

they coincide with them; they *are* these characteristics. The "again" of this renewal includes in itself instantaneousness and irreversibility, and constitutes the differentiation of the time modes. The "again" is irreversible; it cannot be thought of as lying in the past. This would dissolve every possibility of orientation. Even a crab canon has to move forward. The "again" occurs instantaneously. It is not caught in the insistent net of duration. If it were, it could never come again; it could only persist, impotently fading away into a monotonous extinction.

Musical "repetition" does not constitute itself as the same thing occurring at a different time. The repetition contains in itself what has happened in the elapsed intervals; it brings the time interval generically into the repetition itself.

Thus time becomes freed from the imposed dualism of bounding and flowing, of container and contents. It becomes freed from the encumbrance of extraneous contents inhibiting it, becomes purely concrete, its unique tensity unobscured by structures foreign to it.

In conclusion we shall attempt to give a tentative definition of musical time: Musical time is time manifesting itself in such a way that it transcends the dichotomy of a thing manifesting itself temporarily in something else, absorbing this dichotomy into the evolving, structuralizing tensity of aesthetic temporality.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The House, the City, and the Judge: The Growth of Moral Awareness in the Oresteia. RICHARD KUHNS. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962. xi, 164 p. \$5.00.

The literature on tragedy is vast, and the most stimulating and influential reflections have been contributed by philosophers: Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Other philosophers who have written on the subject without equaling the impact of those four include Hume and Schopenhauer, Scheler and Jaspers. But in the English-speaking world, tragedy has been largely left to the classical philologists (who are often very good indeed on points of detail) and to literary critics (who are often quite bad in their unsupportable generalizations). Professor Kuhns takes up the cudgels for philosophy.

His book can be divided into two parts: the first four chapters (not quite 100 pages) deal with "the plot and the hero" of the

Oresteia, with its "moral issue," and with "law, rule, and the polis." Here the author contributes little: much of what he has to say is stated more briefly by Philip Vellacott in his short introduction to the Penguin edition (Kuhns quotes Vellacott's translation once but does not refer to his introduction); and Gilbert Murray's masterly little book on *Aeschylus*,¹ which is not listed in the seven-page bibliography of secondary literature, is head and shoulders above Kuhn's account of Aeschylus's thought. The second part of Kuhns's book consists of the final chapter (44 pages), entitled: "Dramatic and Moral Meaning of Catharsis." This is more interesting philosophically.

The major points of the first part include the following. "The world of Olympian revolution is midway between the established order of the older gods and the enlightened *politeia* of Athens" (29). "The Erinyes, Apollo, and Athena are each representative of stages in this evolution" (67). "The conclusion of the *Oresteia* in fact states the conditions for the triumph of civilization over barbarism" (79). Occasional footnotes remind us, e.g., on page 67, that these contentions are not new or original; but the author does not seem to realize that he is laboring the obvious.

There is one point that is not obvious: that Apollo's apparently odd argument in defense of Orestes, to the effect that "the mother is no parent of that which is called her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed that grows" (*Eumenides*, 658 ff.), is not a mere sophism but a theory widely believed in ancient Greece. But even this was pointed out before by other writers whom Kuhns duly quotes.

The long chapter on catharsis cites many studies of this much-debated concept and tries to bring some order into the chaos by suggesting that "The interpretations of catharsis are of four kinds." The first is based on the medical analogy and associated with Bernays, Bywater, and Butcher. The second maintains that the emotions are not purged but purified: they are "purged of their egocentric reference" (107). L. A. Post and E. P. Papa-noutsos are classified in this category.

The third interpretation holds that catharsis "takes place essentially in the tragedy when it is composed, not in the soul of the spectator; . . . it has nothing to do with a cure or treatment of him. . . . Pity and fear . . . are purified in the same moment that they are aroused, by their incorporation into the beauty and measure of the perfect whole" (112). These lines are quoted from an early article by G. F. Else, who has importantly modified his view of catharsis in his book on *Aristotle's Poetics* (1957); but

¹ Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940; Oxford Paperbacks, 1962.

to the book Kuhns devotes a mere five lines which can hardly make much sense to anyone who has not read Else himself.

The fourth interpretation "maintains that catharsis is a redemptive process" (113). It is the hero who is purified through suffering and who attains to increased understanding. The spectator participates in this catharsis by participating in the hero's experience.

This fourfold classification of conceptions of catharsis is interesting and helpful and probably the best thing in the book.

Criticism is most conveniently offered under two headings. First, objections that have something to do with Aristotle or Plato. Secondly, those that pertain to the treatment of Aeschylus and Greek tragedy.

At the end of the survey of the four interpretations, we are told summarily that "each of these positions . . . can be buttressed by passages from the writings of Plato and Aristotle, [but] it is clear that no one of them satisfactorily explains the dramatic situation and offers an acceptable interpretation of catharsis. Which one is closest to Aristotle's original meaning it is impossible to say." Suppose the point about Aristotle were true; one would still like to see it supported by some evidence. But the famous passage from the *Poetics* that started the whole controversy is not even quoted. Much more important: it remains quite unclear what Kuhns means by "an acceptable interpretation of catharsis." What criteria would an interpretation have to fulfill to be rated acceptable? Or, to put the point differently: as long as the question is what Aristotle meant, the problem is clear; but once the question becomes what catharsis means, quite apart from "Aristotle's original meaning," one no longer knows what Kuhns is talking about. He himself shows that the term is ambiguous and has been used in different ways by different men of intelligence and discernment, but he goes on to write as if it were a profitable question what it really means.

This confusion enters into Kuhns's claim that making "of catharsis a knowing or cognitive process" has the "advantage of allowing one to say that ideally at least the tragic drama could reveal truths about the human condition and the self" (110 f.). Surely, we can say what Kuhns wants to say without saying anything at all about catharsis. Indeed, we can omit the hedge words "ideally at least" and "could" and say that it is a commonplace that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides confront us with "truths about the human condition and the self." Kuhns seems to assume that the point of tragedy is catharsis, whatever that means. He never considers the possibility that the point of

tragedy in general, if it makes any sense to speak of that, or for that matter the point of particular great tragedies, might consist in something that it would be better not to call catharsis—or at least in something that we should do well to distinguish from Aristotle's concept.

Another illustration of the same shortcoming: "As the *Poetics* makes clear, the plot is by far the most important part of the drama" (101). This is what Aristotle says rather baldly; but does he make out a compelling case? If Kuhns agrees with him, he might have met objections and defended the view. And he might also have attended more to the differences between Plato and Aristotle (pp. 134–35 are not nearly sufficient): instead he quotes a passage from Aristotle that some interpreters take for a polemic against Plato, without apparently noting this fact;² and he also ignores the very plausible suggestion that the whole theory of catharsis represents an attempt to answer Plato's critique of tragedy.³ Indeed, Plato's critique is not discussed at all, although it is one of the aims of the book to clarify Plato's philosophy of literature.

To conclude the criticisms that pertain to Aristotle, Kuhns is surely mistaken when he tells us three times on the last five pages that "Aristotle's definition of tragedy" excludes works that end on a note of reconciliation. It is true that Aristotle preferred a tragic end, other things being equal (*Poetics* 13);⁴ but he consistently refrained from projecting his preference into his definition (*Poetics* 6, 7, and 11).

Now as we turn to the treatment of Aeschylus, the most obvious fault of the book consists in two omissions: Aeschylus's other four extant plays are not considered at all, and up to the fifth page from the end neither Sophocles nor Euripides is mentioned. Even then Euripides is referred to in a perfunctory manner, and of Sophocles' plays only the two Oedipus plays are mentioned. Yet on page 132 there is a cryptic reference to "The playwrights and philosophers who concern us." More important: what is the subject matter of the long discussion of the "Dramatic and Moral

² Page 102, *Poetics* 1462. Cf. *Laws* 658d and, e.g. *Aristotle: On Poetry and Style*, tr. and introd. by G. M. A. Grube (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. xii.

³ Compare, e.g., F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics* (1927; rev. ed., New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 51 f., and John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (New York: Oxford, 1962), pp. 39 f.

⁴ Jones (*op. cit.*, p. 47) doubts even this: after noting that 1453^a9 is contradicted by 1454^a4, he says: "I believe the second text (which prefers an averted disaster) to represent Aristotle's settled and general opinion."

Meaning of Catharsis"? If it is not Aristotle's original meaning but rather what as a matter of fact does happen in Greek tragedy, then one surely has to discuss some Greek tragedies.

Moreover, if one wants to know what Aeschylus believed or wished to teach—and this is one of Kuhns's central concerns—it would seem indispensable to have a look at all of his extant plays, and to contrast his treatment of the Orestes story with Sophocles' and Euripides' very pointedly different versions. But the reader is never even told that these two poets dealt with the same story, or that Homer refers to the story a number of times, or how Aeschylus transformed the plot sketched in the *Odyssey*. But if "the plot is by far the most important part of the drama," it is doubly important to see where Aeschylus was original in constructing his plot, and where two of the greatest minds of his own century chose to differ with him.

The lack of historical perspective is a defect in other ways, too. A philosopher devoting a whole book to the *Oresteia* might have noticed its important place in the development of Greek philosophy. An apparently unimportant formulation sums up this failure: "It seems to be the case that Aeschylus agrees with Plato and Aristotle . . ." (130). If anything, they agreed with him: to put it my own way, Aeschylus stands half-way between Homer and Plato, and Euripides half-way between Aeschylus and Plato. Plato owes as much to them as he does to Parmenides and Heraclitus. They laid the foundations of the Platonic dialogue by discussing moral problems of the utmost seriousness in dialogue form. To treat Aeschylus, Plato, and Aristotle as if they had been contemporaries does not make sense, and the philosophers' discussions of tragedy should be evaluated against the background of the three great tragic poets who preceded them. On ever so many points, what matters is not whether the poets agreed with the philosophers, but whether the philosophers' dicta about tragedy agree with the facts—in other words, with the tragedies actually written by the three greatest tragic poets.

Finally, two points about the *Oresteia*. The author claims that Aeschylus assumed that "the gods exist and are just" (86),⁵ that Aeschylus was "concerned with the truth about the gods" and "concerned to present . . . the beliefs about the gods which are true" (94). Without further explanation and qualification, this is plainly false; so much so that one wonders what could be meant. Surely, Aeschylus did not believe that Hermes really said what he

⁵ This paragraph is not entirely unambiguous, but the two passages on p. 94 suggest that this is what he means. In the last chapter stylistic lapses abound and often leave one in doubt about the meaning.

is made to say in the *Eumenides* or in *Prometheus* (a discussion of the latter play would be interesting in this connection) or that he is telling us "the truth" about Apollo.

Kuhns also claims that what Orestes "did was certainly wrong" (141). I should argue that, according to Aeschylus, Orestes did the right thing, considering that in those days there were no courts. But the fact that a man's duty in ancient times could involve such horrors led to the development of institutions, at least in Athens, that abolished the necessity for such terrible deeds—and that is the occasion for the hymns of joy on which the trilogy closes.

Aeschylus, unlike Sophocles, believed that the use of reason and the establishment of wise institutions could eliminate tragedy. That not only is the point of the *Oresteia* but fits Gilbert Murray's persuasive reconstruction of the *Prometheus* trilogy and, most obviously, the striking way in which the king in *The Suppliants* resolves a tragic and apparently ineluctable dilemma by presenting it to the assembly of free men where the arguments pro and con are weighed and a vote is taken. But Aeschylus's world view is one thing, what makes his plays towering tragedies in spite of his apparently untragic world view is another, and generalizations about tragedy on the basis of the *Oresteia* are very likely to be wrong. Kuhns's on pages 132, center, and 134, bottom, are cases in point. And, the conclusion of the book, spelled out in the final five pages, can be supported only by ignoring almost the whole corpus of extant Greek tragedies; and even then it makes little sense of Orestes and Oedipus, the only two figures mentioned by Kuhns.

Greek tragedy and some of Aristotle's theories about it constitute extremely interesting subjects for philosophic reflection. Much of what Plato and Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche have said about tragedy is as misleading as it is fascinating, and important work remains to be done in this area. Professor Kuhns's approach, however, is clearly infelicitous; and apart from a number of specific shortcomings this is due in large measure to his almost exclusive concentration on a single work, *The Oresteia*. While Aristotle based some generalizations on *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and Hegel on *Antigone*, both made a point of drawing, though not systematically enough, on the whole corpus of tragedies known to them. A detailed interpretation of a single play or trilogy, on the other hand, is bound to be of slight philosophic interest: it cannot even hope to establish the playwright's philosophy, much less a philosophy of tragedy or a philosophy of literature, or an interesting theory of catharsis.

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