

EURIPIDES AND DIONYSIAC PIETY (*BACCHAE* 370–433)

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Euripides had left Athens shortly after the production of his *Orestes* in 408 B.C. to spend the remainder of his days at the court of Archelaus of Macedon. The play that was perhaps his greatest masterpiece, the *Bacchae*,¹ was produced by another Euripides, his son or nephew, after his death, and gained first prize. Though the play was undoubtedly conceived and written in Macedon, there is no evidence that it was intended for any but the sophisticated ears of an Athenian audience. In any case, it remains perhaps Euripides' most difficult play: not only because of the lamentable state of the text, but also because of the

¹ Works listed in this note are cited hereafter by author's last name.

For text and bibliography, see E. R. Dodds, *Euripides' Bacchae*² (Oxford 1960; repr. 1963); G. Ammendola, *Euripide: Le Baccanti* (Turin 1948); and E. Grégoire and J. Meunier, *Euripide: 6. Les Bacchantes* (Paris 1961). I have also derived much profit from A. Rivier, *Essai sur le tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne 1944) 86–98; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (Cambridge 1948); E. M. Blaiklock, *The Male Characters of Euripides: A Study in Realism* (Wellington, N. Z., 1952) 209–30; Gilbert Norwood, *Essays on Euripidean Drama* (Berkeley 1954) 52–73; Albin Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*² (Göttingen 1964) 199–201, with the literature cited; Hans Diller, "Die Bakchen und ihre Stellung in Spätwerk des Euripides," *Abh. Mainz: Geistes- und Sozialwiss. Klasse*, 1955, nr. 5, 453–71; A. J. Festugière, "Euripide dans les 'Bacchantes'," *Eranos* 55 (1957) 127–144; William Arrowsmith, *Bacchae*, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (ed. D. Grene and R. Lattimore, Chicago 1959) 4.530 ff.; G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941; repr. 1961) 398–420. For an interesting comparative study, see F. M. Wassermann, "Man and God in the *Bacchae* and in the *Oedipus at Colonus*," *Studies Presented to David Moore Robinson* (ed. G. E. Mylonas and D. Raymond, Saint Louis 1951–53) 2.559–69, with the literature there cited.

Of the earlier editions, I have derived much from *Euripidis opera omnia ex editionibus praestantissimis fideliter recusa, latina interpretatione, scholiis antiquis* (9 vols., Duncan: Glasgow 1821) 6.3 ff.; N. Wecklein, *Euripidis Bacchae* (Leipzig 1898) with his appendix of earlier conjectures, pp. 56–70; and R. Y. Tyrrell, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (London 1897; repr. 1961).

tantalizing ambiguity with which Euripides would seem to leave us at the close of the drama.²

One of the most difficult and subtle of the choral odes is the first stasimon, in which the Bacchant Women sing a hymn to 'Οσία, Piety or Reverence.³ It follows the great religious debate between the seer Teiresias and the young king Pentheus, with the elderly Cadmus acting as a diplomatic moderator. We have, therefore, in the first epeisodion and stasimon four levels or phases of religious belief: the scepticism of Pentheus, the pragmatism of Cadmus, the religious conservatism of Teiresias, and finally the Dionysiac commitment of the Chorus.

Teiresias will not quibble with the gods (200), and he finds that the new worship is merely an extension, a development of the old. In a rationalizing mood, Teiresias explains to Pentheus (274-85) that the worship of Dionysus, like that of Demeter-Earth, is linked with man's most basic drives; and however one may interpret the myths connected with the god's birth (he seems to say), the divine power is manifest in the spirit of possession by which he takes up his abode among men and women (298-305). Indeed, it is this spirit of possession, now mild and now violent, which gives structure and support to the entire play. In sum, Teiresias sees the new cult as bringing nothing but good to men (and here he anticipates 416 ff. of the choral ode): the charisms of prophecy and frenzy, and the harmless release of wine. Hence in the choral ode which follows, the Bacchantes are not criticizing Teiresias' attitude, as Verrall and others once thought,⁴ but merely developing, though from a different point of view, some of the ideas which Euripides had broached through the prophet.

Next comes the religious pragmatism of Cadmus. His is the theory of the noble lie (334): even if Dionysus is not a god, Pentheus should

² For a summary of the various views, see Winnington-Ingram; Dodds, pp. xli ff.; Grégoire-Meunier, 320-37; H. Diller, "Die Bakchen," 453-55, with the literature. See also A. Lesky, *Greek Tragedy* (tr. H. A. Frankfort; London 1965) 196-200.

³ On Euripides' personification here of Piety, see W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*³ (Munich 1940; repr. 1961) 672, 713-14. See also James T. Allen and Gabriel Italie, *A Concordance to Euripides* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1954) s. v. G. Murray once suggested that the name was really adjectival, "Holy One," possibly as an epithet of Nemesis: see *Euripides Translated into English Rhyming Verse* (London 1902) 171, note.

⁴ On Teiresias see A. W. Verrall, *The Bacchantes of Euripides and Other Essays* (Cambridge 1910) 48-56; Murray (above, note 3) 169-70; Grube, 402-3; Dodds, 91.

say he is, for the glory of Thebes. Indeed, he warns the young king against any rash statement which may incur punishment if perchance the god exists (337-42). And what of Pentheus? A traditionalist and a conservative, he is also in modern terms a puritan, who is suspicious of secret cults and is shocked to see his grandfather and the aged seer cavorting like school-girls in their fawnskin and thyrsus. He accuses Cadmus of senility, and Teiresias of conniving at these "filthy rites" (260) in order to line his pockets from the rise in sacrificial offerings and auguries. The Chorus in turn is shocked at Pentheus' blasphemy—*τῆς Εὐσεβείας!*⁵—though no one seems to take any notice of its comment (263-65):

Alas for Piety! Friend, have you no reverence
For the gods, no respect for Cadmus . . .?

It is then the shock of Pentheus' blind opposition, his unjustified suspicion, and his disrespect towards Cadmus and Teiresias that serve as the point of departure for the Bacchants' first stasimon (370-433). In a rare personification, they invoke Piety once again, who soars over the world on golden pinions. There can be little substance, they suggest, to Pentheus' ominous suspicions. Dionysus comes to men as the god of laughter, good cheer, and peace (and to this they will return at the very close of the choral ode): whether at the tables of the gods or the banquets of men, he is the source of happiness, and "the gleam of the grape" brings banishment of care. But if Dionysus represents calm tolerance and the wise acceptance of life, the prudish Pentheus (who recalls Euripides' Hippolytus) stands for restlessness, rash judgment, and imprudent reaction. It is the life of peace, which is at the heart of Dionysiac piety, which abides unshaken and strengthens the

⁵ The genitive of exclamation (263) must surely be retained in accordance with all the manuscripts, and translated "Ah for [the offence to] Piety!" It is true, as Dodds notes (102 *ad loc.*), that such genitives are normally preceded by a particle or interjection. Yet the abruptness of the lines does not seem unusual to the Chorus, and Dodds' translation of the manuscript reading as an *ironic* exclamation ("Such piety!") following Tyrrell, 85, does not do justice to the other possibilities. See Ammendola, 33 *ad loc.* If we accept the reading of the manuscripts we also have a thematic anticipation of the choral ode to 'Οσία (= Εὐσέβεια) which is to follow; for it is precisely the shock at Pentheus' insult to Piety that is the point of departure for the stasimon. For other alternatives, all unsatisfactory, see Wecklein, 58.

families of men (389-91). But Pentheus' is a destructive tendency (395-402):

Cleverness is not wisdom, and thinking
Thoughts that are too proud for men will shorten life.⁶
Hence, whoever would strive for things beyond his grasp
Would risk what is at hand.⁷ It seems to me
That such is the way of madmen and of fools.

This, then, is the essence of Pentheus' impiety: in his "cleverness"—the word is ominous here—he does not grasp the Dionysiac dimension of life. In his attempt to sit in judgment on the god and his new cult, he is being "clever," he is going beyond his human capacity, and his life will shortly end in disaster. Men like Pentheus are little different from madmen or fools; and in their vain efforts to attain something in their bit of wisdom they lose the good things which the god has put within their grasp. Such is the negative side; the Chorus will again return to the positive qualities of true piety at the very close of their song.

The centerpiece of the hymn, the second strophe (402-16), is a prayerful song for freedom and release, in which the Bacchants long to be wafted off to different places in the world where they may live their Dionysiac life in peace. On another level, of course, it might be interpreted as Euripides' own *cri de coeur*, a longing to live in a place where he could be free to think as he chose. In any case, the women first think of Cyprus, the isle sacred to Aphrodite; and next, surely not

⁶ That is, reading lines 396-97 with Hermann, Paley, Sandys, Tyrrell, and others, according to the punctuation (with no stop after *φρονεῖν*) adopted in Aldus Manutius' edition of Euripides (Venice 1503); this is the reading Dodds rightly favors in his note (122) against the printed text of Murray. To take the phrase separately and translate "Life is short," suggests a banality that does not suit either the present context or the meaning of the play; rather the warning that proud thoughts such as Pentheus' result in sudden disaster gives precisely the context and the tone of the entire play. See the discussion in Winnington-Ingram, 61 ff. But the nuance seems completely ignored by Grégoire-Meunier, 258, and Ammendola, 47.

⁷ Though Dodds would prefer to change the text of Murray and follow Tyrwhitt, Headlam, and others, in reading the sentence *τις . . . φέροι* as a question, I feel that the positive statement with the indefinite *τις* seems more acceptable. In this way the sentence parallels the thought of the previous one: having thoughts too proud leads to a short life, and in pursuing great things one may risk losing what is right at hand. See Dodds, 122; Winnington-Ingram, 63 and note 1, which is absolutely right; Ammendola, 48; Grégoire-Meunier, 258.

Paphos, but (following an older emendation of Reiske's) the Egyptian island of Pharos, bathed by the waters of the Nile delta, and already associated with mystical Egyptian rites in Euripides' *Helen*.⁸ Last of all they mention Pieria in Macedon, the home of the Muses, perhaps dearer now to Euripides as he spent his last years at Pella. For here (that is, in all of the places mentioned, and not merely the last) it is not forbidden to celebrate the sacred rites (412-16):

Thither [i.e. to any of these places] take me,
O Bromius, Bromius, god, leading your Bacchic dance.
There the Graces are and Love. And there
It is no sin for Bacchant women
To celebrate their orgiastic rites.

The final antistrophe (417-33) brings the ode full circle, returning to some of the ideas that had been intimated by Teiresias and had been initially suggested in the opening lines of the hymn. The spirit of Dionysiac piety not only encourages the joys of wine: it is an entirely new attitude towards life and mankind. The ecstasy that the god confers is given without distinction to all men, rich and poor, and is suggestive of the equality of nature itself.⁹ Hence the votary must join the multitude of simple folk (τὸ πλῆθος τὸ φαυλότερον, 431) and reject the scepticism of the sophisticate, those "men who are superior" (οἱ περισσοὶ φῶτες, 429).

⁸ Reading *Φάρον* for the difficult *Πάρον* satisfies both metre and context. (Most modern editors attribute the conjecture to Reiske, but apart from the citation in the Glasgow variorum edition I have been unable to locate its exact source.) In the first place, two references to the island of Cyprus would seem unlikely in an enumeration of localities to which the Bacchantes would fly. Secondly, a mention of Egypt would suit the tradition of Dionysus' connection with that country (cf., for example, *Hymn. Hom.* 1.9; Athenaeus 5.197C-201B), as well as the later identification of Osiris with Dionysus (see, for example, Tibullus 1.7.29-48). Dodds (125) seems wrong in rejecting the emendation of Reiske because, as he says, the island of Pharos is in actual fact "seven stades from Alexandria." Still Euripides in the *Helen* 1-3 pictures Pharos as within sight of the streams of the "rainless" Nile. It is good to note that the text of Grégoire-Meunier, 258, adopts Reiske's reading, although John Jackson, *Marginalia scaenica* (London 1955) 117, still adheres to Paphos as certain.

⁹ On the ideal equality of city laws, see the *Suppliant Women* 429-32, and cf. also Hecuba's words to Odysseus in *Hecuba* 291-92. It would appear that the principle of the equality of laws for rich and poor as expressed in the *Suppliant Women* is here applied to the privileges conferred by Dionysus on his votaries. For the concept, see Schmid, *Gesch. der griech. Lit.* 673, note 1, and especially Winnington-Ingram, 69.

Here at last the Bacchants touch on what would seem to be (for all its obscurity) Euripides' clearest statement on the meaning of true piety: it is a fundamental openness and tolerance of an experience that is linked, as Teiresias had already hinted, with the very forces of nature and is close to the spontaneous movements of the heart of man. But this attitude of acceptance is in itself a divine gift; and the god hates those who seem inclined to reject it out of "cleverness" or a feeling of superiority. Such thoughts, as the Chorus had earlier said, are "too proud for men" and will result in catastrophe. This, then, is the folly of Pentheus and all "superior" men, to reject the peace and freedom that Dionysiac piety would bring.

This brings us to the final lines of the antistrophe (421-33), which have been the occasion of much controversy:¹⁰

ἴσαν δ' ἔς τε τὸν ὄλβιον	421
τὸν τε χείρονα δῶκ' ἔχειν	
οἴνου τέρψιν ἄλυπον	
—μισεῖ δ' ᾧ μὴ ταῦτα μέλει—	
κατὰ φάος νύκτας τε φίλας	425
εὐαίωνα διαζῆν,	
σοφὰν δ' ἀπέχειν πραπίδα φρένα τε	427
περισσῶν παρὰ φωτῶν·	
τὸ πλῆθος ὃ τι	430
τὸ φαυλότερον ἐνόμισε χρῆ-	
ταί τ' ἐν τῷδε λεγοίμαν.	433

421 ἴσαν corr l: ἴσα LP 424 ego interpunxi 427 σοφὰν editio Aldina: σοφὰ
metri causa (coll 412) Dindorf Dodds ἀπεχε Hermann: σοφῶν δ' ἀπέχων Paley
φρένα τε ut glossam del Tyrrell πραπίδα: παρ' ἀσπίδα P 430 ὃ τι τὸ Brunck:

ὅτι περ P et forte L 433 τ' ἐν τῷδε λεγοίμην ἂν P: τε[[ε]]ν τόδε λέγοιμ' ἂν (hinc
forte ἐν τῷδε (scr prima manus) L δεχοίμαν Hermann τε τόδ' ἂν δεχοίμαν Kirchhoff
quam sec Murray ('totius v. lectio dubia') at textum potius iuxta P metri causa scripsi

Here one of the crucial lines is 427: σοφὰν δ' ἀπέχειν πραπίδα φρένα τε. The corresponding line (412) in the strophe, ἐκεῖσ' ἄγε με, Βρόμειε, Βρόμειε, would be metrically two iambic dipodies with

¹⁰ My own constitution of the text. Besides the text of Murray-Dodds, see also Grégoire-Meunier, 259; Wecklein, 19-20 (with the appendix, 60). Many of the earlier critical comments are preserved in the variorum edition, *Euripidis opera omnia* (Glasgow 1821) 6.51-53, and F. A. Paley, *Euripides with an English Commentary* (London 1874) 2.446-48.

resolution: $\cup - \cup \cup \cup \mid \cup \cup \cup \cup \cup$. Hence the responsion with line 427 would seem to be faulty.¹¹ And yet it is difficult to quarrel with the Greek of 427.¹² The infinitive ἀπέχειν, which Hermann would have changed to an imperative ἄπεχε,¹³ is perfectly in order, as is suggested by the parallelism of ἔχειν (422) and διαζῆν (425). E. R. Dodds, following the change to σοφόν, first printed in the Aldine edition and subsequently followed by Wilamowitz and others, would modify the adjective still further with Dindorf, reading σοφὰ δ' ἀπέχειν, "it is wise to withhold the mind," and so on, with a view to correcting the metre (in line with 412) to the expected iambic dipody.¹⁴ But the Aldus-Wilamowitz-Dodds correction again ignores the parallel structure of the context, especially the enumeration of the blessings which the god gives his votaries, with a passing slur on "the man who has no concern for this" (424). Indeed, the parallelism of the three infinitives (422, 426, 427) would suggest that the passage has not been correctly interpreted hitherto, and that "living a life of blessedness" (426), and "withholding the wise mind from the sophisticate" (427-28), are not so much explanatory of ᾧ μὴ ταῦτα μέλει (424), but rather part of a triple gift, including the joys of wine, which is offered to rich and poor alike (421-22). By placing the clause μισεῖ δ' . . . μέλει in parenthesis—the δέ here is thus the copulative particle often used in parenthetical remarks—we can stress the fact that each of the three infinitives is dependent upon the δῶκε' (422), such that all represent the favor of the god: the joy of wine, the carefree existence, and the withdrawal from men who have no sympathy for Dionysiac piety. The

¹¹ See the discussion of Dodds, 129; the intrusion of the anapaest in 427 is indeed anomalous, unless we are to change our concept of the line metrically and, with good probability, emend 412 to ἀγε μ' ὦ with Hartung.

¹² See also Tyrrell, 91, and Ammendola, 50 (who, among others, retain the manuscript reading); and Wecklein, 20, Grégoire-Meunier, 259, and Winnington-Ingram, 65, who adopt the emendation of Aldus and Wilamowitz.

¹³ Hermann understands the entire clause differently. In addition to taking the line as addressed to the audience—inappropriate here, as Matthiae and Paley saw (Paley, 448)—he would translate: "Keep far from you the clever sobriety approved of by men who are too severe; whatever the mob sees is inferior it practices." See *Euripidis opera omnia*, 6.53 *ad loc.*, and cf. also Winnington-Ingram, 65-66.

¹⁴ One of the more extreme solutions was Paley's (448, *ad loc.*): reading σοφῶν δ' ἀπέχων, he translates, "But keeping my mind away from the philosophy taught by over-wise men, may I accept whatever the common multitude thinks right and practices." For other conjectures, see Wecklein, 60.

parallelism of the three gifts, then, should be brought out in translation somewhat as follows (421 ff.):

To rich and poor alike he gives the joyous
Release of wine (and he hates those
Who have no care for this), to live
A carefree life by day and in the night,
And to keep one's wise mind and heart away from men
Who are superior.

Thus the mind and heart of the votary are wise precisely because the god has offered him this gift and he has not rejected it; to accept them with openness is the mark of the man who has the *σοφὰν πραπίδα*, and not one "who has no concern for these things." On this view it becomes clear that *σοφὰν* must not be changed either to *σοφὸν* (with Aldus and Wilamowitz) or to *σοφὰ* (with Dindorf and Dodds). There is thus no sound textual evidence that line 427 is corrupt, and we must either accept the somewhat anomalous anapaest *ἀπέχειν*, or else change the corresponding line (412) in the strophe to *μ' ὦ Βρόμιε* with Hartung.

One final line needs some elucidation (432-33), where the text of Murray-Dodds and many recent editors follows the early suggestion of Kirchoff, *τε τόδ' ἂν δεχοίμαν*, a correction to bring the line into metrical corresponsion with 415 of the strophe, *θέμις ὀργιάζειν* (υ υ — υ — —). But while correcting the metre Kirchoff, following a suggestion of Musgrave, had also rejected the verb forms attested in all the manuscripts (*λέγοιμ' ἄν* L, *λεγοίμην ἄν* P), and has thus changed the sense of the choral close for a smoother translation. With the manuscript readings one would have to translate (instead of Kirchoff's "this would I accept"): "this would I profess," following L, or "this would I be reckoned [as believing or practicing]," accepting the passive form of the verb as given in P. But here the first point to be established is that there is no necessity either from the required metre or the meaning to change the verb from *λέγω* to *δέχομαι* with Kirchoff: if sense can be made of the manuscript reading it should be retained. Secondly, from the metrical point of view the reading of the Palatinus can be adapted to bring it closer to the unquestioned first pherecratean (415: — υ υ — υ — —); for by reading 433 as (*χρη*)ταί τ' ἐν τῷδε *λεγοίμαν*, we have a second pherecratean (— — — υ υ — —), and this

not infrequently may correspond with a first pherecratean, as Dodds has already noted.¹⁵

This rejection of Kirchoff's long-standing conjecture and return to the reading of the Palatinus is the most conservative way of handling the text and should be given serious consideration. We may then translate lines 430-33 as either (a) "whatever the simpler mob here believe and practice, this too would I profess"; or (b) "whatever . . . , this too (I pray) I may be reckoned [as believing and practicing]." On the whole, the second form (b) with the verb in the passive as an optative of wish, would seem slightly preferable. The *ἐν τῷδε* of the Palatinus (and perhaps of the first hand of the Laurentianus), though difficult, is best translated as "here," "in this affair," and the subtle metrical corresponson should make it highly probable.

Thus with our revised text, the final version of the choral ode stands as follows [with italics to indicate the location of my variations from the text of Murray-Dodds]:

Strophe 1

O Piety, Piety, heaven's queen, who soar
Over the earth on golden wing, do you not hear
These words of Pentheus, this rude insult
To Bromius, Semele's son, that god
Of all the blessed ones, who loves the sight
Of garlanded good cheer? His realm is dancing
And laughter to the wail of flutes, care's
Banishment, whether the gleam of the grape
Brighten the feast of the gods, or among men
The cup bring sleep to the ivied banqueters.

Antistrophe 1

Of unbridled speech and lawless folly
The end's misfortune. But a life of peace
In wisdom stays unshaken and supports
The home. For though they dwell in the highest ether,
The heavenly ones look down upon the deeds
Of men. Cleverness is not wisdom; *and thinking*
Thoughts too proud for men will shorten life.

¹⁵ See the discussion in Dodds, 130.

Hence whoever would strive for things beyond his grasp
Would risk what is at hand. It seems to me
That such is the way of madmen and of fools.

Strophe 2

Ah, that I might fly to Cyprus, the isle
Of Aphrodite! For there dwell the loves that charm
The hearts of men. Or else to *Pharos*,
Where the hundred-mouthed barbarian river
Fructifies the rainless land. Or else
To Pieria, the lovely seat of the Muses,
Near Olympus' holy steep. Thither take me,
O *Bromius*, Bromius, god, leading your Bacchic dance.
There the Graces are and Love. And there
It is no sin for Bacchant women
To celebrate their orgiastic rites.

Antistrophe 2

The divine son of Zeus rejoices in festivals;
He loves the goddess who is the nurse of youth,
Peace, the bringer of prosperity.
To rich and poor alike he gives the joyous
Release of wine (*and he hates all those
Who have no care for this*), to live
A blessed life both by day and in the night,
And to keep one's wise mind and heart away from men
Who are superior. But as for me, whatever
The common crowd of simple folk believe
And practice *in this affair, this too
May I be said to profess*.

In conclusion, the first episodion and the first stasimon on Piety are essential if we are to understand an important phase of the poet's religious mood and the direction which the play will take. It is the phase in which Dionysiac piety is felt to consist primarily in peace and an open acceptance of the god's gifts: the violence and the destructive cruelty of the god's epiphany, reserved for the clever and superior men, will come later. But for the moment this aspect of the god's power is hidden. Meanwhile Euripides asserts that there is an area wherein the simple believer and the sophisticate can share a common

ground, just as they can share the beneficent effects of wine, and just as in a city-state they should share the protection of equal laws. Euripides thus pleads for a kind of piety in which rich and poor, the intellectual and the humble, can unite in their acceptance of the Bacchic cult. To these is it given to enjoy a blessed life by day and in the night, free from all care and anxiety. Thus the poet's concept of piety would here seem to consist, in part, in the peace and contentment of accepting man and the mysterious universe in which he lives for what they are. And yet, in recognizing the forces of the universe and, indeed, of the role of the Dionysiac among men, Euripides insists that he rejects the arrogance of the clever and is at one with the simple believer.

There is a deep ambiguity here—or else a piece of sophistry—insofar as the poet, while protesting his simplicity, seems to be diverging from the traditional acceptance of piety and holiness, “that soars over the earth on golden wing.” Indeed, his initial, disarming exposition of the meager demands of the Dionysiac, as set forth in this first stasimon, becomes all the more deceptive when reconsidered in the light of the play's final outcome. For here all is openness and peaceful acceptance of the god who brings laughter and dancing to the wail of flutes; whereas there, in the god's ultimate epiphany, there is a touch of the malign; and the promised peace emerges only from orgy and violence, and the vaunted simplicity can only be won by subtlety and conjecture.