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The Ultimate Norm of Morality in the Tragedies of Sophocles

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THE ULTIMATE NORM OF MORALITY
IN THE TRAGEDIES OF
SOPHOCLES

by
Paul F. Conen, S.J.

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of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
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LIFE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the intellectual content of Sophoclean drama, there is little that is more important, and little that is more interesting, than the treatment given to the fundamental norm of morality. The emphasis Sophocles places on this subject, the fact that he puts it in the foreground of some of the plays, invites a serious study of it. Such a study of the measure of right and wrong in Sophocles would be one that inquires not only into the nature of that measure, but which examines as well the influences that led Sophocles to give the subject so much prominence in his drama; it would be a study which tests, too, the validity of his norm of morality by a criterion of the true doctrine. Such is the threefold purpose of this thesis.

It would be rather foolish, however, to begin discussing Sophocles' doctrine on the norm of morality without first ascertaining whether there is such a doctrine in Sophocles' tragedies, and whether or not that doctrine is Sophocles'. After all, the man was not writing a philosophical treatise. He was a poet and a dramatist, and what he wrote was poetical drama.

It is indeed true that in Sophocles "the dramatic inter-
est always holds the first place."¹ And this is a fact to be kept in mind throughout the following treatment, lest through a minute study of one aspect of Sophoclean drama a proper perspective of the whole be lost. But in spite of the prominence of the dramatic interest in Sophocles, it is by no means the only interest. Sophocles' tragedies are not exclusively artistic studies devoid of any moral significance. Sophocles studied human nature not only in its psychological aspect, he portrayed the "passions and sufferings of mankind . . . not only as they appear in themselves, but also as they appear in relation to the eternal laws of justice and divine government."²

To argue that Sophocles was not a philosopher but a dramatist, and that therefore the ideas, even the ethical ideas, expressed in his plays are not Sophocles' own, but merely those of the several characters in their particular situations, is to ignore an important truth about Greek poetry in general, and about Greek tragedy especially, the truth that the Greek poet was a teacher.³ We have Aristophanes' word⁴ for this with regard to the fifth-century poets, and we know that the poets

² Ibid., 169.
³ T.B.L. Webster, An Introduction to Sophocles, Oxford, 1936, 18.
⁴ Frogs, 1055.
themselves looked upon their profession in this light:

Die griechischen Dichter haben sich immer als die Lehrer und Erzieher ihres Volkes betrachtet. Den Fragen, die auf aller Lippen schweben, mögen sie nun die Politik des Tages oder die tiefsten Probleme der Weltanschauung betreffen, geht der hellenische Dichter nicht aus dem Wege, sondern er sieht gerade darin seiner Beruf, im Kampf der Geister sein gewichtiges Wort in die Wagschale zu werfen.

Sophocles himself said that he did not present men as they are--Euripides did that--but as they ought to be. And in this approach to human nature, Sophocles was but a child of his age. With the beginning of the Sophistic movement, the problem of human arete became a focal point of discussion. The Athenian mind in the fifth century grew increasingly humanistic; not in an emotional philanthropic sense, but humanistic in as much as intellectual interest gravitated toward a search into the true nature of man. Sophocles was caught up in the spirit of this humanistic movement, using the medium of his tragedies to express his personal convictions on moral standards.

Because Sophocles advanced his ideas on the norm of morality "nicht als Philosoph sondern als Künstler," it is to be

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6 Aristotle, Poetics, XXV, 1460 b 34.

7 Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, tr. from the 2nd German ed. by Gilbert Highet, Oxford, 1939, 1, 275 & 277.

8 Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 152.
expected that he employed as his method of teaching not the frontal approach of the professional instructor, but the subtler ways of the poet. His effectiveness as a teacher would depend upon how well he centered attention on his tragedies as works of art first and foremost; for only then would he have achieved the proper emotional setting for his doctrine. It is this emotional setting that is so essential to the success of the teacher-poet. We must not expect, then, to find Sophocles preaching his doctrine on morality; for this would only vitiate his purpose. We must rather look for his teaching in the significant utterances of his characters and choruses interpreted in the spirit of the individual tragedies considered as a whole, as well as in the very subject matter of the plays, especially of those dealing directly with a conflict of moral principles. The poet's doctrine, it is true, will not have the clarity of the teacher's, but it will be superior in power.

A study of the norm of morality in Sophocles has a twofold value. One is philosophical, the other is literary. In the course of this thesis, it will be necessary to treat of certain "pure" doctrines of the ancient Greeks on the norm of morality, i.e. principles on the norm which have been carried to their extreme logical conclusions, as opposed to doctrines which illogically contain remnants derived from alien principles. These

9 Webster, An Introduction, 18.
"pure" doctrines throw a good deal of light on certain parallel doctrines in modern times—doctrines, some of which are not "pure," others which are "pure" but advertised as original. Besides this philosophic fruit, an understanding of the moral content of Sophocles' plays will yield a fuller appreciation of the tragedies as works of art. Much of the power of the dramatic situations and characters in Sophocles is due to the philosophi­cal framework upon which the situations and characters are con­structed. The clearer the idea one has of the intellectual framework, the deeper will be his appreciation of the emotional superstructure which comprises the heart of the tragedies.

The procedure followed in the subsequent chapters is a simple one. In the presentation of his doctrine on the norm of morality, Sophocles was reacting, to a large extant, to the doc­trine of the Greek Sophists. A comprehensive understanding and full appreciation of Sophocles' doctrine depends, therefore, on a previous knowledge of at least the basic tenets of the Sophists who influenced him. The relation of Sophocles' moral doctrine to that of the Sophists is presented in an article on the subject by Wilhelm Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik." The thesis bor­rows freely from this article for the moral doctrine both of the Sophists and of Sophocles himself, but supplements the pertinent matter of the article with research in the primary and other secondary sources, and rearranges it so that the logical sequence of the ideas becomes more apparent. Complete originality of
treatment can be claimed only in the evaluation of Sophocles by the criterion of the orthodox doctrine on the norm of morality. This evaluation is the final step toward an appreciation of Sophocles' teaching on the norm. Thus, the thesis falls neatly into four divisions: (1) the doctrine of the Sophists; (2) the Sophoclean reaction and negative doctrine; (3) Sophocles' positive doctrine; and (4) the evaluation of the positive doctrine.
CHAPTER II

SOPHISTIC MORALITY

Strong ideas are often reactionary. Dam up the stream of a Demosthenes' aggressive thought with a stubborn pacifism, and that stream will grow into a raging torrent, will search out the weak points in its obstacle, exploit them in a hundred unpredictable ways, and finally break through in one grand endeavor. Oppose an Aristotle on a fundamental issue, and you will set off cerebral fireworks of such brilliance and variety as to be completely overwhelming. There are strong ideas in Sophocles on the subject of morality, and their strength and abundance leads us to suspect that they are reactionary. The evidence confirms such a suspicion. Not only are Sophocles' ideas on morality reactionary; they are ideas whose strength and importance are not fully appreciated until their reactionary nature is recognized and understood.

To whom or to what did Sophocles react? What was the goad that provoked him to such strong and beautiful expressions on law and morality as are found, for example, in the Oedipus Tyrannus or the Antigone? We may answer simply, but in words that require a good deal of explanation: Sophistic morality. It
is in the moral doctrine of the Sophists that Sophocles finds, in a negative sort of way, inspiration to present his own firm convictions concerning the bases of good and evil through the medium of his plays.

While the present and following chapters will be concerned with pointing out the opposition between Sophoclean and Sophistic ideas where they meet on the field of right and wrong, it must be kept in mind, for an adequate and accurate understanding of the matter, that Sophocles was not opposed to the Sophistic spirit in its entirety. On the contrary, there is one aspect of that spirit into which Sophocles himself entered wholeheartedly, as is evidenced quite forcibly by what is probably Sophocles' best known choral ode, the one in the Antigone which celebrates in magnificent and enthusiastic language the accomplishments of man.¹ The Sophists, especially Protagoras, glorified man as the conqueror of nature, praised him unstintingly for his advancement in material and intellectual civilization.² Sophocles gives poetical embodiment to this humanistic spirit of the Sophists in the Antigone. Where has humanism found more powerful expression than in the first line of the famous ode: πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοσμῶν ἄνθρωπον δεινότερον πέλει, "Wonders are many,

¹ Antigone, 334-375.
and none is more wonderful than man,"³ with its emphatic repetition of the strong δεινόν and the rhythmic concentration on the word ἄνθρωπου? Man conquers the stormy sea, makes the ancient Earth yield him crops. Man captures bird and wild beast, tames the horse and the powerful bull, and forces them to serve him. Man has developed the art of speech, has learned swift thought, has organized societies, has devised means to protect himself from wind and cold and rain. Man is παντοπόρος, "all-resourceful." But Sophocles does not go all the way with the Sophists. His principles allow him to travel down the road of thought only a short distance with them, eine kleine Strecke Weges,³ the part of the road that passes through the country of empirical accomplishment. After that he parts company with them. Sophocles turns right. He gives his whole eulogy on the resourcefulness of man an ironic turn by concluding it with the grim Ἀδα μόνον φεσένον ὅσι ἐπάγεται, "only against Death shall he call for aid in vain." He reflects further that the ingenuity of man can be used just as easily for evil purposes as it can for good. The Sophists, on the other hand, turn left. Their Weltanschauung takes them down the road of the "enlightenment." Perhaps if we follow along with them for a bit, we may find out just what it

³ Antigone, 334. All English translations of Sophocles are taken from R.C. Jebb, Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Cambridge.

³a Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 135.
is about their views on morality that caused the conservative Sophocles to react against them.

Dr. Nestle makes the strong statement that the thought-content of Sophocles' poetry derives its proper character from its fundamental and forceful opposition to the Sophistic Enlightenment. The statement implies that there was a common element in the doctrine of the Sophists against which Sophocles could react. Nestle is not the only one to group all the Sophists under one heading, as will easily be seen from the tables of contents in a number of histories of Philosophy. But the point is not an easy one to make. The Sophists do not form a philosophic school in the sense that the Neoplatonists or the Aristotelians do. They are not branches of the same trunk. They are independent stalks. Hence it cannot be said a priori as it may be said of other groups that there is a common denominator in their respective doctrines, which characterizes them as a school. Such similarity of doctrine can be established, if at all, only a posteriori. Theodor Gomperz' investigations on the subject led him to the conclusion that the Sophists shared little more in common than their name:

What was the genuine common factor in the several Sophists? And to that question we can but reply that it consisted merely of their teaching profession and the conditions of its practice imposed by the age in which they lived. For the rest, they were united . . . by

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4 Ibid., 135.
the part they took in the intellectual movements of their times. It is illegitimate, if not absurd, to speak of a sophistic mind, sophistic morality, sophistic scepticism, and so forth. 5

Nevertheless, there are authorities who do not hesitate to take this "illegitimate" view of Sophistic doctrine, and the evidence they offer in support of their views would seem to indicate that Gomperz has sacrificed complete accuracy to strength of expression. Alfred Benn concludes his treatment of the individual Sophists with the following observation (supported by his previous exposition):

Taking the whole class together, they represent a combination of three distinct tendencies, the endeavor to supply an encyclopaedic training for youth, the cultivation of political rhetoric as a special art, and the search after a scientific foundation for ethics derived from the results of previous philosophy. With regard to the last point, they agree in drawing a fundamental distinction between Nature and Law, but some take one and some take the other for their guide . . . 6

This view, especially the assertion that there was a common tendency present in the ethical doctrine of the Sophists, is corroborated by Heinrich Rommen 7 and Edward Zeller. 8 Zeller stresses

5 Theodor Gomperz, Greek Thinkers, tr. Laurie Magnus, London, 1939, I, 415.


the undermining of all law as the common effect of Sophistic doctrine, and this is the point in which we are particularly interested. It is the legal aspect (legal in its widest sense) of the fifth-century Aufklärung which especially disturbed the harmonious soul of Sophocles. Thus, what the Sophists had to say about law takes on a special interest for the student of Sophocles.

The war that raged in fifth-century Hellas between physis and nomos makes just as interesting reading in its own way as does the Peloponnesian War. And it is a far more important war than the Peloponnesian, especially if one takes into account its counterpart in modern philosophy. Rousseau is Hippias translated into French, and Hobbes but repeats Protagoras, though both of the moderns pride themselves on the originality of their doctrine.

The history of the war between nature and law begins with Heraclitus (c. 536-470 B.C.). Though an extremist with regard to the general outlines of his philosophy, when it came to the question of law, Heraclitus was the Scholastic of the fifth century B.C. He was to the ancient Enlightenment what Suarez was to the modern, in that his orthodox views on law preceded historically a cataclism of error. Whereas Suarez, however, reached his conclusions about law by being logical, Heraclitus reached his by throwing logic overboard. Heraclitus' famous

9 Rommen, The Natural Law, 5-6.
principle, πάντα βεί, οὐδὲν μένει, should have precluded once and for all anything stable, anything permanent in his philosophy. But such was not the case. What Heraclitus buried with one sentence, he resurrected with another. The eternal flow, since it was a flow of all things, should have swept along with it law. But Heraclitus perceived a pattern and a kind of stability in the flux, and for this stability he needed a principle. So he did the obvious but illogical thing. He postulated an eternal and divine logos to rule the flow of things and to establish order in it. This law was the norm, not only of physical change, but also of human moral conduct. To this fundamental law all other laws were subordinate. They all depended on it for their validity:

Σωφρονεῖν ἰσχύων ἐκαίνεται: ἐν τῷ ἐν ἑαυτῷ γενόμεθα. Ἐὰν οὖν ἐστὶ πᾶσι τῷ φρονέσθαι... Εἰκόνα λέγοντας ἰσχύς εσθεν. ἐν τῷ ἐν ἑαυτῷ... Ἐὰν νῦν λέγοντας ἰσχύς εσθεν. Ἐν τῷ ἐν ἑαυτῷ γενόμεθα. Ἐὰν οὖν ἐστὶ πᾶσι τῷ φρονέσθαι... Ρέφοντας ἐκ γὰρ πάντως οἱ ἄνθρωποι νόμοι ἤπο ἐνὸς τοῦ θείου.

Soundness of mind is the greatest virtue; and wisdom consists in speaking the truth, and in hearkening to nature and acting in accord with it... Understanding is common to all... Those who speak with understanding must be strong through what is common to all, as a city through its law, and stronger still: for all human laws draw their force from a single law, which is divine.

Thus, as Rommen says, Heraclitus saw in, and not beyond, the diversity of human laws the one, immutable, natural law, from which

the human laws draw their force.\textsuperscript{10} Beatitude, for Heraclitus, consisted in submitting to the divine order of things, to the eternal law.\textsuperscript{11}

What Heraclitus had so neatly and correctly joined together, the Sophists put asunder. \textit{Physis} and \textit{nomos}, which Heraclitus had blended into one pattern, became now for the Sophists two separate standards, serving as the symbols of two opposed concepts concerning the norm of morality. Under the one standard, \textit{physis}, is grouped the State-of-Nature faction, headed by the Sophist Hippias, and supported strongly by Antiphon, Callicles, and Critias. Marshalled under the standard of \textit{nomos} are the Relativists: Protagoras and his followers.

It was not without reason that the State-of-Nature Sophists evolved the doctrine they did. They were seeking a solution to a serious problem. Most of them were foreigners, and the laws of the Greek \textit{polis} discriminated against foreigners. Hence, the same laws that the citizens considered to be right without qualification (even Socrates held this view) the Sophists stigmatized as not only accidentally but essentially unjust. When Heraclitus distinguished between nature and positive law, he was planting positive law firmly in the ground of natural law, thus giving positive law a source of vigorous life. But when

\textsuperscript{10} The Natural Law, 6.

\textsuperscript{11} Zeller, Greek Philosophy, 70.
Hippias and Antiphon and Callicles distinguished between *physis* and *nomos*, it was rather to uproot positive law from the soil of nature, and thus to kill it. It was not that the laws needed reform in their eyes. It was a case of their being substantially bad. Only what was right or wrong by nature was validly right or wrong. Anything else was merely the machination of an interested party.12

Hippias, probably the first of the Sophists13 to advance a State-of-Nature theory, was a Leonardo da Vinci and Henri Bergson combined. He was a universal genius, a Jack of all trades: astronomer; geometrician; arithmetician; theorist in phonetics, rhythm, music, sculpture, painting, chronology, mnemonics; mythologist; ethnologist; ambassador; writer of epic, tragic, epigrammatic and dithyrambic poetry; master of industrial arts; and not least of all philosopher.14 Such a plethora of abilities goes a long way towards explaining Hippias' philosophic views. Hippias was irked with the laws of the Greek *polis*, distinguish-


13 It is helpful to make a distinction here between the spirit of the early Sophists, contemporaries of Socrates, and the later ones, pupils of Socrates and contemporaries of Plato, together with the Eristics, whom Aristotle opposed. Though Plato in his Dialogues attributed to the early Sophists the traditional "sophistic" manner, it is quite certain that they were not the quibblers and extreme sceptics that the later Sophists were, but rather were sincere and serious thinkers. Cf. Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, 420-421, for a discussion of this point.

14 Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, 431.
ing and discriminating as they did between Hellene and barbarian, citizen and metic, free man and slave. He championed the idea that all men are equal by nature. And when Hippias said equal, he did not mean merely essentially equal. He had the Rousseauean concept that if men could get back to a state of nature everyone would be happy, because everyone would exist with that self-sufficiency with which nature must have endowed all men, but which was being smothered and stifled by laws and conventions. That is why Hippias himself developed his talents along so many lines. He was out to achieve the self-sufficiency he thought himself and everyone else capable of by nature, and he would do it, civil laws notwithstanding. He even went so far as to appear at the Olympic games once in garments fashioned entirely by his own hand, from the sandals on his feet to the rings on his fingers.  

There are three aspects of Hippias' doctrine on physis and nomos that are pertinent to the subject matter of this thesis. The first is the fact that he made a distinction between nature and positive law. We shall, in the next chapter, see Sophocles doing something of the sort. The second point is that he held the natural law alone to be binding and salutary. Finally, Hippias was quite vague as to the content of his natural law.

15 Comperz, Greek Thinkers, 431.
17 The same may be said of the other Sophists who es-
Outside of the fact that it was universal and necessary, and made all men equal, it seemed to have little further determination.

When Hippias pushed positive law from the pedestal of nature which served as its foundation, his aim was to establish equality among men. But another Sophist, who stood by and witnessed the bold act, saw that it could well serve another end, which happened to be more to his particular liking. When Antiphon, then, divorced positive law from its fundament in nature, he did so because positive law stood in the way of pleasure:

16

Most of the things which are just according to law are hostile to nature. There are laws for the eyes, what they may see and what they may not; and for the ears, what they may hear and what they may not; and for the tongue, what it may speak and what it may not ... and for the mind, what it may desire and what it may not. Now the prohibitions of the law are in no way more favorable or akin to nature than its injunctions.

The hedonistic flavor of this passage is unmistakable.

Whereas Hippias was vague as to what he meant by nature as a norm of morality, Antiphon would seem to have identified nature with the animal nature of man, or at least with human nature in so

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far as it is the subject of the pleasure of the moment. Indeed, Antiphon condemns such "scrupulous" behavior as waiting until one is injured to inflict harm, treating harsh parents kindly, failing to meet legal charges with counter-charges, all on the ground that

\[\text{ἀν τίς εὔροι πολέμια τῇ φύσει, ἐν τ' ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀλγύνεσθαι μᾶλλον, ἐξὸν ἥττω, καὶ ἐλάττω ἡδεσθαι, ἐξὸν πλεῖω, καὶ κακὸς πᾶσχειν, ἐξὸν μὴ πᾶσχειν.}\]

one would find them hostile to nature; there is more pain in them where less is possible, less pleasure where more is possible, and suffering where its absence is possible.

For a man whose only criterion of right and wrong is pleasure and pain, nature carries its own punishment of wrong in the pain it inflicts, and the only wrong connected with the violation of a positive law is in getting caught. Antiphon says that the thing to do is to uphold the laws when witnesses are present; but when there are no witnesses to follow the precepts of nature. The precepts of the law are arbitrary; those of nature, necessary. The dictates of the law result from convention, the mandates of nature from natural growth. Consequently, one who transgresses the laws incurs no disgrace or punishment provided that he goes undetected by those who made the laws. But if caught, he must pay the penalty of the law. The transgressor of the innate principles of nature, on the other hand, meets with no less evil if undetected, and with no more if caught. For he is injured, not

19 Ibid., Col. 4, 31 - Col. 5, 24.
by the opinion of men, but by fact.\textsuperscript{20}

The little pebble that Hippias had sent hopping down the mountainside had seemed innocent enough. Hippias was merely looking for equality. But by the time that pebble had rolled half way down, it had dislodged many more pebbles; and, after the movement had passed Antiphon, it was beginning to look dangerous. It was reserved to Critias and Callicles, however, to turn the State-of-Nature theory into a thundering landslide. These two men saw very clearly the truth to which Hippias' eyes were closed: that there would be less equality among men in a state of nature than there existed in conventional society. Men simply did not possess the same endowments. Some were wiser than others, some cleverer, some stronger. But while Critias and Callicles rejected one of Hippias' errors, they embraced one of Antiphon's: only the painful is wrong, only the pleasurable good. And the mixture of the two gave them a new doctrine to proclaim, a Will-of-the-Stronger theory, an \textit{Uebermenschenmoral}.\textsuperscript{21} Callicles and Critias are a preface to Nietzsche and Carlyle. In the animal kingdom, the stronger overcomes the weaker. The same holds true among warring states. In nature, might makes right, the rule of the stronger prevails. What, then, were these laws of men that fettered the stronger and held him in subjection? They were in

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., Col. 1, 12 - Col. 2, 23.

\textsuperscript{21} Nestle, \textit{"Sophokles und die Sophistik,"} 154.
reality a conspiracy of the weak to master the strong. Laws such as were being enforced in Athenian democracy were unjust in the most fundamental sense of the word. It was for the stronger few, then, to seize the reins of government from the weak. They had a right to authority by a title both older and more valid than the unnatural laws then in force. 22

We are struck again and again by the remarkable parallels existing between thought of the Greeks, especially of the Sophists, and that of Descartes and his philosophical progeny. It is a repetition that forms a telling argument against the Hegelian theory that the thought of the Absolute is gradually evolving itself through a process of thesis and antithesis. And what is true about philosophical theories themselves is true also about the manner of their growth. The pattern of growth is the same today as it was in five-hundred B.C. Hellas. Someone proposes an erroneous doctrine, someone else develops it, perhaps a third party carries it to its logical conclusion. Then there appears a philosopher with enough common sense to see the falsity of the extreme conclusion; he reacts to it, and begins to search for premises that will obviate it.

Such, for example, was the case with the moderns, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, and their doctrine on cognition.

22 Rommen, The Natural Law, 11; Benn, The Greek Philosophers, 84.
Locke laid down principles in the light of which he should have denied the existence of substance, but did not. Berkeley saw the illogicality of Locke and denied the existence of corporeal substances, but inconsistently admitted the existence of spirits. Hume promptly rectified Berkeley's error, and thus destroyed the possibility of any scientific knowledge. Then Immanuel Kant appeared on the scene, wishing very much to save scientific knowledge; so he reacted to Hume, and laid down a set of premises by which he thought to rectify the false conclusion—in vain, however, for he did not back down the wrong road far enough. And when he finally turned off in a new direction, he still had behind him some of the errors that Locke had made in the first place.

The Sophists follow much the same pattern as these moderns. The Locke of the Sophists was Hippias (the analogy here is not between the ancient and modern doctrines, but only between the series of action and reaction by which those doctrines were developed). He laid down the false premises by dividing law from nature. Then came Antiphon, amplifying, developing along new lines. And finally, there appeared Callicles and Critias to play the Humean role of carrying the false premises to their extreme conclusion. The stage was now set for the entrance of the reactionary; and he came in the person of Protagoras.

Many of the moderns who are most vociferous in their
denunciations of nature as the fundament of morality, are so because they identify natural law with the law of a state of nature such as Hobbes or Rousseau conceived it. Hence their condemnations are well-founded, since the natural law of Hobbes and Rousseau is ill-conceived. It is only because the condemners view natural law inadequately that they are mistaken. Similarly with Protagoras. He denounced the theory that morality had its foundation in nature only because he identified that theory with the doctrine voiced abroad by the Sophists mentioned above. It was absurd, he said, to take the beasts as models of conduct for men. Human beings could not be left to their instincts and be expected to achieve superior development. They needed the advantages of civilization, especially of the social virtues of justice and reverence. It was mere folly to prefer the so-called simplicity of savages to the complexities of civilized society. Plato represents him as thus answering the naturalists of his day:

I would have you consider that he who appears to you to be the worst of those who have been brought up in the humanities would appear to be a just man and a master of justice if he were to be compared with men who had no education, or courts of justice, or laws, or any restraints upon them which compelled them to practice virtue—with the savages, for example, whom the poet Pherecrates exhibited on the stage at the last year's Lenaeon festival. If you were living among men such as the man-haters in his chorus, you would be only too glad to meet with Eurybates and Phrynondas, and you would sorrowfully

23 Benn, The Greek Philosophers, 39.
long to revisit the rascality of this part of the world.²⁴

Protagoras' reaction to Callicles, Antiphon, and Hippias, though correct in so far as it condemned a false theory of morality, was unfortunate in this, that it had nothing better to substitute. In fact, there are not wanting arguments to show that the state of the question was a little more favorable to truth before Protagoras' contribution than after. The chief difficulty with Protagoras was that he was a sensist, and thus could arrive at no absolute principle as the basis of morality. His fundamental thesis that cognition is sense perception²⁵ could not but infect his views on morality. Protagoras sought to bolster the validity of positive law by pointing out its necessity for civilized man, but he was destined to fail because the only prop he could utilize was the very weak one of convention. Before, there was necessity at least and universality in the foundations of morality, however inadequately those foundations might have been constructed; and there was the possibility of seeing, in time, the true connection between universal nature and positive law. But now there existed only the particular and contingent, and it was impossible, working from such premises, to construct anything but a relativistic theory of law and morality. Whatever was the


²⁵ Gomperz, Greek Thinkers, 456.
original meaning of Protagoras' much disputed "man is the measure of all things," this much, at least, can be said of it. The statement represents admirably, according to what may be termed an obvious interpretation, its author's views on morality. Wherever mere human convention is the supreme rule of right and wrong, morality is whatever man makes it.

It is important to note also, for its pertinence to our treatment of Sophocles, that Protagoras' principle of cognition led him to a scepticism in theological matters, forcing him, of course, to divorce morality completely from anything savoring of the divine or the after-life:

\[
\text{πέρι μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναι, οὐθ' ὡς εἰσὶν οὐθ' ὡς οὐκ εἰσίν οὐθ' ὡς ἀποικοὶ τίνες οἴδαν· πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ καλὸντα εἰδέναι ἢ τ' ἀθηλότης καὶ βραχύς ὁν τοῦ ἄνθρωπον.}
\]

With regard to the gods I am unable to know either that they exist or that they do not, or what form they might have; for many things stand in the way of such knowledge: especially the obscurity of the matter and the shortness of man's life.

If there was any one thing that grated more than all else on Sophocles' moral sensibilities, it was this exclusion of the divine from the realm of ethics.

Someone has said that originality in philosophy is no longer possible. Take any stand on a question you can conceive of, and you will find that someone before you has seriously sponsored the same view. Thus it is with the problem of nature and

26 Diels, Fragmenta, 80 B 4.
law. The Greek Sophists seem to have left little room for an original position in the matter. Either positive law is founded on nature or it is not. If it is not, either law or nature alone must be the sole basis of morality. Heraclitus embraced the first position. He said that positive law was rooted in nature. That nature alone determined right and wrong was the thesis, with slight variations as to details, of Hippias, Antiphon, Callicles, and Critias. Finally, it remained for Protagoras to assert that law alone, arbitrary law, founded not on nature but on convention, was the sole measure of right and wrong. These are the theories that form a background to Sophocles' teaching on the norm. It remains to be seen which of these positions the doctrine of Sophocles most closely resembles.
CHAPTER III

OPPOSITION TO THE "ENLIGHTENMENT"

Before considering the positive aspect of Sophoclean morality, it will be well to treat of his moral teaching in so far as it is an attack against the views advanced by the Sophists. Such an approach to Sophocles' positive ideas will serve to place them in their proper perspective.

Of the seven existing plays of Sophocles, five contain matter of a sufficiently obvious moral nature to merit consideration in this thesis: Antigone, Ajax, Oedipus Tyrannus, Philoctetes, and Oedipus Coloneus. Sophocles opposes in these plays both the positive-law concept of Protagoras and the State-of-Nature theory of Hippias, Antiphon, Callicles, and Critias.

With regard to the State-of-Nature theory, Sophocles' attack is threefold. Against Hippias he upholds the existence and binding character of law, especially "eternal" law. He assails the scepticism and hedonism of Antiphon. And, finally, he heaps abundant condemnation on the Will-of-the-Stronger theory of Callicles and Critias.

Hippias had been struck forcibly by the differences and apparent contradictions present among existing laws (νόμοι).
These differences led him to the conclusion, first, that νόμος had only an arbitrary and relative character, and that therefore νόμος had no binding force; but, secondly, that nature alone (φύσις) was salutary and commanded respect in the moral order. Sophocles attacked this concept of νόμος vigorously in the Antigone, especially when the νόμος in question was divine (gottgewollt). Wilhelm Nestle calls the Antigone a declaration of war against Sophistic doctrine. Creon is the "enlightened" despot who would overthrow by sheer force the hallowed usages enjoined by religious law. Nestle continues:


Whether Sophocles went so far as to assign nature as the fundament of law and morality is debatable, but there is little doubt of this: that Antigone is the champion of an efficacious and absolute divine law in the face of a tyrant who tried to subordinate that law to human caprice. When Ismene excused herself from the divinely imposed duty of burying her brother, on

1 Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 137.


3 Ibid. Italics in the original.
the score that she was forced to it by circumstances, Antigone retorted:

\[ \text{τὰ τὸν θεῖον ἐντιμ' ἀτιμάσαι ἔχε.} \]

But if thou wilt, be guilty of dishonoring laws which the gods have established in honor. . . . I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.4

Antigone answers Ismene's charge that she is over-zealous to perform this duty with a succinct ἀλλ' οἴδ' ἄρεσκοις οἴς μᾶλισθ' ἀδείν μὲ χρή. "I know that I please where I am most bound to please."5 And when the final test came, and Antigone had to face a Creon angrily charging that she violated his edict, she did not flinch in her loyalty to divine law:

**KP.** ἤδησθα κηρυχθέντα μὴ πρᾶσσειν τάδε;
**AN.** ἵνα τί δ' οὐκ ἐμελλον; ἐμφανῆ γὰρ ἦν.
**KP.** καὶ δὴ ἐτόλμασ τοῦδε ὑπερβαίνειν νόμους;
**AN.** οὐ γὰρ τί μοι ζεῦς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε, οὐδ' ἢ σύνοικος τὸν κατὶ θέουν ἄλλη τοιοῦτον ἐν ἄνθρωποις ὑπερβαίνειν νόμους;
**KP.** σέειν τοῦτον φῶμῃ τὰ ἅθι κηρύγματ', ὥστ' ἀγραφὴ κάρφωλη θεῶν νόμιμα δύνασθαι θητον ὅνθ' ὑπερβαίνειν;
**AN.** οὐ γὰρ τί νῦν γε κάθεις, ἀλλ' ἄει ποτε ἐκ ταῦτα, κυδίες οἴδεν ἐξ ἰδου φανή.

**Cr.** [I]newest thou that an edict had forbidden this?
**An.** I knew it: could I help it? It was public.
**Cr.** And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law?
**An.** Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set

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4 Antigone, 76-81.
5 Ibid., 89.
among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.6

Antigone is condemned to death for her conviction, and fearful of death though she be, she never loses sight of the fact that she dies in a noble adherence to the divine νόμος:

λέγουσαι, ηδής οι κοιμανίδαι, 
tήν βασιλείαν μούνην λοίπην, 
οία πρὸς οἶνων ἀνδρῶν πάσχω, 
tήν εὐσεβίαν σεβίσαμα.

Behold me, princes of Thebes, 
the last daughter of the house of your kings,—see what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear of heaven!7

The self-centered and self-exalting Enlightenment of Hippias, scorning law and falsely glorifying human nature, this Enlightenment, in opposition to which the character of Antigone is drawn, is no less forcibly damned by Sophocles in what Nestle calls the Herzpunkt of the Oedipus Tyrannus,8 the beautiful choral ode in praise of reverence for the eternal laws.9 In the epi-

6 Ibid., 447-457.
7 Ibid., 940-943.
8 "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 148.
9 Oedipus Tyrannus, 863-910.
sode which precedes the ode, Oedipus has treated Creon with "overbearing harshness." He has accused Creon of plotting to gain control of the throne of Thebes, and of inducing Teiresias to utter his terrible prophesies. Jocasta has been no less overbearing in her scorn of the prophetic powers of Apollo's ministers. While Oedipus and Jocasta are thus giving expression to their ego in true Hippian style, with little regard to a law which is higher than their ego and to which their ego must conform, there runs parallel to this false exaltation of nature the rising suspicion that Oedipus is guilty of his father's blood, if of nothing else. The choral ode following the episode develops in wonderful contrast these two central themes of the tragedy. The first stanza deals directly with reverence for the heavenly laws:

εἰ μοι ξυνεῖ η φέροντι
μοίρα τᾶν εὕσπερ τόν ἄγνελαν λόγων
ἐργῶν τε πάντων ὁ νόμοι πρόκειται
ὑποδέσει, οὐράνιαν
δι' αὐθέρα τεκνωθέντες, ὃν "Ολύμπος
πατὴρ μόνος, οὐδὲ νῖν
θενατά φύσις ἀνέφων
ἐπίκτεται, οὐδὲ μὴ ποτὲ λάθα καταχωμάσην;
μέγας ἐν τούτοις θεός, οὐδὲ γρίτωσιν.
May destiny still find me winning the praise of reverent purity in all words and deeds sanctioned by those laws of range sublime, called into life throughout the high clear heaven, whose father is Olympus alone; their parent was no

Then, abruptly, in the second and third stanzas, the chorus denounces the deeds of "enlightened" and proud nature:

Insolence breeds the tyrant; Insolence, once vainly surfeited on wealth that is not meet nor good for it, when it hath scaled the topmost ramparts, is hurled to a dire doom, wherein no service of the feet can serve... But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of Justice, no reverence for the images of the gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities. Where such things are, what mortal shall boast any more that he can ward the arrows of the gods from his life? Nay, if such deeds are in honour, wherefore should we

11 Oedipus Tyrannus, 863-871.
join in the sacred dance?  

Jebb sees in the word τύραννον of the second stanza quoted, a reference to the overbearing manner of Oedipus. The λόγος of the third stanza he interprets as applying to Jocasta's intellectual arrogance.  

Oedipus manifests his pride in the haughty attitude he takes toward Creon in the second episode, persistently charging the latter with suborning Teiresias, the seer, to accuse Oedipus of unholy deeds. Jocasta's arrogance appears especially in the lines: ὥστε οὖν μαντεῖας γ' ἐν οὖτε τῇδ' ἐγὼ βλέψαιμ' ἐν οὐνεξ' οὖτε τῇδ' ἐν ὑστερον. "So henceforth, for what touches divination, I would not look to my right hand or my left."  

When Hippias tore the limbs of law from the trunk of nature and said in effect that the limbs should be burned and the trunk should remain, he did little by way of making the trunk appeal to men's sight. He merely left it stand in its ugliness. The task of beautification was left to Antiphon, Callicles, and Critias. The two schools took the same general approach to their work: they concentrated men's vision on one pleasant aspect of the trunk of nature to the exclusion of its less desirable features. Antiphon chose the sweet sap flowing from the open wounds. He held the pleasure of the moment before men's eyes,
and told them to make this the measure of their actions. Callicles and Critias singled out the sturdiness of the wood. They made the will of the stronger the criterion of morality.

The hedonistic current of Antiphon's philosophy, so far as this has come down to us, results from the juncture of two complementary streams of thought. The first is the self-sufficient and sceptical rationalism of the Sophists. As in the modern, so in the ancient Enlightenment, only that is considered to be true, if anything at all is so considered, which the human understanding (more often the human senses) can grasp clearly. It is humiliating to have to admit the truth of something the mind or the senses cannot see, and the "enlightened" were not to be humiliated. The "enlightened" were supreme--"man is the measure of all things" 15--and whatever failed to fall within the bounds of immediate human cognition was to be vigorously opposed. The divine belonged to this class of objects, and whatever was connected with the divine--divine law, after-life, inspired prophecy, religious cult, etc. Thus was Antiphon, a true son of the Enlightenment, forced to seek on the human level for a norm of morality, for a rule by which man should measure his life's conduct. And what on the human level is a more obvious norm of action than the simple one of pleasure and pain? This is the sec-

15 άνω των χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστιν ἄνθρωπος. Diels, Fragmenta, 80 B (Protagoras), Frag. 1.
ond stream of thought, which, joined with the rationalistic, constitutes the hedonism of Antiphon. It begins with the strong attraction toward pleasure that is in every man, and the equally strong aversion to pain. A man chooses to follow the easy way of life, sets up pleasure and pain as his positive and negative norm of conduct, and then proceeds to rationalize away anything that would tend to interfere with his philosophy: God, divine law, after-life, inspired prophesy, religion, etc.

Jocasta, in the Oedipus Tyrannus, is the personification of this latter stream of thought. She is happy with Oedipus at Thebes, and she will allow nothing, be it heaven itself, to interfere with this happiness. Hence, when the prophesies of Teiresias betoken an interference with this earthly pleasure, she follows the Sophistic line of thought in defending the status quo. She denies the power of prophesy. She insinuates that in the divine itself there is no reality. To Oedipus:

τά δ' οὖν παρόντα συλλαβῶν θεσπίσματα
καίται παρ' Ἀιών Πόλυβος ἄξιον οὐδενός
But the oracles as they stand, at least,
Polybus hath swept with him to his rest in Hades: they are worth nought,

she answers:

οὐχ οὖν ἐγὼ σοι ταῦτα προολεγον πάλαι;

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

μὴ νυν ἐτ' αὐτῶν μηδὲν ἐς θυμὸν βάλης.

Nay, did I not so foretell to thee long since? . . . Now no more lay aught of
those things to heart.\(^{16}\)

She concludes with a summary of her hedonistic philosophy:

\[\text{τὶ δὲ ἀν φοβοῖτ' ἀνθρωπος, ὡτὶ τῇ τῆς τύχης κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δὲ ἔστιν οὐδὲνς σαρῆς; εἷς κράτιστον ζῆν, ὅπως σύναιτό τις.}
\[\text{οὐ δὲ εἰς τὰ μῆτρός μή φοβοῦ νυμφεύματα.}
\[\text{πολλοὶ γὰρ ἢ δὴ κὰν ὄνειρασιν βροτῶν μητρὶ ξυνευνάθησαν. ἄλλα ταῦτ' ὀτω}
\[\text{παρ' οὐδὲν ἐστιν. βῆστα τὸν βίον φέρειν.}
\[\text{Nay, what should mortal fear, for whom the decrees of Fortune are supreme, and who hath clear foresight of nothing? 'Tis best to live at random, as one may. But fear not thou touching wedlock with thy mother. Many men are now have so fare in dreams also: but he to whom these things are as nought bears his life most easily.}\(^{17}\)

What a modern ring have the lines: εἷς κράτιστον ζῆν, ὅπως σύναιτό τις, and ἄλλα ταῦτ' ὀτω παρ' οὐδὲν ἐστιν, βῆστα τὸν βίον φέρειν!

Antiphon calls prophesy "the guess of a resourceful man,"\(^{18}\) and Nestle remarks that this statement "ist genau die Formel der rationalistischen Aufklärung für die Mantik."\(^{19}\)

Sophocles severely condemns the rationalistic hedonism of Antiphon as embodied in the character of Jocasta. He does so by the tragic fulfillment of the very prophesies that Jocasta

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16 *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 971-975.


19 "*Sophokles und die Sophistik,*" 151.
scorns, and by a striking presentation of the insecurity of present happiness, as evidenced by the suicide of Jocasta and the reduction of Oedipus from the position of a self-confident king to a state of utter grief and self-imposed exile. The lesson Sophocles would have us take away with us from the tragedy is clarified in the closing verses of the chorus:

If Descartes, standing as he did at the font of modern philosophy, could have beheld his intellectual progeny up to the present day, doubtless he would have been dumbfounded. Starting from a false epistemological principle, Descartes distinguished too radically between soul and body, and his distinction begot two schools of thought which have carried his premises to their logical conclusion: the one, idealism; the other, materialism.

Had Descartes foreseen these developments of his principles, it may reasonably be conjectured that he would have employed a great

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20 Oedipus Tyrannus, 1524-1530.
deal more caution in enunciating them.

Perhaps Hippias, too, would have proceeded more carefully with his revolutionary distinction between law and nature, had he foreseen the full results of that distinction in the Sophists who took it up.

When Hippias appealed against law to nature, he seemed to presuppose, like his modern counterpart, Rousseau, that all men are equally endowed by nature. Callicles and Critias, however, were quite aware of the falsehood of this presumption, and proceeded to rectify the oversight. Some men are physically stronger, some intellectually keener, than others; hence, an appeal to nature as the rule of life meant logically that the norm of morality should be the will of the stronger, be he the intellectually or the physically stronger.

As repugnant as this view of morality is to the average man, it naturally has a great appeal to the strong—most especially to those who hold the power of government. That the theory did not fail to gain adherents is shown by the fact that Plato gives it a prominent position in the first book of the Republic, introducing the vociferous Thrasymachus as its proponent:
justice, which is the interest of the government. 21

Indeed, so widespread an acceptance did the doctrine meet with, that the Athenian embassy to the government of Melos in the Peloponnesian War seemed to take its truth for granted; seemed, moreover, to take it for granted that all men in all ages recognized its validity. In opening the debate, the Athenians adopted the doctrine as the very principle of discussion:

\[
\text{[οὖχ] ὑμᾶς ἀξιότιμεν ἢ ὅτι Δακεδαμιοῦν ἄποικοι ὅντες οὐ ἔσχατον ἢ ὅτι κεῖσαι λέγοντας οἰκεῖαν πείσειν, τὰ ὅντα τὸ ἐξ ὑμῶν ἀλήθεια ὑπονόμευς διαπρᾶσσεθαι, ἐπισταμένους πρὸς εἰδότας ότι δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπειον λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμῶν ἀνάγκης χρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ προύχοντες πράσσοντες καὶ οἱ ἀνθενείς εὐνόμοιν.}
\]

\[N\]or must you expect to convince us by arguing that, although a colony of the Lacedaemonians, you have taken no part in their expeditions, or that you have never done us any wrong. But you and we should say what we really think, and aim only at what is possible, for we both alike know that into the discussion of human affairs the question of justice only enters where the pressure of necessity is equal, and that the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must. 22

As the discussion with the Melians proceeded, the Athenians clarified this principle, appealing, as did Callicles and Critias, to nature for its defense:

\[
\text{ὑγούμεθα γάρ τὸ τε θεῖον δόξῃ τὸ ἀνθρώπειόν τε σαφῶς διὰ παντὸς ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκαίας, οὐ ἀν κρατῇ, ἄρχειν· καὶ ἡμῖν οὐτε θέντες τὸν νόμον οὐτε κείμενῳ πρῶτοι χρήσαμενος, δυναὶ δὲ παραλαβόντες καὶ ἐσόμενον ἐκ αἰεὶ}
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22 Thucydides, V, 89. Tr. E. Jowett, Thucydides, Boston, 1883.
καταλείποντες χρώμεθα αὐτῷ, εἰδότες καὶ ὅμιλος ἀν καὶ ἄλλους ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ δυνάμει ἡμῖν γενομένοις ὅρθοντας ἀν ταύτῳ.

For of the Gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a law of their nature wherever they can rule they will. This law was not made by us, and we are not the first who have acted upon it; we did but inherit it, and shall bequeath it to all time, and we know that you and all mankind, if you were as strong as we are, would do as we do.  

It was not, then, some philosopher's dead abstraction that stung Sophocles' moral sensibilities. The Will-of-the-Stronger theory was then, as it is today, a living reality, that moved armies to slaughter the innocent, and moved governments to enslave the weak—and this, under the guise of justice. It was to check the inroads of such a theory that Sophocles focused most acutely his poetical powers:

Still more, Sophocles stands opposed to those warped conceptions of human conduct that find their ultimate sanctions . . . in the momentary advantage of the stronger or more shrewd (a common deduction from physis).  

It is especially to deflate this Will-of-the-Stronger theory that the Ajax "richtet polemische Spitzen gegen die Aufklärung." The purpose of the drama is to expose the nothingness of human strength when viewed in relation to the might of

23 Ibid., 105.
24 William Chase Greene, Moira, Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought, Cambridge, Mass., 1943, 140.
the gods. Ajax, drunk with his own physical strength, is seized with a μηδεν, that does not hesitate to scorn even the gods. When, as he left home, his father advised him, τεχνον, ὁρι βουλου κρατεῖν μέν, σὺν θεῷ ὃ ἤει κρατεῖν, "My son, seek victory in arms, but seek it ever with the help of heaven," he answered arrogantly:

πάτερ, θεοὶς μὲν κἀν ὁ μηδὲν ὃν ὁμοί
κράτος κατακτήσαις. ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ δίχα
κείμενον πέμπον θεῷ τοῦτό, ἐπισαράζειν κλέος.
Father, with the help of gods e'en a man of nought might win the mastery; but I, even without their aid, trust to bring that glory within my grasp.

True to his word, when Athene stood at his side in battle and offered him her encouragement, he rebuffed her, saying:

ἀνασσα, τοις ἀλλοίωσιν Ἀργεῖων πέλας
καθ' ὃ μᾶς ὃ, οὔποτ' ἔχομες μάχη.
Queen, stand thou beside the other Greeks; where Ajax stands, battle will never break our line.

The tone of the whole play justifies us in interpreting the messenger’s comment on these lines as Sophocles’ own view:

τοιούτῳ τοι λόγοισιν ἄστεργῆ θεᾶς
ἐκτήσατ' ὄργην, οὐ κατ' ἀνέρωπον φρονήν.
By such words it was that he brought upon him the appalling anger of the goddess, since his thoughts were too great for man.

26 Ibid.
27 Ajax, 764-769.
28 Ibid., 774-775.
29 Ibid., 776-777.
Sophocles tells us that because Ajax did not think as man should, because he prided himself on his physical strength and thought in a true Sophistic spirit that nothing counted but strength, because he lived his life on the principle that physical power gave him a title to whatever he desired,—for this, he was destined to ruin:

εμελλες, τάλας, εμελλες χρόνω,
στερεόφρων ἀρ' εξανύσεσειν κακὰν
μοίραν ἀπειρεσίων πόνων.
Thou wast fated, hapless one, thou wast fated, then, with that unbending soul, at last to work out an evil doom of woes untold.30

It is not only the obvious injustice of adopting physical strength as an ultimate criterion of action, but its utter foolishness, that Sophocles wishes to impress on his audience. Why, he would ask the Sophists, choose for your rule of life a norm which is so unstable, one so apt to turn on you and bring results just the opposite of those desired? Athene speaking to Odysseus is Sophocles speaking to the world against Callicles' brand of Sophistic morality. Alluding to the mad Ajax, she says:

τοιαῦτα τοῖνυν εἰσορῶν ὑπέρχοσον
μηδὲν ποτ' εἴπῃς ἀφτὸς εἰς θεοὺς ἔχος,
μηδ' ὅγχον ἄρη μηδὲν', εἰ τινὸς πλέον
ἡ χειρὶ βρῖθεις ἡ μαχρὸς πλοῦτον βάθει.
ὡς ἡμέρα κλίνει τε κᾶνάγει πάλιν
ἀπαγα τάνερψεια τοὺς δὲ σφιρόνας
θεοὶ φιλοθεὶ καὶ στυγοθεὶ τοὺς κακοὺς.
Therefore, beholding such things, look

30 Ibid., 928-930.
that thine own lips never speak a
aughty word against the gods, and as-
sume no swelling port, if thou prevailst
above another in prowess or by store of
ample wealth. For a day can humble all
human things, and a day can lift them up;
but the wise of heart are loved of the
gods, and the evil are abhorred. 31

Odysseus in the Ajax and Odysseus in the Philoctetes
are two different characters. In the Ajax he is all kindness,
moderation, piety; he is a foil to the headstrong Ajax and the
vengeful Menelaus. In the Philoctetes he is the opportunism in-
carnate of the Sophistic Will-of-the-Stronger spirit: "Die
selbstsüchtige Uebermenschennoral . .. wird in der Person des
Odysseus, der hier ein ganz anderer ist als derselbe Held in
"Ajax" dargestellt und bekämpft." 32 In the Ajax, Odysseus is
presented as

one who has taken deeply to heart the lesson of modera-
tion, and of reverence for the gods, taught by Athena's
punishment of his rival; and, if there is no great ele-
vation in his character, at least he performs a credita-
ble part in dissuading the Atreidæ from refusing bur-
ial to the dead. 33

In the Philoctetes he is an exponent of the Sophistic principle
that the end justifies the means, and of the dictum enunciated by
Plato's Thrasymachus: εἶναι τὸ δίκαιον οὐχ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ τοῦ

31 Ibid., 127-133.
33 R.C. Jebb, Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, IV,
The Philoctetes, Cambridge, 1890, xxx.
When the sincere Neoptolemus asks him, "Thou thinkest it no shame, then, to speak falsehoods?" Odysseus gives him as answer that has become a byword for present-day sophists the world over: οὐχ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναι γε τὸ ψεύδος φέρει. "No, if the falsehood brings deliverance." 35

When the Sophists divorced nature from law, they did away with ultimate ends and focused on the here and now. So, too, Odysseus of the Philoctetes. He could be virtuous indeed, but not for virtue's sake. Virtue was for him a means to an immediate end: his own gain. Virtue for Odysseus, when he practiced it at all, was only a part of his over-all opportunism:

οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτων ἄγαθοι, τοιοῦτος ἐὰν ἔγω.
καθέναι δικαίων κἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν κρίσις,
οὐχ ἄν λάβοις μὲν ὄμων οὐδὲν εὔσεβής.
νικάν γε μὲντοι πάνταχος χρήσιν ξέφυν...
Such as the time needs, such am I.
Where the question is of just men and good, thou wilt find no man more scrupulous. Victory, however, is my aim in every field... 36

Sophocles draws the unprincipled character of Odysseus against the background of an upright and straight-thinking Neoptolemus. It is Nestle's opinion that Neoptolemus was meant to

34 Quoted above from Plato, Republic, I, 338, C.
36 Ibid., 1049-1052.
be a model for young Sophists to follow. Just as Neoptolemus, so too the young Sophists had been drawn from the path of conventional morality. And it was Sophocles' hope that the Sophists, as did Neoptolemus, would return to a healthy ethics after but a short detour.37

In no other play does Sophocles use the word σοφός and its derivatives so much as in the Philoctetes.38 And the flavor of the word in this play is unmistakable. It represents that perverted sort of wisdom which resulted from the Sophists' exclusion of law from life as a norm of action. σοφίσμα is the word Odysseus uses for the plan whereby he would capture Philoctetes.39 Again, in explaining the plot to Neoptolemus, Odysseus says:

άλλ' αὐτῷ τοῦτο δεῖ σοφίσματε, κλοπεὺς ὅπως γενήσαι τῶν ἀνικήτων ὀπλῶν.

No; the thing that must be plotted is just this,—how thou mayest win the resistless arms by stealth.40

The σοφία that was the Sophistic ideal was a "wisdom" which rode roughshod over any sense of shame. Odysseus motivates Neoptolemus towards his part in the plot by pointing out to the young son of Achilles that he will be considered σοφός κάγαθός, "wise and

38 Ibid., 155.
39 Philoctetes, 14.
40 Ibid., 77-78.
valiant." But Neoptolemus well knows what such wisdom implies, for he yields to Odysseus with the words: ἵτως ποιήσω, πᾶσαν ἀδισχύνην ἀφείς, "Come what may, I'll do it, and cast off all shame." A man can be ἄνδρεως, "of little worth," but at the same time γλῶσση σοφός, "clever of tongue." He can be σοφὸς ἐν κακοῖς, "cunning in evil." And when Neoptolemus finally rejects the spurious wisdom to which Odysseus had encouraged him, he does so because it is opposed to justice:

Od. οὐ δ' οὕτε φωνεῖς οὕτε ἀρασείες σοφός.
Ne. ἄλλ' εἶ δίκαια, τὸν σοφὸν κρείσσον τάξε.
Od. Thy speech is not wise, nor yet thy purpose.
Ne. But if just, that is better than wise.44

Creon of the Oedipus Coloneus is perhaps Sophocles' clearest proponent of the Übermenschenmoral, where that philosophy rests on physical strength and hypocrisy as its basis. Creon's purposes in the play are patently at odds with justice. Hence he throws justice overboard in pursuing his aims, and relies instead upon duplicity and sheer force. Acting on the principle that everything is right which nature, divorced from law, can accomplish, Creon's first attempt is to lure Oedipus back to Thebes by a hypocritical adroitness of speech. But Oedipus sees

41 Ibid., 119-120.
42 Ibid., 439-440.
43 Ibid., 1015.
44 Ibid., 1245-1246.
through the sham and brings it into the open:

τὸ σὸν ἀφίκτα: δεδρ' ὑπόβλητον στόμα,
pollὴν ἔχον στόμασιν . . .

But thou hast come hither with fraud on thy
lips, yea, with a tongue keener than the edge
of a sword.45

When duplicity fails him, Creon falls back on the baser means of
physical force to gain his end. He has seized Ismene. He now
seizes Antigone and attempts to lay violent hands upon Oedipus
himself. It is only the timely intervention of Theseus that pre­
vents him--Theseus, whose nobility of character and selfless ad­
herence to justice contrast sharply with the Sophistic machina­
tions of Creon; Theseus, "der nicht mit Worten sondern mit Taten
dem Leben Glanz verleihen, dem Recht dienen und das Unrecht ver­
eiteln will."46

A philosophy can be deceptive in the abstract and in
its more general principles. Sophism was and is so deceptive.
Sophocles exposes the deceit by concretizing the abstract in the
Oedipus Coloneus, and by presenting general principles in their
particular deductions. Creon is the concretion of the Calliclean
brand of Sophism, the Will-of-the-Stronger morality. Theseus is
the embodiment of the conservative morality. Sophocles presents
the two in stark contrast, and asks the beholder to choose be­
tween them.

45 Oedipus Coloneus, 793-794.
46 Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 156.
Although the State-of-Nature theorists and Protagoras arrived at the same conclusion, in that they both divorced law from nature, their starting points with regard to morality are quite different. When Hippias separated law from nature, his reason for so doing was the diversity and contradictory character of existing laws. Hippias, then, rejected law and followed what he supposed to be nature. Not so Protagoras. Protagoras' difficulty was epistemological. He began from the principle that "man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." The conclusion he drew from this principle was that nature did not exist, but only law. At first, this seems like a strange deduction from such a premise. After all, man is the measure of all things. Since being is the object of man's intellect, whatever man cannot know, in some way at least, does not have being, and hence does not exist. The explanation of the conclusion, however, lies not in the major premise of Protagoras' argument, but in the minor: man cannot know nature. Human cognition for Protagoras was sense cognition, and sense cognition is always of particulars. Therefore, anything as universal as nature certainly lies outside the scope of man's knowledge, is not "measured"


48 Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 137.
by man, and hence does not exist. But laws surely did exist. They were particulars and humanly knowable. Therefore Protagoras admitted the validity of laws, but based their validity not on nature—since nature was a non-entity;—not on divine decree—because a sensist must be at least an agnostic in things divine; but on the only thing a sensist could appeal to: convention.

Sophocles opposes the Protagorean sensistic norm of morality with the conventional concept of the unwritten laws of heaven. Creon of the Antigone is the proponent of the former, Antigone herself of the latter. The conflict which arises from the clash of these two ideas forms the intellectual basis for the tragedy of the play. Jaeger, commenting on the Antigone, tells us:

Hegel saw that the Antigone dealt with the tragic conflict of two moral principles: the law of the state, and the rights of the family. From this point of view, the severe though exaggerated logic of king Creon's devotion to the state makes his character easier for us to understand; while the agony and defiance of Antigone justify the eternal laws of family duty against the interference of the state, with the irresistible persuasiveness of true revolutionary passion.

Sophocles sympathized with the progressive spirit of the Sophists as long as that spirit contained itself within the physical order. But when the infatuated intellect of the "En-

49 Diels, Fragmente, 80 B 4.
50 Paideia, I, 279.
51 Cf. choral ode in the Antigone, 332-375.
lightened" invaded the moral order, there to make man the center of the universe by making him a law unto himself—as Kant was to do centuries later—Sophocles perceived with keen insight the terrible catastrophe such a move foreboded. For Sophocles, religion was the foundation of good living, whether in the social or in the individual sphere. It was the foundation of sane politics as well as sane ethics. And if that foundation were to be undermined through the machinations of the "enlightened progressives," the entire superstructure would crash to the ground. Hence, he moves in the Antigone to enlist to his vital cause the sympathies of his contemporaries. He does so by drawing the vague abstractions of Protagoras down to the ugly concrete of a Creon, and by placing in immediate juxtaposition to this ugliness the beautiful and pathetic loyalty of Antigone to the decrees of eternal law.

James Adam says of these eternal laws in Sophocles:

"One of the most noteworthy and fundamental of the religious ideas to be found in Sophocles is that of an immutable moral order or law, the origin and sanction of which are alike divine." These are the νόμοι ὑπόκος already referred to in the Oedipus Tyrannus, νόμοι σύρανιν ὑι' αἰθέρα τεκνωθέντες, ὑν "Ολυμπος πατήρ μόνος, "laws called into life throughout the high clear

52 Nestle, "Sophokles und die Sophistik," 143.

heaven, whose father is Olympus alone."54 These are the νόμιμα which Electra observes τῇ Ζηνὸς εὔσεβείᾳ, "by piety towards Zeus," and this, even though she is seen βεβαιῶν ἐν μοίρῃ σῶν ἔκθελᾳ, "in no prosperous estate."55 These are the δαιμόνων νόμοι, "laws of the divinities," which Menelaus would abuse by preventing the burial of Ajax, the θεῶν νόμοι, "laws of the gods," Agamemnon would dishonor by insulting a dead hero.56

It is not to be thought, of course, that Sophocles denied altogether the validity of man-made laws. The point at issue was not whether human laws were valid or not, but whence they derived their validity. If they were binding of themselves, they were subject to no limitations. If, however, they drew their force from the "law eternal in the heavens, beyond and above all transitory human laws,"57 then human law could not violate the limits set for it by the eternal.

54 Oedipus Tyrannus, 865-868.
55 Electra, 1093-1096.
56 Ajax, 1130, 1343-1345.
57 Adam, The Religious Teachers, 168.
CHAPTER IV

DIVINE LAW

The moral content of Sophocles' plays is not chiefly negative. He does indeed attack the Sophists through the medium of his verse. He tells us what the measure of human action is not. But he does so, only that it may be understood the more clearly what the norm of morality is.

Sophocles possessed to an eminent degree that quality for which Greek artists and writers are outstanding in the world of art and letters: the love of harmony. Sophocles had a passion for harmony—not so much for the physical proportion achieved in sculpture, in music, in architecture, or even in verse, though he had this too. The laws of physical harmony had long since been discovered and developed to perfection. Sophocles was interested primarily in the harmony of the soul, in moral harmony.¹ The physical balance and proportion, the sophrosyne, which characterizes Sophocles' poetry is not an end in itself. It is rather a very apt medium for giving expression to that higher sophrosyne,

¹ Jaeger, Paideia, I, 276.
the balance and proportion of a soul ruled by justice.  

The moral universe of Aescylean drama is one of "storm and stress." Euripides highlights the apparent contradictions present in the divine government of the world. Sophocles, while he "is by no means unconscious of the discordant elements in human life and destiny," devotes his main efforts to the reconciliation of these elements, to the establishment of harmony, of peace. Balance and proportion were for Sophocles the principles of all existence, and the principle of balance and proportion in the moral order is the measuring rod of human acts, whatever that measure may be. From this it can be judged what an important position the norm of morality holds in the art and doctrine of Sophocles.

The question now arises, what is the norm of morality in Sophocles? He has rejected mere nature as the measure of human activity. He has rejected human law as the fundamental norm. The Sophists had divorced law from nature and were divided in their espousal of the one or the other as the norm of morality. But Sophocles approached the question of the norm from the stand-

2 Ibid., 274.
3 Adam, The Religious Teachers, 163.
4 Ibid.
5 Jaeger, Paideia, 274.
point of the divine. To Sophocles' way of thinking there is no law higher than the unwritten law of Zeus. The chorus of the Oedipus Tyrannus prays that it may speak those words and do those deeds for which


laws have been set forth, moving on high, called into life throughout the high clear heaven, whose father is Olympus alone; their parent was no race of mortal men.  

In language still more revealing, Antigone proclaims the supremacy of divine law as the measure of right and wrong:

Where human law and divine law conflict, it is human law that must give way. There is human law and divine law in Sophocles,

6 Oedipus Tyrannus, 865-870.

7 Antigone, 450-455.
but the human is steadfastly and emphatically subordinated to the supreme law of heaven.

It is not to be thought that Sophocles was original in his ideas about the norm of morality. Rommen states that the same view was held by all peoples in the early periods of their history. Customs and laws were not distinguished from the norms of religion, and were considered as being exclusively divine in origin. It is noteworthy that such laws, though they cannot always properly be called natural, had nevertheless two of the essential properties of natural law. They were immutable, in the sense that they could not be changed by human decrees; and they were universal in their application. 8

To say that the fundamental norm of morality according to Sophocles was divine in origin does not explain the poet's view fully. The question remains, what did Sophocles mean by divine? Did he entertain the traditional ideas of the Greeks concerning the hierarchy of Olympus, or did he manage at all to rise above them into an atmosphere clearer with truth? The question is a difficult one to answer with any finality, because the evidence does not point clearly to any one conclusion. At times Sophocles seems to accept the traditional belief in the Olympian mythology, where the gods are little more than preternatural men. Again, at

8 Rommen, The Natural Law, 3-4.
other times he seems to penetrate to the truth that there is but one God, who is all powerful, the principle of law and justice.

Perhaps a resolution of this discrepancy is to be found in the fact that Sophocles writes as a poet. Thus, "[h]e took contentedly the orthodox view of the hierarchy of Olympus," but he took it for its poetic value only, much as Horace in later years was to include in his odes popular beliefs in the existence and nature of Hades, though his own philosophy precluded such beliefs. But in those passages where "the poet seems to be speaking his own thoughts, [he elevates] Zeus ... into a supreme deity of justice and truth." That Sophocles was speaking his own thoughts when he conceived of Zeus as something more than the thunderer of Olympus is evidenced by the fact that his ideas on the norm of morality postulated such a Zeus. Something has already been said about the love of harmony that motivated Sophocles toward his concept of the moral order. Given this fact, James Adam reasons thus:

A further question naturally suggests itself in connec-
tion with Sophocles' belief in a single all-embracing plan or purpose according to which the world is ruled. If there is a unity of purpose, must there not also be a unity of power?

9 Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way to Western Civiliza-
tion, New York, 1949, 146.


11 The Religious Teachers, 176.
Adams answers yes, and explains that "the polytheism of Sophocles was 'if not nominally, at least practically monotheism.'"\(^{12}\) Evelyn Abbot not only calls Sophocles' Zeus "a supreme deity of justice and truth,"\(^{13}\) but goes so far as to attribute to him the following attributes: eternal rule in heaven; exaltation beyond human power; justice and righteousness of rule; possession of a kingdom founded not on caprice, but on law; power eternal and immutable.\(^{14}\)

In establishing the fundamental norm of morality as divine law, Sophocles posed for himself a deep problem to solve: how to explain the tremendous amount of suffering and pain in the world. The appeal of the Sophistic morality to the common mind lay precisely in this, that it claimed to have the answer to the problem of suffering. Live according to our norm of morality, said the Sophists, and you will do away with suffering. Advocates of the Will-of-the-Stronger theory guaranteed that the suffering of the strong, at least, would be eliminated. The carpe-diem morality, on the other hand, the pleasure-of-the-moment philosophy, promised freedom from pain for everyone. The Protagorean positivists, in their turn, saw escape from suffering in suitable human laws. But what had Sophocles to offer the suffer-

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) "The Theology and Ethics of Sophocles," 38.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 40.
er, with his unchanging divine law as the measure of right and wrong? It was obvious that the world was full of people who followed this norm to the best of their knowledge: Antigones, Philoctetes', Dejaneiras, Oedipus'; and still it could not be denied that these same people suffered; often, indeed, more than the guilty suffered.

The divine Author of law was for Sophocles not only mighty in His decrees, but also just. Sophocles' faith in the divine justice and goodness was profound; so profound, in fact, that it was this piety, joined with his equally deep sympathy for human suffering, which enabled him to draw tragic characters on such a grand scale. Oedipus in the Coloneus calls down terrible curses on his sons because he is confident that η παλαιότατος Δίκη δύνατος [ἐστι] Ζηνός ἀρχαῖος νόμοις, "Justice, revealed from of old, sits with Zeus in the might of the eternal laws." The gods are not indifferent as to who keep the divine law and who break it. Rather, says the same Oedipus,

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15 Oedipus Tyrannus, 871, 885.


17 Oedipus Coloneus, 1381-1382.
cape been found for an impious mortal on the earth. 18

If, then, the gods distinguish between the pious and the impious, the innocent and the guilty, in meting out punishment, how explain the fact that not only the guilty, but also the innocent suffer? Sophocles offers a twofold answer to this problem—or, rather, a single answer with a twofold aspect. He would justify the suffering of the innocent on the grounds both of the here and of the hereafter.

Chief among the benefits accruing from suffering in this life is the educative power of suffering. "Man learns, first, that he has unsuspected powers of passive endurance, of tlemo-syne. He learns too that his will is free; his motives may still be pure, whatever the fell hand of circumstance may bring." 19 Aged Oedipus learned this lesson after many years of intense suffering:

"for patient endurance is the lesson of suffering, and of the years in our long fellowship." 20

Aged Oedipus learned this lesson after many years of intense suffering: στέργειν γάρ αἱ πάθαι με χρόνος ξυνόν μακρός διδάσκει, "for patient endurance is the lesson of suffering, and of the years in our long fellowship." 20

Oedipus Coloneus, 7-8.

18 Ibid., 278-281.
19 Greene, Moira, 141.
20 Oedipus Coloneus, 7-8.
πάθει μάθος, "we learn by suffering."

We learn patient endurance; but that is not all. Suffering gave the aged Oedipus more than tlemosyne. It mellowed him, and it enlightened him. It gave him a broader vision, in which he might understand and appreciate more fully his own destiny. It gave him a keen insight into character, and a deep and sweet sympathy with the sufferings of his fellow men: for, πολλ' ἐν κακοῖς θυμὸς εὐνηθείς ὀφί, "a soul steeped in trials sees much."

Theseus too, that paragon of nobility in the Oedipus Coloneus, had suffered much: εἰς πλεῖστ' ἀνήρ ἐπὶ ξένης ἡθος κινδυνεύμαι ἐν τῷφ χάρφ, "in strange lands [I] wrestled with perils to my life, as no man beside." And Theseus recognized that it was his suffering which had lighted in his soul fires of generosity and planted there the seeds of sympathy:

21 Philoctetes, 535-537.
22 Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 177.
23 Adam, The Religious Teachers, 172.
25 Oedipus Coloneus, 563-564.
Never, then, would I turn aside from a stranger, such as thou art now, or refuse aid in his deliverance; for well know I that I am a man, and that in the morrow my portion is no greater than thine.  

In suffering Sophocles saw the circumstance of life which, more than any other, served to raise man to his greatest dignity. Sophocles' characters are not passive in the face of suffering. Suffering does not destroy them or debase them. Rather, "[d]ramatic action is for Sophocles the process by which the true nature of a suffering human being is unfolded, by which he fulfills his destiny, and through it fulfills himself."  

The educative value of suffering is largely individual. But Sophocles sees other fruits of pain and trial that have a more far-reaching influence. The suffering of Antigone, for example, serves to establish more firmly in the minds of men the divine law for which she sacrifices herself. "Sophocles seems to invite us to lift our eyes from the suffering of the individual to a consideration of the ulterior purposes which Providence

26 Ibid., 565-568.


28 Jaeger, Paideia, 281.

29 Abbot, "The Theology and Ethics of Sophocles," 59.
is thereby seeking to fulfill."  

Dejaneira's tragic error and its consequences were the appointed means whereby Heracles should be released from a life of toil and attain to immortality.  

Philoctetes' suffering on the island of Lemnos would find its resolution in the overthrow of Troy. Neoptolemus clearly saw the hand of the divine in Philoctetes' wretched trials, and he saw the glorious end to which those trials were ordained:

οὐδὲν τούτων θαυμαστὸν ἦμοι·
θεία γὰρ, ἐξεπερ κἀγὼ τι φρονῶ,
καὶ τὰ παθήματα κεῖνα πρὸς αὐτῶν
tῆς ἀμόφρονος χρύσης ἐπέβη,
καὶ νῦν ἄ πονεὶ δίχα κηδεμόνων,
οὐχ ἔσοθ᾽ ὡς οὐ θεῶν του μελέτη,
τοῦ μὴ πρότερον τόνδ᾽ ἐπ᾽ Τροΐᾳ
tεῖναι τὰ θεῶν ἀμάχητα βέλη,
πρὶν δὲ ἔξειχοι χρόνος, ὡ λέγεται
χρῆναι σφ ὑπὸ τώνδε δαμήναι.

Nought of this is a marvel to me. By heavenly ordinance, if such as I may judge, those first sufferings came on him from relentless Chryse; and the woes that now he bears by the providence of some god, that so he should not bend against Troy the resistless shafts divine, till the time be fulfilled when, as men say, Troy is fated by those shafts to fall.  

But it was not only toward final victory at Troy that Philoctetes' sufferings were directed. His trials were ordered to

30 Adam, The Religious Teachers, 173.
31 Ibid., 174.
32 Philoctetes, 191-200.
to his own personal glory as well. Heracles himself, in his *deus-ex-machina* appearance near the end of the play, assures Philoctetes of this:

\[\text{καὶ σοὶ, σάφει ἢσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν, ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶν εὐκλεᾶ θέσαι βίον.}\]

And for thee, be sure, the destiny is ordained that through these thy sufferings thou shouldest glorify thy life.33

Perhaps that view of undeserved suffering is most peculiarly Sophoclean which regards the pains of the innocent as part of the general harmony of the universe. It was Sophocles' passion for harmony that led him to seek for a unity of law in the moral order. It is that same passion which leads him to consider suffering as a dissonance which plays a contributing though subordinate part in the larger symphonic consonance of the world. 

"[T]he moral order of the world does not of necessity mean the happiness of all men. From some it may demand endurance and sacrifice."34 It is not only that suffering is not incompatible with the general harmony in which Sophocles never ceased to have faith; but these very discords of suffering serve to promote and enhance that universal harmony,35 much in the same way that the discords of polyphonic music enhance the resolutions which fol-

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33 Ibid., 11421-11422.
34 Abbot, "The Theology and Ethics of Sophocles," 59.
35 Adam, *The Religious Teachers*, 175.
low them, or the gargoyles on a medieval cathedral enhance the harmony of the whole. The dissonance of the symphony is a condition of the resolution. Without the one the other is impossible, since there is nothing to resolve. So, "undeserved suffering, while it is exhibited in Sophocles under various lights, always appears as part of the permitted evil which is a condition of a just and harmoniously ordered universe." 36

After all the arguments have been placed on the other side of the scale to try to counterbalance the weight of suffering, we still find, as the ancient Greeks must have found, that the weight of suffering is the greater. Sophocles, who was deeply convinced that God was just as well as mighty in his laws, could not help but face the fact that, in spite of all he said of development of character, of personal dignity, of universal harmony, God in allowing the innocent to suffer was unjust, unless—unless there were an after-life in which the dissonance could be fully resolved. Sophocles recognized, says W.C. Greene, that

[italics]the ultimate justice of the gods is to be upheld, it is not because they always prevent the suffering of noble heroes and give them material success but rather because they somehow provide that undeserved suffering be crowned by compensations of another order, compensations which vary with circumstances. 37


37 Moira, 141. Italics not in the original.
but there will be cases, such as Antigone's, where the only other order possible in which the suffering can be justly compensated is the order of an after-life.

What does Sophocles hold on the existence and nature of the after-life? The question is not an easy one to answer. Quotations can be multiplied to show that Sophocles believed in a life after death; but it is more difficult to sound his mind on the kind of life he believed in. Thus, Antigone says that she owes allegiance to the dead, a greater allegiance, in fact, than to the living, ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἔστι χείσομαι, "in that world I shall abide for ever." She says that her action may appear blameless in the next life: τίς οἶδεν εί ἄραγεν εὖ ἔγαιρεν ὑμῖν τόδε; "Who knows but this seems blameless in the world below?" Heracles reports in the Philoctetes that he has won ἄθανατον ἄρετήν, ὃς πάρεσθ' ὄραν, "deathless glory, as thou beholdest." Electra asks Chrysothemis if she thinks their dead father will accept kindly the gifts sent by his wife to his tomb. Even here, of course, where it is merely a question of the existence of an after-life, it cannot always be said for certain that the sentiments uttered by Sopho-

38 Antigone, 76.
39 Ibid., 521.
40 Philoctetes, 1420.
41 Electra, 442-443.
Oedipus' characters are his own. This is all the more true because of the fact that those sentiments are quite widely divergent as to the nature of the after-life.

There are three views on the nature of the after-life to be found in Sophocles. Some of his characters see in death a giver of eternal sleep; others believe in the after-life of the Homeric Hades; and still others seem to reach a higher concept of it, a concept which overreaches the grossness of the first two. 42 Thus, the chorus of the Oedipus Coloneus calls upon Death, the son of Earth and Tartarus, as the "giver of eternal sleep": οἱ τοιχόθροι τῶν αἰεναινον,43 and Antigone refers to Hades as πανχοίτας, "giver of sleep to all."44 The chorus of the Oedipus Tyranus, on the other hand, represents life upon life speeding like a winged bird or resistless fire ἀκτάν πρὸς ἑορέου θεοῦ, "to the shore of the western god,"45 reminding one of the Homeric Erebos in the West. The chorus of the Oedipus Coloneus prays that Oedipus may pass without pain κάτω νεκρῶν πλάκα καὶ Ξτύγιον δόμον, "to the fields of the dead below, the all-enshrouding, and to the Stygian house."46 It is noteworthy that in this reference to the

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43 Oedipus Coloneus, 1578.
44 Antigone, 308.
45 Oedipus Tyrannus, 177.
46 Oedipus Coloneus, 1563-1564.
Homericafter-life (all such references, of course, can easily
be interpreted as a potical expression of a more orthodox view),
we have a very clear allusion by the poet to the very point in
which we are interested: a just retribution in a future life.
For the chorus adds to the lines just quoted:

πολλῶν γὰρ ἄν καὶ μᾶταν
πημάτων ἱχνουμένων
πάλιν σφε [Οἴδιπόδα] οἰμῶν ὀξιὰς αὔξοι.
Many were the sorrows that came to him
without cause; but in requital a just god
will lift him up.47

Antigone furnishes us with an example of the third concept of the
after-life referred to above. Going to her death, she foresees
a more substantial existence in the after-life than that of an
eternal sleeper or a Homeric shade:

ἐλευθερία μέντοι κάρτ' ἐν ἐλπίδιν τρέφω
φίλη μὲν ἡξειν πατρὶ, προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί,
μήτερ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα.
But I cherish good hope that my coming
will be welcome to my father, and pleas­
ant to thee, my mother, and welcome,
brother, to thee.48

Thus does she see in the future, if not a reward for her heroic
action, at least release from her sorrow. She has hope. But by
far the most exalted concept of the after-life found in Sophocles,
and one which, because of its unique character, we feel to be his
own, is the following, enunciated by Heracles in the Philoctetes:

47 Ibid., 1565-1567.

48 Antigone, 896-898.
What, then, are we to conclude from the evidence about Sophocles' belief in an after-life of retribution? Dronke says that immortality is "the natural crown and coping-stone" of the religion of Sophocles, and that therefore we are bound to attribute the belief to him—an a priori argument. Churton Collins, on the other hand, says, "It is quite impossible to say on which side the balance of probability really inclines," whether it is for or against the belief in immortality—he argues a posteriori. Adams straddles the fence and says he does not feel justified in attributing to Sophocles "a sure belief in immortality." In view of the frequent references to the after-life in Sophocles—and these, not only in one play, but in them all—and in view of the general tone of these references (the spirit in which many of them are uttered gives us every reason to believe they are Sophocles' own), we are safe, it would seem, in adopting for ourselves the conclusion Evelyn Abbot draws on the point: "We see then that

49 Philoctetes, 1442-1444.
50 Adam, The Religious Teachers, 180.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 182.
in a certain sense compensation comes to those who suffer innocently—such compensation as a noble spirit would seek to gain. And again:

Hence for the righteous there is a good hope in death, and the life to come is a real existence in which the broken ties of this world will be united, never to be severed again. . . . By thus conveying the mind to another life, Sophocles in some measure softens the weight of injustice and misery in this.

The in some measure of this statement is full of significance; and we would not be giving a complete picture of Sophocles' mind on the norm of morality and its consequences if we failed to explain somewhat this restrictive phrase.

The Sophists had placed great emphasis on the fact that their various systems of morality, whether based upon human law alone or on nature alone, did away with the one thing men were most anxious to avoid: suffering. Their claims were decidedly optimistic, and if Sophocles was to propose an effective counter-appeal to the common man, his divine-law proposal too had to be optimistic with regard to the question of suffering. We have seen that Sophocles' best argument for an optimistic outlook on life was the belief in an after-life of reward for those who followed the divine law and of punishment for those who did not.

53 Abbot, "The Theology and Ethics of Sophocles," 61.
54 Ibid., Italics not in the original.
since Sophocles' optimism depended thus upon his belief in a future life of reward or punishment, it followed that the intensity of that optimism would be directly proportionate to the solidity of his belief in the after-life. The evidence of the plays forces us to conclude that Sophocles' belief in an after-life of reward and punishment was not as strong as it might have been. But what else could be expected when the belief rested upon human reason alone?

In the moments when Sophocles lost sight of the truth of a future life, and they are not infrequent, his view of the present life became quite cheerless, and he placed little value upon existence. He was disposed at these times to emphasize "the Nichtigkeit of human life." This seems to have been Sophocles' state of mind as he ended the Trachiniae. Heracles' son, Hyllus, brings the play to a close with words of gloom and bitterness towards the gods. Reflecting upon his father's great misfortune, he says:

μεγάλην δὲ θεῶν ἄγνωμοσύνην, 
εἰδότες ἑργῶν τῶν προσομένων, 
οἱ φύσαντες καὶ χληζόμενοι 
πατέρες τοιαύτῃ ἐφορώσι πάθη. 
τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ' οὐδεὶς ἐφορᾶ, 
τὰ δὲ νῦν ἑστῶτ' οἴκτρα μὲν ἡμῖν, 
ἄχρα δ' ἑκέσιοις . . .

[But mark the great cruelty of the gods in the deeds that are being done. They beget children, they are hailed

55 Ibid., 47.
as fathers, and yet they can look upon such sufferings. No man foresees the future; but the present is fraught with mourning for us, and with shame for the powers above... 56

Sophocles finds no end of fuel to feed the fire of his pessimism. The gods he conceives of as jealous of the power of men. 57 The gods intervene so that the evil man overcomes the good. 58 Not only do the gods heap evil upon men, but they so blind men that the evil seems good to them; and thus do men hurl themselves to ruin in the pursuit of an apparent good. 59 If the sons of Oedipus have set their hearts on kingly power and pursued it in evil rivalry, it is because some god has infatuated them, and has moved them to their desire. 60 And since the power of the gods is supreme, when they move man to evil, there is no hope for him. Sophocles draws a Philoctetes who is overwhelmed by misfortune, and who can find no explanation for his lot except in the jealousy of the gods. 61 He had wronged none by force or by fraud, he had lived at peace with his fellow-men; yet the gods

56 Trachiniae, 1266-1273.
57 Ajax, 758-761.
58 Ibid., 454-455.
59 Antigone, 622-625.
60 Oedipus Coloneus, 371-373.
61 Philoctetes, 776-778.
abandoned him to a cruel fate. Philoctetes perceives that it is the way of the gods to heap suffering and destruction on the good, and to allow the evil to prosper. His experiences at Troy have taught him that πόλεμος οὐδέν' ἄνδρ' ἐκὼν αἰρεῖ πονηρόν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς χρηστοὺς ἀεί, "war takes no evil man by choice, but good men always." His reflections on the injustice of the gods in thus rewarding the evil and punishing the good lead him to cry out with bitter sarcasm:

ἐπει' οὐδέν πω χακόν γ' ἀπώλετο;
ἀλλ' εὖ περιστέλλοντοι αὐτὰ δαίμονες,
καὶ πως τά μὲν πανούργα καὶ καλιντριβή
χάρισι' ἀναστρέφοντες εἰς Ἀδοὺ, τὰ δὲ
δίκαια καὶ τὰ χρήστ' ἀποστέλλουσι' ἀεί.

No evil thing has been known to perish; no, the gods take tender care of such, and have a strange joy in turning back from Hades all things villainous and knavish, while they are ever sending the just and the good out of life. How am I to deem of these things, or wherein shall I praise them, when, praising the ways of the gods, I find that the gods are evil?

The thoughtlessness of youth, Sophocles concedes, renders that period of life easier. But when youth is gone, man is subject to all kinds of affliction and suffering: envy, factions, strife, battles, and slaughters; and finally old age claims him, dis-

62 Ibid., 684-686.
63 Ibid., 436-437.
64 Ibid., 446-452.
praised old age, infirm, unsociable, unbefriended old age, with which πρόκαντα κακὰ κακῶν ζευνοῖσει, "all woe of woe abides."\(^{65}\) Their hearts oppressed with the gloom of these pessimistic thoughts, the chorus of the *Oedipus Coloneus* utters a dreadful sentence, one which shocks us profoundly even though it comes from the pen of an ancient pagan. It is the consummation of pessimism:

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\text{μὴ φύναι τὸν ἄκαντα νικῆ λόγον τὸ δ' ἐπεὶ φανῆ,}
\text{βὴναι κεφανόν τεθεὶν περ ἢκεῖ πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα.}
\]

Not to be born is, past all prizing, best; but, when a man hath seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go thither, whence he hath come.\(^{66}\)

The pessimistic strain in Sophoclean drama resulted in large part, no doubt, from the literary traditions to which he was heir, and from the environment in which he lived. The lyric poets had harped a great deal on the sadness of life. Mimnermus had pointed out the emptiness of life, once the joys of youth had expired. Solon, in his dialogue with Croesus, had emphasized the unstable character of success, even when one was fortunate enough to attain it. And parallels can be found in Herodotus to most of the other pessimistic sentiments expressed by Sophocles.\(^{67}\) One could not have turned the tide of such a literary stream in a

\[^{65}\text{Oedipus Coloneus, 1230-1238.}\]

\[^{66}\text{Ibid., 1225-1226.}\]

\[^{67}\text{Abbot, "The Theology and Ethics of Sophocles," 50.}\]
ay—not even a genius of Sophocles' stature. The conditions of
he times, moreover, must have exerted an influence on Sophocles'
and toward pessimism. War was the order of the day. There were
few families without their war-dead—at any time a somber influ-
ence on one's Weltanschauung. And the times of peace did not
bring much improvement. The struggle to get ahead was a fierce
one. The strong won out, and few pitied the weak. All rejoiced
at the misfortunes of their enemies. Revenge was exalted to the
status of a virtue. One could have combated the pessimism sug-
gested by these harsh conditions of life only through a firm and
abiding faith in the existence of God, in His justice, in the cer-
tainty of an after-life of reward and punishment. Sophocles had
this faith, but it was neither firm nor abiding. Thus, Sophocles
pierced frequently enough the gloom of pessimism with the bright
rays of an inspiring optimism—but he did not dispel it.
CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

The light which the Sophistic morality throws on the Sophoclean norm does much to bring out the true character of the latter. But Sophoclean morality cannot be appreciated in its full colors until it is placed, along with the doctrine of the Sophists, against a backdrop of the orthodox doctrine on the norm of morality. The influence that the Sophists had on Sophocles has already been pointed out. It remains now to examine the opposing tenets of the two schools by the criterion of scholastic doctrine and evaluate them accordingly.

It must be mentioned here, parenthetically, that while an inquiry of this sort is necessary to a complete treatment of the subject of the thesis, it also entails a danger. The criterion to be used in evaluating Sophocles and the Sophists was not itself worked out fully except with the aid of divine revelation and several hundred years of subsequent thought. It is obvious that unless this fact is kept in mind a serious injustice can be done to Sophocles and the men he opposed, when their doctrines are weighed against the true one. The danger can be avoided, however, by keeping a correct sense of historical proportion. The
purpose of this chapter is not to condemn either the Sophists or Sophocles for failing to see what was virtually impossible for them to see, nor even to show how short their several doctrines fell of the true norm. The shortcomings will indeed be pointed out, but only that the ancient doctrines themselves may be the better compared and appreciated. It is as if we were to use a color we know to be pure in order to examine the relation one to another of two shades whose purity we suspect.

The true doctrine on the norm of morality hinges on the fact of creation. As man cannot decide to make something without first having a reason for making it, neither can God. In creating the universe God first had to have a reason. And since nothing else existed before creation, God's reason for creating must somehow be contained in Himself. Now since God has nothing to gain from creatures—He already possesses everything—His reason for creating must be so that He can communicate something of Himself to other beings. A man, if he wishes to make an instrument to tell time, must select certain materials and place them together in a certain order. If the proper order is not observed, the purpose desired from the combination of the parts will not be achieved. So too with God. God cannot create, cannot communicate His excellence to the universe unless the compo-
nent parts of the universe are so ordered that they reflect and thus share in God's excellence. This order which God places in the universe, and which is, to a certain extent, a reflection of His own internal order, is called the Eternal Law. To return to the watchmaker once more, the purpose of a watch is to tell time. Obviously that purpose is not completely fulfilled by the mere completion of the watch. A certain amount of time must elapse before the watch can tell time. The watch will approach closer to its complete perfection as each second passes. The same holds true in the world. God does not make (corporeal) creatures in their full perfection. They are made in a certain degree of excellence, but are capable of, and directed to the achievement of, a greater perfection—through growth and the exercise of their various faculties and powers. Now in most creatures this advance in perfection is automatic; and the part of the Eternal Law governing their advance is called the Physical Law. But in the case of man, progress in perfection is not altogether automatic. Since man has a will which is free, his growth in perfection is the result of free activity; but this means also that he can impede his progress. Man must figure out for himself what contributes to his advancement, and choose accordingly. He must discover that part of the Eternal Law which pertains to himself, and he must govern his actions by it. And this order of things which man must observe in his free choices is called the Natural Law. If man acts according to the Natural Law to the best of his knowl-
edge he is good. If he does not, he is evil. The Natural Law is for man the ultimate norm of morality.

The Natural Law alone, however, is not sufficient as a norm of morality. Although it is all-comprehensive, governing every possible deliberate action a man might perform, it frequently applies only in a general way. Man, by examining his own nature and the nature of other creatures, can determine the measure of his actions only in its larger lines. In many cases he cannot deduce the necessary specific norms from nature. For example, man can know from nature that he has a right to possess property, since his own nature demands that he support himself and his family, and it is the nature of irrational things to contribute to this support by being possessed and used. This principle, then, is part of the Natural Law. But man cannot know from the nature of things how in particular he may acquire property. Thus there arises a need for a more proximate norm of right and wrong, to be determined by legitimate human authority. This norm is called Positive Law. It is to be noted that Positive Law is not an independent norm of morality. It has a right to existence at all only because it is postulated by the Natural Law; it has its roots in nature. And its decrees are arbitrary only to the extent that the Natural Law is indeterminate. It may in no way oppose the precepts of the Natural Law. It may only complete them.

With these few facts in mind about the Eternal Law, the
Natural Law, and Positive Law, we are in a position to evaluate and make a more critical comparison between the moral doctrine of the Sophists and of Sophocles.

The Sophists who advocated a State-of-Nature morality all had this one failing in common—they did not see any kind of relation between nature and God. As a result of this defect, the natural law (if indeed it can be called law at all) which they proposed as the norm of morality was at best a highly impersonal sort of thing. Adherence to such a norm of action was obedience not to a supremely intelligent being, but acquiescence to the physical forces of the world. To break such a law could not be a sin. It was rather a true ἀμαρτία, a "bad shot," a short advance along the wrong road. To break the law was to make a mistake, like making a mistake in arithmetic. Constantly to observe the precepts of such a law against the pull of the passions would certainly have called for stronger convictions than most men are capable of.

But this failure to see God behind nature was not the worst error of the Sophists. Had they formed an adequate concept of nature, of the hierarchy of beings and the hierarchy of faculties within beings, especially, perhaps they would have been led eventually to see the divine seal stamped upon the law of nature. But their ideas about nature were most inadequate, and were such as to lead them to grotesque and immoral conclusions.

Hippias was the least flagrant of the offenders in this
regard. But only because he was the most vague. Hippias fixed a
determined eye upon the idea that if men got back to "nature"
everybody would be happy, because in "nature" everybody was equal.
Just what Hippias meant by nature is not clear. Hippias' state
of nature seems to have been a condition of life in which every­
one developed all his faculties to the full, and in which there
were no positive laws to destroy equality. The falsity of this
position is evident. It fails on two heads. First of all, it is
quite evident that all men are not equal by nature, that men are
possessed of highly diversified and in many cases very unequal
talents. This fact is so plain that one wonders at the wishful
thinking that could lead men of Hippias' stamp to assert the con­
trary. Secondly, it was seen above (p. 71) that the positive law,
which Hippias conceives of as the great obstacle to man's happi­
ness, is rather an essential condition postulated by nature it­
self for that happiness. Positive law, far from being opposed to
nature, is rather its natural complement.

Antiphon, too, failed to face the facts which nature
presented to him. Even granting his assumption that man will at­
tain happiness simply by avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure, to
seek for a condition of life in which all pain can be avoided and
pleasure ever enjoyed is to seek for the impossible. Even a cur­
sory examination of nature reveals that there are certain plea­
sures which necessarily involve pain: intellectual pleasures, for
example, involve a certain amount of physical pain, and this even
where one is free to determine the conditions of life as he will.
The question then arises: which pleasures are to be preferred and which pains accepted? This in turn gives rise to a second question: which faculties must one exercise and upon what objects to gain the most pleasure? And the answer to these two questions would have led Antiphon away from his hedonistic morality to a hierarchical concept of nature and to a more orthodox natural law.2 At all events, with everyone seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, as Antiphon would have had it, the consequent lack of order in society would have meant a minimum of pleasure and a maximum of pain for the general run of men. The order insured by the observance of the Natural Law is an essential condition for the well-being of society, and Antiphon's hedonistic morality could not but have destroyed this order.

Callicles and Critias accepted Antiphon's errors and carried them to their logical if perverse conclusion. Taking the ultimate criterion of action as pleasure (and Callicles and Critias, as did Antiphon, understood by this the pleasure of the moment, not the beatitude of the orthodox Natural-Law doctrine), they saw immediately that this end was impossible of attainment

2 Cf. Aristotle's remarkable observations on this subject: Nicomachean Ethics, 1176 b - 1179 a; especially the summary statement: "What is proper to each by nature is best and most pleasant for each. And for man it is life according to reason, since it is just this that man chiefly is. This life then is the happiest."
for all men. An all-out pursuit of pleasure by some was bound to mean pain for others. The solution they offered for this difficulty was a crass one. Refusing to reexamine their premises, they pushed on relentlessly to say that it was only for the strong to enjoy pleasure; the weak they committed to a life of pain. The norm of action for all men was the will of men who were stronger. Theirs was the power, so theirs was the privilege of enjoying life. It remained for the rest of mankind to do the arbitrary bidding of the strong.

Since these two Sophists, Callicles and Critias, embraced the errors of Antiphon, their theory falls by the same criticism that applied to Antiphon's. It is impossible that the pleasure of the moment be the criterion of man's actions. But they surpassed Antiphon in error, and thus laid themselves open to a more devastating criticism. They asserted that it was not for all men to be happy. Happiness was only for the few, and necessarily involved the unhappiness of the many. This statement is contradicted by the facts of nature. All men are equally endowed with the capacity and desire to be happy. Therefore it is arbitrary to say that some should attain this end and others not. The assumption of course is that it is impossible for all men to attain happiness. But this premise is laid down by the proponents of the Will-of-the-Stronger doctrine only because they fail to see in what true happiness consists. Nature itself tells us that man can attain true happiness only by perfecting
his higher capacities, his intellect and will, even if it is at
the expense of the lower faculties. Man will be happy only if
he pursues knowledge of the truth and love of the good; and where
this is done, the natural order of things will be maintained,
which guarantees happiness for everyone. It is only when the few
pursue a disordered happiness, a false perfecting of the facul-
ties, that the whole of society becomes disordered and the unhap-
iness of the many is increased (though never, in the true view
of things, destroyed). The exercise of unlimited power by a ty-
rant, for instance, although it allows him to perfect certain of
his faculties and thus brings him a certain amount of pleasure,
does not bring him true happiness, since he is either ignorant of
the truth, or knowing it fails to choose what is good, and thus
frustrates the perfection of his highest faculties, his intellect
and will.

The legal positivism of Protagoras misses the mark of
truth by an even wider margin than does the State-of-Nature the-
ory. Protagoras was a sensist, and admitted only sense knowledge
to be true, i.e., a knowledge of particulars. But since nature
is a general concept which is abstracted from particulars and
known only through the intellect, not only did Protagoras fail to
reach an adequate concept of nature, as did the Naturalists; he
failed to reach any concept of it whatsoever. Thus did the veil
of sensism hide from his eyes the vision of order in the universe
which is so essential to the formation of a true doctrine on the
norm of morality. Protagoras sought refuge instead in positive human law as the measure of action. But it has already been seen that positive law is rooted in nature and is valid only in so far as it is in alignment with nature. Protagoras' attempt to establish the norm of morality in this domain, therefore, could not but have failed miserably. He was trying the impossible; he endeavored to establish a conclusion, the validity of positive law as the norm of morality, whose only possible premise, nature, he had already destroyed.

How then does the doctrine of the Sophists compare with the true doctrine on the norm of morality? What does their doctrine make of the three great facts of the orthodox explanation: Nature, God, and Positive Law? One school denies nature altogether and the other three fail to perceive the order and hierarchy of values in nature which constitute the Natural Law. None of the four Sophistic schools sees the relation of nature to God, its author and consequently the promulgator of its law. And finally, all of them divorce positive law from nature, thus completely destroying the validity of human law.

It has been shown that Sophocles vigorously opposed the Sophistic doctrines on the norm of morality. But how does his own doctrine compare with theirs when evaluated by the same criterion used to judge the Sophistic morality?

Before proceeding with this question, it must be remarked again that Sophocles does not treat the norm of morality
in the abstract. He was not writing a philosophical treatise. Rather he wrote as an artist, in the concrete and particular. He did not present for refutation the moral principles of the Sophists in their abstract formulation. He gave us rather the logical living out of those principles in the individual lives of men who embraced them. And the manner of his refutation was the same. He did not oppose the Sophistic errors with his own doctrine in the abstract, but rather presented it as lived out in concrete action. Sophocles' method has a great deal to recommend it. Abstract principles have little significance for the average man. Certain of the Sophists' principles might sound innocent enough in the abstract. But when carried out in the concrete action of a domineering Creon or a selfish Jocasta, they have a force which few can miss. The same holds true for the doctrine Sophocles proposed as an antidote to Sophistic perversity.

But the artistic method also has its disadvantages. It is more difficult for the analyst to reach a precise, certain, and integral knowledge of the general truths which are embodied in the concrete circumstances of character and action. This is especially true in the case of Sophocles, where not only the concretions of abstract principles, but even expressly general truths are presented in a poetical medium. The poetical expression clarifies the beauty and force of these truths, but it tends to obscure their intellectual content.

These facts are important. One who expects a certain
type of evidence in support of a theory and does not find it is apt to conclude, perhaps falsely, that there is no evidence at all.

The three elements of the true norm of morality used as a touchstone to evaluate the Sophistic doctrines are God, Nature, and human Positive Law. The same elements will now form the basis for evaluating Sophocles' doctrine.

The ultimate norm of morality is divine law. This law is eternal and immutable, as its author, God, is eternal and immutable. How does the doctrine of Sophocles compare on this point with the orthodox morality? Sophocles says in the Oedipus Tyrannus that the laws to be observed by all men are the νόμοι ὑψίστοις ... ὥν "Ὀλυμπὸς πατὴρ μόνος, "laws of range sublime, whose father is Olympus alone." Antigone says that no mortal can override these ἄγραπτα θεῶν νόμιμα, "unwritten statutes of heaven." They are therefore the ultimate norm of morality.

Are these laws then eternal and immutable? Sophocles calls the divine laws ὑψίστοις, and Jebb interprets this as meaning laws "having their sphere and range in the world of eternal truths." Furthermore, Sophocles represents Antigone as saying of the divine laws: οὐ γὰρ τι νῦν γα κάχθεσ, ἀλλ' ἂς! ποτε τά?

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3 Oedipus Tyrannus, 365-368.
4 Antigone, 454-455.
5 Jebb, The Oedipus Tyrannus, n. on line 365.
"For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time."6 That the same laws are immutable can be inferred from the word ἀμφιάλη which Antigone uses to describe them,7 and which means, according to Jebb, that the laws "stand fast forever."8

As to the divine element of the norm of morality, then, Sophocles' doctrine is perfectly sound. But what is to be said of the relation of Sophocles' norm of morality with regard to the second element of our criterion, nature?

According to the orthodox view of the ultimate norm of morality, the Eternal Law of God is promulgated in nature through creation. Thus promulgated it consists in the interrelation of creatures resulting from their ordination to a final end, God. This relation of creatures one to another and to God, so far as it affects man, is called the Natural Law. Man can attain a natural knowledge of the Eternal Law only from the knowledge he has of the nature of creatures and the relationships which follow upon their make-up. It can be ascertained, for example, from the nature of plants and animals and from the nature of man, that plants and animals are ordained for the use of man in this life, since plants and animals have no life after death, whereas man's

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6 Antigone, 456-457.
7 Ibid., 454.
8 Jebb, The Antigone, n. on line 454f.
soul is immortal. It can be established by an examination of nature that a truthful God exists and that man must believe and obey Him in all things, since man is God's creature and is ordered to God as to his last end. This is an important truth in laying the basis for the acceptance of direct revelation from God.

What can be said of the doctrine of Sophocles concerning the Natural Law? Since Sophocles was evidently ignorant of the fact of creation, it was impossible for him to reach an entirely orthodox view of the Natural Law. But is it to be maintained that Sophocles failed altogether to see a norm of morality in the natural order of things?

It was remarked in the last chapter that Sophocles had what amounted to a passion for harmony, moral harmony as well as physical. And it was no doubt this love of harmony which led him to see a unity in nature, a natural ordering of things flowing from a single principle. This principle was for Sophocles not the fact of creation but a truth closely related to creation, the presence of divine Providence. Sophocles saw, especially when he reflected upon human suffering, that there was a divine plan in the world which directed all things toward an end, so that an evil of a lower order, physical pain, for example, was ordered to a good of a higher order, the perfection of character, happiness after death, etc. Such being the case, the divine precepts would always be in accord with nature (hence just), since they proceed from divine Providence. The Eternal Law of Sophocles is in ef-
fect the Natural Law of the orthodox view, because the precepts of both are identical: the precepts of both laws flow from the notion of finality in the universe.

But did Sophocles in fact always consider the precepts of the Eternal Law to be just, i.e. to be in accord with nature? It would seem from a fragment of the lost play Thyestes that he did not. The fragment is concerned with a divine command, probably delivered through an oracle to Thyestes:

\[
\text{σοφός γὰρ οὐδεὶς πλὴν ἄν ἀν τιμὴ θεός.}
\text{ἀλλ' εἰς θεοὺς σ' ὅριντα, κἂν ἔξω δίκης }
\text{χωρεῖν κελεύῃ, κεῖσ' ὀδοίπορεῖν χρεῶν.}
\text{αἰσχρόν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἂν ὑφηγοῦντα: θεοὶ.}
\]

For no one is wise except him whom God holds in honor. But if looking to the gods you are bidden even to proceed apart from justice, you must turn your steps in that direction; for nothing is shameful which the gods enjoin.

The principle is here laid down that nothing which the gods command is wrong; this principle is in accord with Sophocles' doctrine that the ultimate norm of morality is the divine Eternal Law. But a difficulty arises out of the phrase, "even if you are commanded to proceed apart from justice." This sentiment would lead one to believe that a divine command could be unjust, i.e. contrary to what is right by nature, contrary to the Natural Law. And if this was Sophocles' opinion, it is obvious that he...
was in serious error concerning the norm of morality. Not only would such a doctrine place a contradiction in God, since He is the author of both laws, but it would undermine, as far as man is concerned, the validity of the divine law, since the validity of this law depends upon the validity of the Natural Law which tells man that God is to be obeyed in His commands.

Such an interpretation of the fragment, however, is so contrary to the general spirit of Sophocles' dramas that one must hold it suspect. There is for example a key phrase in the Oedipus Tyrannus whose obvious interpretation would seem to identify reverence and service to the gods with observance of the dictates of justice. Because of its significance with regard to this important question in the moral doctrine of Sophocles, the passage deserves to be quoted in full:

εἰ δὲ τίς ὑπέροπτα χερσίν ἡ λόγῳ πορεύεται,
Δίκας ἀφόβητος, οὐδὲ
δαίμονων ἔδη σέβην,
κακά νυν ἔλοιπον μοῖρα,
δεσπότου χάριν χλιδᾶς,
εἰ μὴ τὸ κέρδος κερδανεὶ δικαίως
καὶ τῶν ἀσέπτων ἔρευται,
ἡ τῶν θείων θέτεται ματάξων.
τίς ἔτι κοτ' ἐν τοῖοσ' ἀνὴρ θεῶν βέλη
ἐπιέται ψυχᾶς ἀμύνειν;
εἰ γὰρ αἱ τοιαίδει πράξεις τίμιαι,
τί δὲι με χορεύειν;

But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities. Where such things are, what mortal shall boast any more that he can ward the arrows of
the gods from his life? Nay, if such deeds are in honour, wherefore should we join in the sacred dance?  

It is noteworthy that in this choral ode Sophocles does not make pride (ὑπέροψα, χλιόδακ) consist exclusively in irreverence toward the gods, as he doubtless would have if the divine law had no relation to what is right and wrong by nature. Rather, the proud man is one who, first of all, scorns justice, i.e. one who pursues his own advantage with injustice (presumably to other men), who commits "unholy" deeds, who touches things which are not to be touched. It is because he commits such deeds which are unjust in themselves, which are wrong by nature, that the arrows of the gods are directed against the proud man. Indeed, it is implied here that not even the gods themselves can sanction such (essentially) unjust acts (bid a man proceed apart from justice), for the chorus concludes its observations with the remark: "If such deeds are honorable, why should I dance," i.e. why pay reverence to the gods?

Perhaps an even more explicit indication that the gods could not, to Sophocles' way of thinking, command a man to proceed apart from justice is the following statement enunciated by Oedipus in the Oedipus Coloneus. After cursing both his sons for the dishonor they had shown him, Oedipus appeals for the fulfillment of his curse to the fact that ἡ παλαιφατος Δίκη ξύνεδρος

10 Oedipus Tyrannus, 883-896.
Justice, revealed from of old, sits with Zeus in the might of the eternal laws." Justice is enthroned with Zeus, is all-powerful with Zeus, by reason of the eternal laws. It is over the "eternal laws of natural duty" that justice here presides, and since the literal meaning contained in the figurative ζυνεδρός would seem to be that Zeus is one with justice, it is difficult to see how he could bid a man perform an act which is naturally unjust.

How, then, explain the fragment from the Thyestes, which states that man should obey God even if He enjoins something (in this case incest) that is unjust? Several explanations of the passage are possible which would absolve Sophocles from inconsistency and error in his doctrine on the norm of morality. Perhaps the most probable, certainly the simplest, of these explanations is that Sophocles did not subscribe to the view expressed in the fragment. Since the context of the passage is uncertain, to say the least, there is no evidence to show that the sentiment expressed is Sophocles' own, and not merely an utterance of one of the characters or the chorus to which Sophocles himself lends no support. On the other hand, the context of

11 Oedipus Coloneus, 1381-1382.
12 Jebb, The Oedipus Coloneus, n. on line 1380.
13 It is to be noted that Sophocles did not originate the Thyestes story, but was treating a myth as handed down to him, a fact which further absolves him from its details.
the plays quoted above shows that Sophocles did support the orthodox doctrine on justice and the gods. The probability of this explanation is fortified by a statement of Lactantius that in the story of Thyestes the oracle did not command incest outright, but merely observed that for Thyestes "aliter malorum remedium inveniri non posse, nisi cum Pelopia filia concubuisset."14

But even if Sophocles subscribed to the principle contained in the fragment, it is not clear that the principle is opposed to orthodox morality, though this seems to be the case at first sight. The clause of the fragment that causes the difficulty is κάν ἐξω δίκης χωρεῖν κελεύη, "even if you are bidden to proceed apart from justice." Cannot this expression be interpreted without strain to the sense of the words, "what is ordinarily contrary to justice?" It must not be forgotten that Sophocles, as a dramatist, is not held responsible for the precision of language that is expected of a philosopher. He is permitted to omit the distinctions which in everyday language are rather understood than expressed; for to include them would weaken the rhetorical force of his drama. And even we, who have the benefits of a fully elaborated science of morality, would tend to say in ordinary speech, "Homicide is wrong; but if God commands it, His command should be obeyed." Acts prohibited by the Natural Law are prohibited only in so far as they are opposed to the com-

14 Pearson, Fragments, 186.
mon good, or opposed to the order of justice or virtue by which the common good is maintained. It can happen, then, that an act which is ordinarily wrong because it ordinarily hinders the common good may become legitimate under certain circumstances, because under those circumstances it promotes the common good (e.g. homicide if commanded by God, as in the case of Abraham and Isaac). 14a Now if Sophocles conceived of incest as falling into this category of acts which can under certain conditions become legitimate, 14b he was certainly correct in bidding man obey, for the act would not then be contrary to nature. It is to be noted in this regard that Sophocles does not say that the gods can command anything they will and by this fact it becomes not shameful, but rather, "Nothing is shameful which the gods command," which can mean: the gods do not command something shameful, for the very reason that it is shameful. Sophocles would be the last one to say that the gods could make right something which is contrary to the order and harmony of the world, since he set so much store by divine Providence. Rather he is saying just the opposite. He says: obey the gods in whatever they command, because they cannot command anything inordinate. Perhaps it is not always evident how the commands of the gods are in accord with the order of the

14a Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 100, a. 8, c. and ad 3.

14b God, in fact, could not command incest between parent and child, although He could command it between children of the same parents (Ibid., II-II, 154, a. 9, ad 3).
world, but that is only because man does not see things as clearly and comprehensively as the gods. The Sophists (and Euripides with them) would say that if man thinks something is wrong he should avoid it, even if the gods do command it. Sophocles says, and more correctly, if the gods command something it cannot be wrong, and therefore they are to be obeyed.

The third criterion for evaluating the Sophists' and Sophocles' norm of morality is that of Positive Law. It will be recalled that orthodox morality calls for the existence of human positive law as a complement to the Natural Law. Positive law must not contradict the Natural Law since it is subordinate to the Natural Law. The State-of-Nature Sophists, because of their misconception of nature, denied the validity of any law whatsoever, and hence of positive law in particular. The positivistic Sophists, on the other hand, constituted positive human law as the ultimate norm of morality and gave it unlimited scope.

Sophocles, in combating these two errors, successfully meets the requirements of orthodox morality. Although Sophocles' chief effort in opposing the State-of-Nature theorists was to show the validity of divine law, there are not wanting passages which testify to his convictions on the validity of human laws as well, but only such human laws as do not violate the Eternal Law, which do not go beyond the bounds of justice.

In the ode from the Antigone on human accomplishments, Sophocles commends man when he honors both the laws of the land
(νόμους γεραίρων χειρός) and the justice he has sworn by the gods to uphold (θεόν τ' ἐνορχον δίχαν). Antigone tells Creon that she did not think his decrees were of such force that they could override the unwritten laws of the gods. The implication here is that Creon's decree concerning the burial of Polyneices would have had force had it not been in opposition to the decree of a higher law. Again, Creon is called the new ruler of the land νεαραίοι θεῶν ἐπὶ συντυχίαις, "by the new fortunes that the gods have given." The phrase indicates divine sanction of human government. But Creon's power is not absolute and unlimited, despite his own delusions on the point. The city is not for the ruler, but the ruler for the city. The ruler must govern for the good of the governed:

КРЕОΝ: ἀλλα ἃ ἡ μοι χρή με τῆσον ἄρχειν χειρός;
ΑΙΜΣΩΝ: πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἐσθ ἂτις ἄνδρος ἐσθ ἐνός.
ΚΡ.: οὔ τοι κρατοῦσιν ἑ πόλις νομίζεται;
ΑΙ.: καλὸς ἐρήμης γ' ἄν οὖ γῆς ἄρχοις μόνος.

Creon: Am I to rule this land by other judgment than my own?
Haemon: That is no city which belongs to one man.
Cr.: Is not the city held to be the ruler's?
Hae.: Thou wouldst make a good monarch of a desert.

And indeed, the whole plot of the Antigone illustrates the truth that human law, while generally valid, loses its validity when

15 Antigone, 368.
16 Ibid., 453-455.
17 Ibid., 156-157.
18 Ibid., 736-738.
opposed to the higher law whence it derives its original force.

It is indeed remarkable that Sophocles, in his opposition to the errors of the Sophists on God, Nature, and Positive Law, approached so closely to the truth. If his doctrine did not coincide exactly with the orthodox morality on the norm of conduct, it is only because he was ignorant of the fact of creation. Even this lacuna in Sophocles' view of the norm did not affect the conclusions of his doctrine so much as it limited the adequacy of the premises for those conclusions, especially the explanation of divine Providence.

It is not likely that Sophocles reasoned scientifically to the wonderful truths which he championed in his plays. Such reasoning was to come later, consolidating and elaborating what had already been brought to light even in those ancient pagan times. Sophocles' approach was different. The method he used, while not so sure as the philosophical, on the other hand has a greater popular appeal. His method is the poet's. It is rather intuitive than discursive; and to the ordinary man, to whom long and close reasoning comes hard, Sophocles' method is impressive. It is an appeal to common sense, and an appeal to one's love of the beautiful. Sophocles wins adherence to the truth by portraying the inherent ugliness in the errors of the rationalistic Sophists, and by unveiling with compelling clarity the harmonious splendor of a world governed wisely and justly by God.

A great deal of this moral beauty and force in Sopho-
cles is independent of history. It is felt and appreciated even by those who do not know who Sophocles was or when he lived or with whom. But the full import of the greatest truths in Sophoclean drama is not realized until it is understood that the man who wrote these dramas was conducting a noble crusade. He was waging a war on behalf of truth against errors of the most pernicious sort. For modern readers the interest engendered by this militant character of Sophocles' plays is heightened by the fact that the very errors he fought to overcome are rampant again in our own society: in religion, education, and politics. They have had a rebirth and a regrowth in modern times. What was once Sophocles' great concern in ancient Greece is now the concern of every man who loves the truth as did Sophocles. The relevance of his art has not died with the centuries.

It is both for its own merits and its renewed significance in relation to its modern counterpart that the writer has thought it eminently worthwhile to attempt in the present thesis a presentation of that ancient crusade.
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B. ARTICLES


APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Paul F. Conen, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classical Languages.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Aug. 3, 1953

Date

Signature of Adviser