if you think on love's nature carefully. (*Par.* III 76-78)

Similarly, the Furies scold Orestes: "every mortal who outraged god or guest or loving parent: each receives the pain his pains exact." Even kind Athena acknowledges, "there is

a time when terror helps, the watchman must stand guard upon the heart" (*Eum*. 266-267, 529-530).

As much as the heroes receive scolding, they also receive mercy. For Orestes it comes in Athena's fairness and persuasion: "a suppliant, cleansed, you bring my house no harm. If you are innocent, I'd adopt you for my city" (*Eum*. 489-490). Athena's compassion serves Orestes as Beatrice's beauty serves Dante by expanding his capacity to appreciate it. Beatrice's beauty increases in Dante's eyes as he ascends the universe's spheres:

> and if—by means of human flesh or portraits—
> nature or art has fashioned lures to draw
> the eye so as to grip the mind, all these
> would seem nothing if set beside the godly
> beauty that shone upon me when I turned
> to see the smiling face of Beatrice. (*Par*. XXVII 91-96)

Beatrice always resides in the highest Heaven, and there her beauty reflects perfectly God's love and truth; yet, Dante can only see her beauty partially, in increments, until he too sees highest Heaven. Orestes and Dante share one lesson, among others, in *Eumenides* and *Paradiso.* Both learn a balance between "rights" on one hand and love, or compassion, on the other. Whether in the court at Athens or the mind of God, rights and compassion must go together. As much as all the characters in *Inferno* and *Agamemnon* consider only their own rights, no one else's, Orestes and Dante learn rights and justice

must be balanced with mercy and love. Feeling themselves unheard in *Eumenides*, the Furies repeat four times in all that rights must be respected. Two examples include:

> All in all I tell you people,
>
> bow before the altar of the rights,
>
> revere it well
>
> Never trample it underfoot, your eyes set on spoils. (*Eum*. 546-548)

and, "is there a man who knows no fear…that still reveres the rights?" (*Eum*. 546-548, 530-535). While those with little power must have recourse to rights, the powerful must show compassion. Orestes tells Apollo after Athena takes over:

> lord Apollo, you know the rules of justice,
>
> know them well. Now learn compassion, too.
>
> No one doubts your power to do great things. (*Eum*. 89-91)

Beatrice could have easily said these same words. Concerning the angels, she speaks on the balance between grace and merit, which could be likened to rights and compassion:

> their vision was exalted with
>
> illuminating grace and with their merit,
>
> so that their will is constant and intact.
>
> I would not have you doubt, but have you know
>
> surely that there is merit in receiving
>
> grace, measured by the longing to receive it. (*Par*. XXIX 61-66)

Beatrice goes on to say that earthly schools confound this truth. In both the *Orestia* and *Divine Comedy,* the balance between justice and rights on one side and compassion

and love on the other perplexes humanity. In both works, divine lessons constantly teach balance where the proud on earth try to argue one side or the other. In the *Orestia*, Athena must exhort, "neither anarchy nor tyranny, my people. Worship the Mean, I urge you" (*Eum*. 710-711). In the *Divine Comedy,* in addition to grace and merit there appear other tensions in balance, as well. Saints Dominic and Francis, representing Dominican dogmatic learning and Franciscan humble charity, dance in unison; they reveal no contradiction between the two, rather, both must abide (*Par*. XIII). Similarly in *Paradiso*, St. Peter and St. James whirl about in a dance, representing the unity of both faith and works (*Par*. XXV). In Aeschylus and Dante, earthly people have trouble seeing unity among sides but, in reality, no such conflict exists. In both pieces, partisanship destroys community and cooperation saves it; this message speaks to the personal as well as the political status quo.

Thus nature and government reveal parallel balance. Both the *Orestia* and *Divine Comedy* portray elaborate pageants; the colorful displays burst forth as visual panoramas of the exalted, perfect cities in natural and political harmony. In the *Orestia* the pageant takes place at the end; it celebrates political freedom for Orestes and peaceful cooperation among Athenians. In the *Divine Comedy*, the story's end doesn't come with the pageant; a serpent and eagle disrupt it and reconciliation comes later. A serpent and eagle destroy in the *Orestia* too; Clytemnestra has a dream that she gives birth to a serpent destined to kill her, symbolizing Orestes, and the eagle symbolizes Agamemnon and the Greeks destroying Troy (*L.B*. 514, *Ag*. 127-128). Similarly, in Dante the serpent represents Satan and the eagle represents old Rome attacking the early church; Beatrice instructs Dante to

write about the destruction so all on earth will know (*Purg*. XXXII). Yet the beauty of the holy mountain's top, where the pageant occurs, remains beautiful:

> for to the leaves, with song, birds welcomed those
> first hours of the morning joyously,
> and leaves supplied the burden to their rhymes. (*Purg*. XXVIII 16-18)

So the pageant in the *Divine Comedy* instructs and warns against evils, but it is not the end of the story. Beatrice rebukes Dante for thinking the church and empire will remain destroyed: "know that the vessel which the serpent broke was and is not" (*Purg*. XXXIII 34-35). In Dante, God will overcome the serpent; in the *Orestia*, Athena purifies Orestes so that he no longer resembles a snake. Of course, the gods alone could not do this for Orestes, but Athena's persuasion and Athens's mercy save the day. In the *Divine Comedy*, celebration delays until Dante ultimately experiences God's divine face; this happens at *Paradiso's* very end. Sadly, Dante's hope for personal political freedom in his city, Florence, never comes as it does for Orestes. Dante knows this: in both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio,* he hears prophecies that he will always remain in exile. Yet, Dante's ultimate triumph at *Paradiso's* end appears more profound than Orestes's triumph at the *Eumenides's* end. Dante learns there's a place in high Heaven for the emperor who will finally give fair laws to Italy's republics, so fear wains; more, he beholds God's face and learns he will have a place in Heaven too. While Dante the author dies in exile, never witnessing an emperor enforce law in Italy, Dante the character, showing the author's continued hopes, believes a good emperor will come. Still, it never happens.

Significantly, the *Orestia* does have characters who undergo such social and spiritual transformation, similar to Dante's. The *Orestia*'s pageant celebrating personal, natural and governmental harmony does not really do so for Orestes, who leaves before it on his journey to become king in Argos. The Furies remain in Athens and they are the ones who celebrate and march in the pageant, wearing crimson robes, full initiates into Athen's communal life. Their transformation at *Eumenides*'s end resembles Dante's at *Paradiso*'s end.

Before the Furies' transformation, they resemble characters in Dante's Hell, in particular, among those who sought their own good, who forever mindlessly repeat marching around a banner. Viewing them, Dante hears something similar to the Furies' ravings in Aeschylus. Dante observes:

> Strange utterances, horrible pronouncements,
> accents of anger, words of suffering,
> and voices shrill and faint, and beating hands—
> all went to make a tumult that will whirl
> forever through that turbid, timeless air. (*Inf*. III 25-29)

Just like those here in Dante's Hell, the Furies' anger consumes them and they seem to have "lost the good of the intellect" (*Inf*. III 18). Because Dante's characters who sought their own good receive constant wasp and hornet stings, they constantly putrify, worms and maggots surrounding them, resembling the Furies' stench and snakes (*Inf*. III 61-67; *Eum*. 190-195). Dante singles out a pope among the group, one who stood for something good but retired early to pursue his own spiritual growth (*Inf*. III). Like the Furies and the

other opportunists in Dante's canto, Celestine the pope follows a banner; he follows a good but selfish cause. Aeschylus's Furies seem to hold up a banner for their worthy cause but refuse to see any other good cause. Standing up for women's and mothers' rights, they have the courage and vigilance to confront not only Apollo but all Athenian society as well. As Athena remonstrates with them to give up their anger in *Eumenides,* they repeat "but for me to suffer such a disgrace," just as Celestine repeats circling around his banner forever (*Eum*. 847, 879). Compared to Athena's reasoning, the Furies seem unintelligible. They reveal themselves, at bottom, to be motivated mostly by selfishness, like those in Dante's Hell.

Yet, the Furies become the "kindly ones," the Eumenides, not because they agree they were wrong about the rights of women and mothers—Athena never asks them to do this and they never do. They agree to give up their selfish anger, to see others have rights too, to see good for all Athens, not just themselves. Dante sees Pope Celestine in this light; like the Furies who at first refuse to take Athena's leap of faith, so Celestine seems to remain stubbornly wrapped up inside himself and turns his back on his people. He does nothing to support Christendom's cause, nothing to encourage morality in government or to advance a new and truly holy Roman Empire, so forever he will be chasing his own banner near the vestibule of Dante's Hell. It is not that Dante condemns contemplatives, who are in Saturn's sphere in high Heaven. Those Dante condemns suffer because they refuse to take into account the whole community's good. At first, the Furies reject Athena's just but merciful vision and democratic city, while Celestine rejects the Christian earthly holy city, or an empire where Christ's teachings ruled, as Beatrice says,

a Rome where Christ is Roman (*Par*. XXXIII). The only difference between Celestine and the Furies remains that the Furies transform by persuasive, divine intervention. Interestingly, Dante's Furies appear guarding the entrance to the heretics' realm. Heretics emphasize one aspect of Christianity while denying others, similar to the Furies before their transformation.

Significantly, the Greek word for the Furies, Ερινυες, resembles the Greek word for peace, or ειρηνη. In fact, a verb form of the word for peacemaker, ερινος, sounds more like ερινυες than the word for peace, ειρηυη. Both words existed since the time of Homer. Like Aeschylus, Dante uses two words for the Furies: both the more Latin name for them, in Italian, "furie" and the Greek-influenced Italian "Erine" (*Inf*. VIII). Dante capitalizes Erine, distinguishing the proper name from their description "furie." So it seems the Furies always had within them the potential and actuality, at once, for transformation to Eumenides, or the kindly ones, as Aeschylus names them. In the sense that the Erynes' only actions were to defend and punish matricides, they acted as a deterrent, fostering peace. In Aeschylus, though, they undergo a real and most dramatic transformation, even as compared to Orestes, perhaps because the powerless have more to be angry about.

Both the Furies' transformation in *Eumenides* and Dante's final ascent toward the face of God in *Paradiso* have similarities. Both envision a social, community-minded transformation. Equally, each holds up an individual citizen's ideal role in the community. Significantly, neither holds a sublime, ideal community divorced from the real, earthly one. Even in Heaven, Dante's saints don't forget life on earth; they explicate ideal community there. Dante's heavenly transformation does not represent an escapist flight

from earth's problems; rather, Dante portrays one ideal encompassing all the universe. Highly incarnational, love and intelligence permeate earth as well as Heaven. Just as the faith-works and doctrine-charity unities must abide, love and reason must balance each other. Both essential, neither exists separate from the other, though reason has the subordinate role to love. God is love, which Dante sees first hand at the very end of his journey. Perhaps one could describe the unity of the two as an intelligible love that permeates the universe. When Dante has trouble understanding how he will ascend through the levels of Heaven, Beatrice responds:

> and she began: All things, among themselves,
> possess an order; and this order is
> the form that makes the universe like God.
> Here do the higher beings see the imprint
> of the Eternal Worth, which is the end
> to which the pattern I have mentioned tends. (*Par*. 103-108)

In Heaven, Dante learns the Mind of God orders the entire universe; it reflects perfectly the order inherent in God Himself. Perhaps this leaves the impression God is an impersonal being, as the classical philosophers thought. Should Dante have thought so, he learns the contrary at the end of his journey:

> so I searched that strange sight: I wished to see
> the way in which our human effigy
> suited the circle and found place in it—
> and my own wings were far too weak for that.

But then my mind was struck by light that flashed

and, with this light, received what it had asked. (*Par.* XXXIII 133-141)

So citizenship in the ideal city, when citizenship reflects what God intends, reflects the order in the specifically personal Mind of God. In his final vision, Dante sees God's triune nature as well as His personal nature: God is communal as well as personal. Should one see this highly personal yet communal citizenship possible only in Heaven, that would only be partially true. Charles Martel, in life a candidate for Holy Roman Emperor, now a saint in Heaven, explains citizenship. All must consider themselves citizens; it seems he means all must live community-minded, not isolating themselves as individuals only. At the same time, citizens, providentially varied in skills and interests, must pursue the vocations most natural to them for the good of the earthly community:

He added: 'Tell me, would a man on earth

be worse if he were not a citizen?"

"Yes," I replied, "and here I need no proof."

"Can there be citizens if men below

are not diverse, with diverse duties? No,

if what your master writes is accurate." (*Par*. VIII 115-120)

Not to respect one's own natural vocation contradicts the Mind of God. Charles condemns it:

But you twist to religion one whose birth

made him more fit to gird a sword, and make

a king of one more fit for sermoning,

so that the track you take is off the road. (*Par*. VIII 145-148)

Thus on earth as well as in Heaven, each has a highly personal place and task, just as every saint has a place in the rose. So too the Furies come to agree with Athena and take a special place in the community; their voluntary self-forgetfulness earns them a special place in Athens, welcomed as guests. Athena addresses the Athenian community as citizens:

As time flows on, the honours flow through all
my citizens, and you throned in honour
before the house of Erectheus, will harvest
more from men and women moving in solemn file
than you can win throughout the mortal world. (*Eum*. 862-866)

Ultimately the women of Athens invest the Furies with crimson robes for the final light-procession, led by the women bearing torches. Transformed through Athena's persuasion, the Furies can exclaim:

give joy in return for joy,
one common will for love,
and hate with one strong heart:
such union heals a thousand ills of man. (Eum. 604-606)

They agree to become members of the community, guarding the Athenians' homes. Symbolically, Aeschylus calls all Athenians to welcome each other regardless of class. Like George Washington, Dante, too, condemns all partisanship. Significantly, still concerned for earthly government, though in Heaven, Emperor Justinian laments the

Italian states' dismissal of law. Even though Dante took part in war between middle class Guelphs and aristocratic Ghibbelines, then war between established middle-class White Guelphs and newer middle-class Blacks, in the sphere of the just in Heaven, Dante denounces all partisanship. He condemns them all for refusing to unite under one sign:

> Let Ghibellines pursue their undertakings
> beneath another sign, for those who sever
> this sign and justice are bad followers.
> And let not this new Charles strike at it with
> his Guelphs—but let him fear the claws that stripped
> a more courageous lion of its hide. (*Par*.VI 103-108)

In addition, just as Dante celebrates the contributions of the individual to society, so too does Aeschylus, whose contributions to the Greek art of drama include increasing the number of characters from two to three, then to more than three (Herington, "Aeschylus" 37). Thus he gives voice to every facet of society, so a woman, one who killed the king, gets a voice, as do the Furies, though universally excoriated. Even the enslaved Trojan women have a voice, a revolutionary contribution to classical Greek values: celebration of the individual in society. Consequently, a degree of equality exists that parallels the new legal equality recently bestowed on lower class citizens in Athens. Both value equality among individuals, not despite diversity, but in harmony with it.

Dante's Heaven, too, celebrates a degree of equality. Though saints appear to Dante at Heaven's various levels, in the rose, all have a place and all remain equal:

> And as a hill is mirrored

in waters at its base, as if to see

itself—when rich with grass and flowers—graced,

so, in a thousand tiers that towered above

the light, encircling it, I saw, mirrored,

all of us who have won return above. (*Par*. XXX 109-114)

Here Dante expresses not only all believers' equality, but also each soul's radical and eternal individuality in the rose. Similarly, in Aeschylus's Athens, having lost power in recent decades to the lower classes and descendants of immigrants, aristocratic members of the Areopagus must accept sharing power with the lower classes and the disenfranchised the Furies symbolize. Much feared by the aristocracy, for all Athenians, democracy triumphs. Thus, both *Eumenides* and *Paradiso* celebrate the balance of individual and community, while they denounce partisanship specifically.

Finally, *Paradiso'*s indescribable grandeur and beauty parallel *Eumenides*' timeless, ecstatic joy. Each portrays sublime beauty in the Greek sense of the word το καλον. A dictionary definition of this word, "to kalon," reveals it signifies far more than visual beauty, though it does mean that too: "the ideal of physical and moral beauty especially as conceived by the philosophers of classical Greece" (Merriam-Webster, "kalon"). In *Eumenides*, after the Furies forgive, Athena describes the beauty-vision that encompasses all the cosmos, all nature and specifically all people in Athens, as individuals as well as a democratic community:

Nothing that strikes a note of brutal conquest. Only peace—

blessings, rising up from the earth and the heaving sea,

and down the vaulting sky let the wind-gods breathe
a wash of sunlight streaming through the land,
and yield of soil and gazing cattle flood,
our city's life with power and never flag
with time. Make the seed of men live on,
the more they worship you the more they thrive.
I love them as the gardener loves his plants,
these upright men, this breed fought free of grief. (*Eum*. 913-923)

The vision sparks praise and rejoicing in the Furies, now transformed to the "kindly ones," the Eumenides. They rejoice just as Dante's heavenly saints praise God, sing, dance and rejoice. The Furies exclaim:

Rejoice,
rejoice in destined wealth,
rejoice, Athena's people—
poised by the side of Zeus,
loved by the loving virgin girl,
achieve humanity at last. (*Eum*. 1004-1009)

Interestingly, the Furies call the beauty-vision "humanity," evoking the same significance classical Greek humanism expressed about the individual's beauty, potential and worth; the early classical age starts with Aeschylus. More, the religious procession at *Eumenides*'s end calls to mind the humanistic, sublime enlightenment believed about the

initiates to the secret Eleusian Mysteries, which had become an Athenian tradition (Fagles and Stanford 71-72). Athena exclaims:

> You too rejoice! and I must lead the way
> to your chambers by the holy light of these,
> your escorts bearing fire. (*Eum.* 1012-1014)

In *Paradiso*, Dante marvels at the beauty-vision through the wisdom that permeates all the cosmos, unifying Heaven and earth:

> and through its living light the glowing Substance
> appeared to me with such intensity—
> my vision lacked the power to sustain it.
> O Beatrice, sweet guide and dear! She said
> to me: "What overwhelms you is a Power
> against which nothing can defend itself.
> This is the Wisdom and the Potency
> that opened roads between the earth and Heaven,
> the paths for which desire had long since waited. (Par. XXIII 31-39)

The intense natural beauty in Paradiso inspires:

> Then I saw all the Heaven colored by
> the hue that paints the clouds at morning and
> at evening, with the sun confronting them. (*Par.* XXVII 28-30)

How Beatrice increases in beauty reflects the beauty of Paradiso, as well, as Dante observes:

and if—by means of human flesh or portraits—
nature or art has fashioned lures to draw
the eye so as to grip the mind, all these
would seem nothing if set beside the godly
beauty that shone upon me when I turned
to see the smiling face of Beatrice. (*Par*. XXVII 91-96)

Further stunned by Beatrice's beauty in high Heaven, Dante admits his artistic limitations:

I yield: I am defeated at this passage
more than a comic or a tragic poet
has ever been by a barrier in his theme…
but now I must desist from this pursuit,
in verses, of her loveliness, just as
each artist who has reached his limit must. (*Par*. XXX 22-24, 31-33)

Moreover, at *Paradiso*'s end, when Dante requests Mary's prayers that he achieve the ultimate beatific vision, Dante's incarnational faith recognizes Mary's exalted position as the example for all creation's potential, particularly human potential, anticipating Renaissance humanism:

Virgin mother, daughter of your Son…
you are the one who gave to human nature
so much nobility that its Creator
did not disdain His being made its creature.

> That love whose warmth allowed this flower to bloom
> within the everlasting peace—was love
> rekindled in your womb; for us above…
> and there below, on earth, among the mortals,
> you are a living spring of hope…
> in you
> is every goodness found in any creature…
> This man—who from the deepest hollow in
> the universe, up to this height…now pleads
> that he may lift it toward the ultimate salvation. (*Par*. XXXIII 1-27)

One difference between the Aeschylean beauty-vision and Dante's remains: the love Athena requests among Athenians and Furies, to Dante, exists between humanity and an all-good and reasonable God. In Dante, only through God's love does humankind achieve peace and enlightenment. Yet, as with Aeschylus, one can see the great Renaissance humanist revolution's beginnings appear earlier in Dante. The great desire to know, rooted in firm faith in an ordered, knowable universe, mirrors his highly ordered universe. Interestingly, in Aeschylus, the faith that no order exists in the universe spurs his great confidence in humanity to solve its own problems by creating its own order. Both works inspire supreme confidence in human potential.

Conclusion

In both the *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy*, what could have ended in tragedy did not. Unlike tragic heroes, Orestes and Dante are unique because they face their mistakes and flaws and freely give them up, opening up a path to new life. In contrast, like inhabitants of Dante's *Inferno*, Hamlet forever vacillates, never faces his flaws, never seeks forgiveness for murder, and remains frozen in his sin. But Orestes and Dante are different, they look inward and change themselves rather than remain unmoved trying to change others. That is their achievement and that is why, by the end of their trilogies, they are not tragic heroes. Italians don't call Dante's work the *Divine Comedy*; they call it the *Commedia,* emphasizing this aspect. Some might see Dante as less fortunate than Orestes because Orestes's salvation includes a homecoming; Orestes's exile ends. Of course, Italian readers knew Dante died in exile, yet they call the work the *Comedy* because they also knew Dante had a superior homecoming.

Though he never returns to his beloved Florence, in the *Divine Comedy* his homecoming is the beatific vision; he enters communion with God and all the saints. Italian readers might conclude the faith expressed in his work was his own and Dante reached the beatific vision after his historical death. Like instability in pre-classical Athens and in the Italian city-states on the cusp of the Renaissance, the strife and exile in Dante's life created the circumstances that allowed him to produce his great work. The *Orestia* and the *Divine Comedy* exhibit the same principle: people may see everything they depend on uprooted, like Orestes, Dante and Hamlet, yet, determined by how they

react to the situation, it could end in tragedy or it could leave fertile ground for triumph. Where Hamlet's choices led to further tragedy, Orestes's and Dante's led to triumph.

Interestingly, in addition to physical conflict, philosophical contention also contributed to the great flowering of culture in classical Athens and Renaissance Florence. From both we learn ideas matter because they have consequences. In both these instances, the consequences were fruitful. Yet, we should not forget that bad ideas, even when rooted in philosophy, can be dangerous. The twentieth century's genocides are testament to the ramifications of bad philosophy. The philosophies behind those genocides contradict the classical and Renaissance humanist confidence that the universe is knowable and each person's value and creative capacity, near limitless. These two works recall western civilization's great watershed periods espoused the humanist and Judeo-Christian view. A third century church father, Tertullian, once asked, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" ("Prescription Against Heritics"). Though he intended to say that they have very little in common, he failed to consider one thing. No two cultures anywhere contributed to celebrate the dignity of the individual human person more.

Though Aeschylus's message ultimately denies complete cosmic intelligibility, his sureness that human effort could produce greatness was the key concept behind classical achievement. In Aeschylus's day the philosophical tug-of-war between proponents of the one and champions of the many led to Socrates's great reconciliation of the two in the classical era. Renaissance achievement inherited the ideas that the universe is fathomable and human reason fully able to discern it. The Renaissance idea was viewed in the Judeo-

Christian context which only increased the philosophical value of the individual and human capacity: where Aristotle and Plato saw some classes as more suited to enlightenment than others, Pico Mirandola saw every human being as "a little less than the angels" (16). His Renaissance manifesto, "On the Dignity of Man," was, at first, questioned by the Church but eventually accepted. What more could be said in praise of human reason and creativity?

> For this account man is properly said to be a great miracle and a wondrous being…The supreme Father, God the architect, had already fabricated this house of the world which we see…He took man…and placing him at the midpoint of the world spoke to him in this way…You, compelled by no limitations, according to your free choice…shall prescribe your own limits. I have set you at the center in the world, that you might more easily observe whatever there is in the world…Oh the magnificent generosity of God the Father! Oh the extraordinary and wondrous, felicity of man, who was given the power to be that which he wanted! (Della Mirandola 16)

Aeschylus's Furies, in their selfishness, saw reason as something to be weaponized in order to persuade others to their side, as they do here when they congratulate themselves for tripping up Orestes:

> So the centre holds.
>
> We are the skilled, the masterful,
>
> we the great fulfillers,
>
> memories of grief, we awesome spirits

stem, unappeasable to man,

disgraced, degraded, drive our powers through. (390-395)

However, Dante anticipates the more Socratic as well as Christian view of the Renaissance. In contrast to Aeschylus's view, Dante sees the universe as having one center and those with faith most apt to use reason to see it:

The nature of the universe, which holds

the center still and moves all else around it,

begins here as if from its turning-post.

As in a circle, light and love enclose it,

as it surrounds the rest—and that enclosing,

only He who encloses understands.

No other Heaven measures this sphere's motion,

but it serves as the measure for the rest,

even as half and fifth determine ten. (*Par*. 106-117)

Both speak of a center around which their universe spins, only Dante's is the one cosmic center, fully integrated with reason as well as love.

Both the *Orestia* and *Divine Comed*y envision community as its best, good societies. Aeschylus and Dante see their communities at dangerous crossroads and display a way forward in harmony among individuals, within the community, among communities and between communities and cosmos. The *Orestia* and *Divine Comedy* open with ugly pictures of discordant, disparate communities. In each work, while the heroes' initial desires revolve around personal salvation, the action moves to a point of

the individual's desire for change and positive contributing citizenship in the community. By the last parts of these works, the authors provide roadmaps for peace and transformation, not only for the works' heroes, but for all their communities' viewers or readers. As Beatrice tells Dante,

> Here you shall be—awhile—a visitor;
> but you shall be with me—and without end—
> Rome's citizen, the Rome in which Christ is
> Roman; and thus, to profit that world which
> lives badly, watch the chariot steadfastly
> and, when you have returned beyond, transcribe
> what you have seen. (*Purg*. XXXII 100-106)

Wisdom results from the heroes' journeys and is meant to be shared with the larger community. Similar to Beatrice's words above, here Athena speaks not just to the sides involved in Orestes's case, but all of Athens:

> Here… my people's kindred powers
> will hold them from injustice through the day
> and through the mild night…
> So I urge you Athens. I have drawn this out
> to rouse you to your future. You must rise,
> each man must cast his lot and judge the case,
> reverent to his oath.
> Now I have finished. (*Eum*. 703-706 and 722-725)

Each work holds up one picture of individual, political, scientific and religious history, not so that readers and viewers might live in the past, but so they might learn and transform the futures of their communities. Aeschylus and Dante seem to say that all modes of knowing point to one human capacity for transformation. Each work serves as a society's impetus to reach its full potential. As Athena warns to "never banish terror from the gates," though, one should not forget the irony that climbing Satan himself is the way out of Hell, into Purgatory and then Heaven. One must face Dis to get to paradise, for Athenians, Florentines and the rest of us who read about them.

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