

RELIGION AND TRAGEDY

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IN a discussion of any topic it is well to begin by defining terms. By religion, in this article, is meant primarily (though not exclusively) the Christian religion; and by tragedy is meant literary tragedy.

The relationship of religion to tragedy should be a subject of genuine interest to the theologian and the man of letters alike. No theologian can leave the fact of tragedy out of his reckoning, and no tragic writer can ignore the impact of religion on his art. Yet, while there is this obvious relationship, there is also an apparent tension or conflict which it is the object of this article to outline and, in some measure, to resolve. That conflict or tension is the apparent antagonism between the tragic ending demanded by tragedy as an art and the happy ending demanded by religion as religion.

To simplify the problem without doing injustice to the facts of the case, the discussion of tragedy is here limited mainly to the two great periods in literary tragedy,—the fifth century B.C. in Greece, and Elizabethan England—with special emphasis on the outstanding figures in each period, Aeschylus and Shakespeare; while the discussion of religion will lead eventually to the relationship of tragedy to Christianity.

I

Historically, religion is the mother of tragedy, and it is the theme of this paper that an intimate relationship still exists. Great religion and great tragedy go hand in hand. They stimulate each other to loftier heights. When Aeschylus decided to write tragedy, for example, he soon discovered that the gods as he knew them were inadequate for his purpose. Tragedy involved order and morality, and the capricious gods of the Greeks were inimical to his art. So Aeschylus, through his art, re-created the gods. In the words of Macneile Dixon, he "lifted Olympus itself upon his shoulders and added a cubit to the stature of Zeus." The tragedies of Aeschylus caused the gods to *grow*; so that, if religion is the mother of tragedy, the mother was forced to learn from the child.

Tragedy at its best and religion at its highest deal with matters of cosmic importance. Their prime concern is with a God (or gods) conceived as good, involving an ordered world;

and, over against that, the problem of evil. A philosophy or religion that ignores or assimilates evil, thus removing this problem, renders tragedy invalid. As Nietzsche expresses it, "Diminish evil, and it will go hard with the tragic poets." A dualistic religion, such as Zoroastrianism, with Mahzdu its God of Light and Ahriman its God of Darkness, is incapable of producing tragedy by its very nature. Such a religion makes the problem of evil no problem at all, the explanation of the universe being reduced to a simple mathematical equation. How fine it would have been for the Greeks—but how terrible for their tragedy!—if they had had an Ahriman to match their Zeus.

The problem of tragedy, like the problem of Christianity, is the problem of William Blake:

Tyger, tyger, burning bright . . .
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

In Christian theology Satan is there, it is true, borrowed from the Persians or Babylonians, but the most that can be made of Satan is what Milton made of him in *Paradise Lost*—another tragic hero. He is not a separate deity who reduces the problem of evil to an absurdity. The Christian God, like Zeus, as the ultimate source of all things, somehow has the responsibility for evil as well as good.

Even lesser and secular tragedies, centering on such themes as jealousy, ingratitude, revenge, ambition, etc., derive their poignancy from the pains of a disordered world that we feel ought to be other than it is; but they are concerned with a mere detail or fragment of the larger theme, and to that extent they lack tragic stature.

While there are obvious affinities between religion and tragedy, there are equally obvious antagonisms. Perhaps these antagonisms may be best understood and resolved by comparing the nature and function of tragedy as an art with the nature and function of religion as religion. This may be done in a number of ways, but a logical starting-point might be this: that religion is concerned with *solving* life's problems, while tragedy's concern is simply to *present* life's problems artistically in an ideal way. If you like, religion is concerned with the voice of God, tragedy with the voice of man. The religionist, in other words, seeks first to know God's will and how man may best approximate to it in his life; the tragic poet's first concern is with the will and acts of man, and the consequences

that these acts may have on other people as well as himself through the reaction of incalculable forces that transcend the orbit of his knowledge and his power.

Neither religion (and here we think primarily of the Christian religion) nor tragedy seeks to disguise the evils of life, but they approach them in different ways. Cordelia and Jesus both faced life's evils to the bitter end; yet, in the one case, by the genius of a great poet, and in the other, by the genius of a religious faith, though overthrown they are not overcome. The paradox of Christianity, like the paradox of tragedy, is that, presenting the worst in life, it somehow contrives to bring out the best. Only, Christianity achieves the victory over the forces of evil openly by proclaiming the Resurrection, while tragedy proclaims it obliquely through an appeal to heroism and beauty.

The last note in tragedy, like the final note in religion, is a note not of defeat but of triumph. Dr. Johnson may have been shocked that Shakespeare had "suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause"—he was horrified by such a fact. But that reaction reflected on himself rather than on Shakespeare. The reaction of John Keats is much more universal. He saw tragedy not in terms of horror but in terms of beauty. We take heart, he says, at the sight of such beauty, and of human creatures who continually give birth to new heroism. The tragic poet's weapon against malignancy, then, is not horror but beauty—a different weapon, in degree, from that of the religionist, but, as regards the implied victory of good over evil, accomplishing the same end. Tragedy, like religion, quickens our sensibility, generates inspiration and makes us more sensitive to the ultimate issues of life. It makes us more alive, and may set us on fire with a desire to emulate the best.

II

Christianity, or any religion, of course, may not for all people solve the problem of evil or why the good suffer, but it presents a possible solution. Tragedy presents only the action in human life, but idealized, and leaves us to draw our conclusions for ourselves. Herein lies the greatness both of religion and of tragedy. A religion is great because it presents a solution to life's problems; tragedy is great because it presents life beautifully and heroically.

Tragedy and religion both transcend the pale ground of logic and reason and, in their highest moments, soar to realms the

intellect alone can never reach. The aspirations, ideals and intuitions of man—compassing the ocean-depths of grief, shame, remorse, despair, and the planetary heights of love, desire, hope and joy—have a secret intelligence whispered to the ear of the tragic poet and the religionist alike; and they, each in his own way, are able to transmit that intelligence, as we are able to bear it, to us. Tragedy and religion give us, in the phrase of Sir Thomas Browne, “a glimpse of incomprehensibles and thoughts of things which thoughts but tenderly touch.”

Because tragedy is an art, its function differs from that of religion, but it has an affinity with religion because it *is* an art. The tragic poet's weapons are not only beauty and eloquence, but the fact that he weaves his characters and actions into a pattern. Order is one of the fundamental presuppositions. The number of bodies strewn around the stage in the last act of *Hamlet* may be physically chaotic (though even this must be artistically done), but the pattern of the play is the very opposite of chaos. And the *art* of tragedy, involving the necessity of pattern, is a link with religion in its conception of an ordered world under an orderly God.

Moreover, when we speak of the beauty of tragedy, we must realize that there is a moral quality in the tragic poet's beauty. This is reflected in our own reaction to tragedy, or to any play for that matter: we never side with the villain, and the hero, even though apparently beaten, wins all our sympathy, pity and admiration. Both the hero and the forces that beat him, with ourselves as the audience, are on the side of the angels.

A. C. Bradley expresses the relationship of morality to tragedy thus: “That men may start a course of events but can neither calculate it nor control it, is a *tragic fact*.” And what is this but expressing in another way what the religionist calls the moral consequences of human action and will? We may quibble about terms if we will, but the thing that the terms describe is the same. Bradley is here simply stating in literary terms the moral law that an act, once done, cannot be undone, nor its consequences prophesied or recalled. After the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth cannot wash away the blood of the dead king from her hands—or from her heart. “All the perfumes of Arabia” cannot cleanse her of the morally wrong deed she has done, or arrest the progress of events that that deed has set in motion.

An excellent example of the importance of the moral quality of the tragic poet's beauty is seen in comparing the fierce moral

strain which dominates the Aeschylean treatment of Orestes slaying his mother and the Sophoclean treatment of the same theme. There is an awfulness and sublimity in the work of Aeschylus which is noticeably lacking in that of his younger contemporary; and all of Sophocles's artifice in the elaboration of plot cannot place his tragedy on the same high level as that of the elder dramatist.

It must be realized, however, that, while tragedy cannot be dissociated from morality, the tragic poet must not degenerate into a moralist, a tendency that was one of the weaknesses of Euripides; nor can religion degenerate into morality or it, too, loses in grandeur. The point is that both religion and tragedy must have moral content, without making moral content the sole aim and object of their existence.

If there were no moral quality in the beauty of tragedy, why is the tragedy of Lady Macbeth and her husband on a lower plane than that generally accorded to *Hamlet*? Is it not, partly at least, because no matter how supreme the artist, no matter how much Shakespeare captivates us with the power of Lady Macbeth's strength, courage, will and imagination, we can never quite forget that she is a wicked woman? The great tragedy is possible only when our sense of moral as well as aesthetic judgment, in relationship to the principal characters, is not shocked.

Perhaps the relationship of morality to tragedy may be put this way: All men want to experience life deeply and finely, but not all men do. We have an intuition that life is noblest only when lived at its deepest and loftiest levels, involving of necessity sacrifice, suffering and tragedy; but, like the ordinary man at the theatre or the reader of popular tales, we desire a happy ending rather than a satisfying experience, and fear of life's severest tensions makes us traitors to our truest selves. Our ultimate reaction to tragedy is to regard it not as tragic, but as beautiful and heroic. What is tragic is our own timidity to plumb life to its depths. We admire the tragic hero because he incarnates our own suppressed desires—and he does it beautifully, heroically and *morally*.

This is not to say that we expect justice in tragedy. If we take into consideration the circumstances in their lives not of their own choosing and making, was life just to Cordelia or Hamlet? Life is not just, and the tragic poet does not pretend that it is. In the same way, life was obviously not just to Jesus. If there is an ultimate justice in life, as seen through the eyes of the

tragic poets and Christianity, expressed in statements such as St. Paul's "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," it is certainly not an obvious or physical justice. But do not both Christianity and tragedy imply a higher justice that pays those who attain the stature of the tragic hero the terrible reward of a righteous and unconquered soul? Only, Christianity posits, in addition to that, a hope and a recompense in a future life of which tragedy says nothing at all.

It may be well to observe here that the hope of rewards in heaven for wrongs suffered on earth is not universal Christian teaching; that in modern times, as a matter of fact, the tendency has been to veer away from this. Even organized Christianity, as represented in and through the churches, is far from uniform in belief or static in outlook. But even if we posit the belief of one branch of the Christian family, that there are rewards in heaven for wrongs suffered on earth, the relationship of religion to tragedy is still very close.

There are those, of course, who contend that religion, and the Christian religion in particular, will lose in grandeur by offering the hope of a recompense in a future world. But surely that is a deduction made from a misconception of religion's nature and function. If anyone doubts that it takes heroism to live the part of the tragic hero even with this faith, he is woefully inexperienced in the shortcomings of human life. In one sense it cannot be denied that the Christian promise of immortality robs tragedy of its most excruciating climax. Yet we do not ask what was the religion of Othello or Macbeth. They are tragic figures whether they have hope of heaven or not.

The hope of heaven takes Christianity beyond tragedy and, in so doing, it remains true to its genius as a religion: that is, according to one interpretation, it is part of the Christian solution to the problem of life. The hope of heaven, as such, however, has no place in the scheme of tragedy as an art, for tragedy seeks to present life rather than to solve it. The religion of the tragic hero is of no more fundamental importance to tragedy, as such, than his nationality. It may serve as a background for our understanding of the play, and may actually have a minor part in the plot and the development of character—as the fact that Othello was a Moor, or that Prometheus's relationship was with Zeus. But, if the relationship of religion to specific characters in tragedy is of minor importance, it is not so in the relationship of religion to tragedy proper. Tragedy,

by its very nature, *demand*s a religious conception of the universe. Historically, religion is the mother of tragedy, and the tragic poet relegates her to the position of a "superannuated step-mother" only at a price to his art.

III

The crux of the whole question centres in the fact that religion and tragedy have different functions and serve different spheres. If you like, tragedy deals with the world as it is, while religion is concerned with the world as it ought to be. But even this is an over-simplification, and thus a misrepresentation, of the case. The world as it is, in tragedy, implies the world as it ought to be; and the world as it ought to be, in religion, cannot be divorced from the world as it is. However, there are certain things that, because of the difference in nature and function as between religion and tragedy, must not be done. A Christian, for example, has no more right to read into Hamlet's death the hope of a personal immortality than a Buddhist has the right to wish for him the blessedness of Nirvana. Once we do that, we apply the beliefs of a particular religion in the realm of tragedy and, while the religionist is entitled to his beliefs, this is not the basis on which tragedy, as such, must be judged. Yet the fundamental conception of all religions that have advanced beyond the primitive—the concept or belief in some sort of order in the universe despite its mystery—is necessary to tragedy or it cannot exist. As Aeschylus so conclusively proves, tragedy can make religion grow; yet, paradoxically speaking, religion, in its fullest stature, is one of the criteria by which tragedy is judged. There is a relationship and interdependence between the two that cannot be gainsaid.

Tragedy condemns not only capricious primitive faiths that lack morality, and dualistic religions, such as Zoroastrianism, that oversimplify the problem of evil, but the passive acceptance and defeatism of most Oriental religions. The religions that best suit the purposes of tragedy must have the element of the heroic in them. For this reason the redeemed gods of Olympus were conducive to tragedy, and so also are Judaism and the religions that developed out of it—Mohammedanism and Christianity.

Pre-eminently is this true of Christianity. The essence of Christianity is contained not in the Golden Rule that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us (which has

nothing of the heroic in it at all), but in the injunctions to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, etcetera. These injunctions are not passive, negative statements, as an uncritical reader may suppose, but positive and active. Read in their context and having in mind the background of Jesus's life, they imply that the true Christian is the person who, regardless of cost or sacrifice to himself, will do, in the interests of others or because he feels it to be right, things that he does not need to do, yet deliberately chooses to do out of the greatness and heroism of His own soul. Superficially how unnecessary it was for Jesus to go the "other mile" for the sake of his fellow men and the principles in which he believed! Yet how heroic! Jesus, as the founder of no other religion, lived heroically and died heroically. Moses, Mohammed, Buddha—name whom you will—lived to a ripe old age and died in peace. Jesus alone, of the founders of the world's great religions, chose deliberate martyrdom—chose to go the "extra mile"—in the very prime of His manhood rather than be untrue to the principles which he professed. One has only to read the narrative of His life to be impressed with the element of tragedy: the cryptic record of St. Mark, if we stop at the end of the eighth verse of the sixteenth chapter, which modern scholarship tends to indicate was the original ending, contains all the elements of tragedy (and this, being the first of the gospels to be written, has special significance); while the parallel between St. John's gospel and classic tragedy is so obvious, and has been so frequently noted, that it scarcely seems necessary to point it out.

It should not be forgotten, too, that Christianity and tragedy have a common point of interest in the individual human life. Christianity's interest in the individual is founded on the most significant of the teachings of Jesus: it was not the will of His heavenly Father that the "least of these little ones should perish;" even the hairs of our head are numbered; the Son of Man came to save sinners; and so on. Neither Christianity nor tragedy deals with the philosopher's universal man; each with individual men. In the words of Macneile Dixon, "If there be any other language than theirs, poetry knows nothing of it." And, he might have added, Christianity knows nothing of it either.

However, this distinction has to be made: that, while the individual is the Absolute in tragedy, God is the Absolute in religion. But the Christian God is concerned first of all with individuals, and the individual in tragedy is concerned mightily

about God. Christianity's concern is the waywardness of man; tragedy's concern is the waywardness of God.

The grandeur of tragedy is its ability to make articulate and artistic human questionings about the universe; religion's greatness is the measure of its ability to give a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil in life. Tragedy invades the field of religion here only at a cost to its own stature; for it is not in the essence of tragedy to present a solution to life's problems. But religion, starting from the same ground as tragedy—that is, from the affairs of this world—*must* present a solution, or it is not true to its own genius as a religion. A religion that flees the hard facts of life and takes refuge in a mechanism of escape loses more than a cubit in its stature. For this reason some religions are inimical to tragedy, but we can align Christianity and tragedy, for Christianity runs the whole gamut of human experience, even unto death, heroically. A universal Zoroastrianism, Hinduism or Buddhism—those defeatist or dualistic faiths of the East—would leave tragedy no grounds for existence. Tragedy at its best is a testimony to man's greatness; and a religion must be great to compass what tragedy maintains. Is not the essence of all religion that owns a god that the Creator must be greater than the creature?

The aim of tragedy, like the aim of religion, is to pluck life from the heart of failure; in Tennyson's phrase, to make us feel that we are greater than we know.

Bradley's insistence that tragedy impresses us with a "sense of waste" is a superficial and too easy analysis. It is not without significance that the great ages of tragedy—the Greek world of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and Elizabethan England—coincided with the ascendancy of a certain type of religion. In the Greek instance this was in large measure responsible for religion. Not waste, but heroism and the dignity of man, is the theme of the tragic poets; and the sense of waste is ultimately subsumed in the grandeur of that concept. And does not this coincide with the dignity of the individual inherent in the religion of the Greeks, made articulate once more in the example and teaching of Jesus, and—let it be said—reborn at the time of the Reformation in Protestant Christianity?

IV.

Some critics, like Goethe, argue that religion stands in the same relationship to tragedy as any other of the many facets

of life. Yet, when religion languishes, great poetry also languishes; and religion itself, when divorced from poetry, loses its height of power. The passion of the one is necessary to the other, or religion degenerates to morality and poetry to pretty poems—"the poetry of Pope or Scott or Morris, a low-land type of literature"—as far removed from tragedy as the Albertan hills are short of the towering peaks of the Rockies. Is it not possible that the lack of great tragedy in our own time is due, in part at least, to our low levels of religious aspiration—the dwarfing influences of liberalism and humanism in theology—and to poetry's similar plight, bound by a too-close servitude to scientific, social and political influences? It could at least be a factor in the case. Not waste, but the heroism and dignity of man, is the theme of the tragic poets and of Christianity alike, though one speaks as a religion and the other as an art.

Another superficial analysis is expressed by those critics who seek to explain tragedy through an analysis of character, attributing the hero or heroine's fall to such-and-such a defect in them. These searchers for the Achilles heel in *Prometheus*, *Oedipus* or *Antigone* infer, though elsewhere in their writings they may deny it, a just world of rewards and punishments here and now. Such reasoning is an insult to tragedy at its very soul. There is undoubtedly some truth in Bradley's assertion that "the centre of tragedy . . . may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action," but it is certainly not the whole truth, nor the most vital aspect of it. The tragic poets do not tell us "that men obtain what they merit or merit what they obtain, that innocence is a protection against suffering, or calamity a proof of folly or sin." Othello's jealousy and Desdemona's folly of innocence are undoubtedly necessary to the play, as is Hamlet's procrastination or Lady Macbeth's will to power; but their tragedies are not stories of rewards and punishments here and now. Their tragedy is the tragedy of man, made as he is, in a world made as it is—where not justice but too often its opposite seems to prevail. We must ever remember that tragedy at its best exalts its hero; and we cannot, merely to save the "rationality of things," put him in the wrong.

Macneile Dixon insists that this pre-occupation with character is one of the weaknesses of modern tragedy:

. . . Modern tragedy insulates and makes more of character; with this implication, that helpless we are not altogether helpless, that another, wiser or better or stronger than the defeated hero,

might have met and sustained the hour—a more sagacious Brutus, a wiser Othello, a saner Lear . . . Yet if your conclusion be that the victim of calamity, always and in fact, sets fire to his own dwelling, or at least supplies the flint and the steel, though life is wonderfully simplified by your discovery, and the human plot robbed of its mystery, tragedy declines to a morality, a seamark on some dangerous reef, jealousy, or pride, or ambition.

“In pure tragedy,” says Reinhold Niebuhr, “the suffering is self-inflicted. The hero does not transmute what happens to him, but initiates the suffering by his own act.” In other words, the tragic fact arises out of deliberate action, not blind chance. This makes a creation like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, for example, greater than any of Hardy’s characters whose fate is so much subject to chance.

While on the subject of Hardy, it may be well to mention another aspect of tragedy. It is that not only is the tension in tragedy dependent on the presupposition of an ordered world but that, hand in hand with that, as in religion, goes an ultimate hope. A meaningless universe and despair for man robs tragedy of its grandeur. Is this not why Hardy, great as he is, falls short of the highest? Despair robs his heroes and heroines of the grandeur of those who undertake the really heroic part. They bear affliction simply because there is nothing else to be done; which is not the stuff of which tragic heroes are made.

Tragedy, like religion, is undoubtedly concerned with character and conduct (i.e. morality), but the theme of both is much larger than that—that is, the meaning of the universe itself. For this reason tragedy, to remain tragedy, as religion to remain religion, must prostrate itself before the unknown—for the unknown always presents itself in life. In religion, the answer to the unknown is supplied by the weapon of faith; in tragedy, other means may be used. Aeschylus’s answer implied that Zeus had not yet spoken the final word, being himself in the process of growth. This conception of a finite God is one way of explaining things. The Christian conception is of finite man only gradually able to compass in his mind, and never fully, the stature of an infinite God.

But even when the idea of a finite God is used, that God still controls the ultimate answer to life. Even in *Prometheus*, Aeschylus admits the final authority of Zeus; and Sophocles, despite an occasional protest, clings to the idea that somehow the good have their divine helpers. Only Euripides makes a direct assault upon the gods and openly exonerates the victims of their wrath. But the gods have their revenge, and return to haunt

him as the Furies haunted Orestes. Ultimately, in tragedy, God rules. Prometheus may be a fine fellow, but Zeus is still the king of gods and men.

Zeus, indeed, *must* be the king of gods and men. "The tragic poets are no doubt in agreement that the Power behind the world has placed a heavy strain upon humanity and tried it far . . . Yet it were to think poorly, that is unpoetically, unimaginatively, of that Power as of majesty and strength *in excelsis*, the source of all that is, and at the same time as wholly senseless . . ." And the tragic poet does not intend us so to think. The greatness of the Power behind the universe is as necessary to tragedy as the greatness of its human characters. This is the fundamental tension, the essential conflict, the source and crux of the tragic play. Combined with the poet's art and the natural sympathy of the audience for that which is great and good, it is the secret of the high hope which, despite everything, tragedy ultimately generates in the human heart. In Greek tragedy this tension was expressed in the conflict between the vitality of life and the laws of life—if you like, in the war between Dionysius and Zeus. It is also expressed in the conflict between the higher and lower natures in man as maintained by Christianity.

But, in classic tragedy, there is another ground of conflict. The Greek word *hybris*—insolence, arrogance, pride, on the part of man in his relationship to the gods—expressed for Aeschylus and Sophocles the unpardonable sin. The Greek idea implied that there was a bound beyond which man might not go with impunity. On the other side of this bound stood Nemesis, the minister of the gods, whose eye no mortal could escape. When *hybris* took a man beyond this bound, the blame and the penalty were his. This was acknowledgment of, and tribute to, the unknown.

It is interesting to note that in a recent book, by one of the foremost Christian scholars of our time, a considerable section is devoted to a consideration of the place of *hybris* in Christian theology. Fundamentally, it is the same place as that accorded it in the thinking of the Greeks. With the Christian, as with the worshipper of Zeus, *hybris* is the unpardonable sin.

In classic tragedy, too, we must remember that the Greek gods, though immortal, were not the only rulers of the world. They were themselves somehow governed by *Moirai*, Fate or Necessity. In Christian doctrine this has become articulate in the inherent contradiction between predestination and free-will. The Christian God, though the Creator of all things, is Himself

in some sense subject to the world He has created. Thus, the problem in tragedy, as in religion, is the problem posed by Milton in *Paradise Lost*:

To justify the ways of God to men.

God is omnipotent, yet He is not omnipotent: hence the problem, and hence the justification for religion as religion and tragedy as an art.

The sad note in modern tragedy is that, almost without exception, our tragic writers have lost sight of this lofty ideal. They have become experimenters in technique or crusaders for social change, in some cases obtruding stage detail, characters and intricacies of plot and style to the point where these things have attained greater importance than the tragedy itself. C. E. Vaughan draws an interesting comparison between the *Antigone* of Sophocles and Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* in this respect. "The theme of both," he says, "if for the moment we make abstraction of everything that gives form and colour and distinctive character to a work of art, is virtually the same; the revolt of the individual conscience against the community and its tyranny . . ." Of Ibsen's play he declares, "His cause is good, and, under the given conditions, it is driven home to our imagination with uncommon power. But, at the end of the account, the cause is almost lost in the man, in the delight with which he clasps the opportunity of revolt, in the exulting assertion of his own naked individuality . . . If we compare Ibsen's play with that of Sophocles, we can hardly fail to recognize that the latter moves throughout upon a higher plane, that alike in conception and handling it is a nobler achievement. The circumstances are more inspiring in themselves, and they are not obtruded on us with the detail which, in the modern play, goes far to stun and deaden the imagination. What is yet more significant, we are made to feel, from the first scene to the last, that the weightiest issues are at stake, that the individual characters, Creon and Antigone, have their feet planted on the rock, that they draw their strength and their very being from the causes for which they stand, and that those causes are the greatest for which man can shed his blood, or the human will imperil all that it holds dear."

"Once more," he declares, "the region of the highest poetry is not the outward but the inward; its function is not to reproduce but to idealize; its noblest task is to idealize, not the lower, but the higher side of our nature. And the man who can do this

with the supreme genius of Sophocles is not only the nobler spirit, but the greater artist."

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On this lofty peak it is perhaps well to pause. What conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing pages? First, that there is a definite affinity between religion and tragedy, and that any antagonism between them is apparent rather than real, due mainly to a difference in nature and function. The happy ending in religion, with its promise of future rewards, does not deny the heroic ending in tragedy which makes no mention of these; nor does the ending in tragedy deny the possibility of future rewards. Religion's function, being to solve life, offers these rewards, through faith, as part of the solution; tragedy's function, being to present and idealize life, ignores future rewards as being outside of its province. Each ends with a note of triumph and hope—only, religion declares its hope openly, tragedy obliquely.

Beyond that, it may be said that tragedy makes demands on religion that it be heroic and moral, and that without this type of religion tragedy cannot exist. On the other hand, tragedy provides a criterion by which religion may be judged, in that a religion that cannot meet the demands of tragedy cannot meet the demands of life. Here we see the pre-eminence of Christianity as a religious force, and the inadequacy of certain other religions, notably of the East.

Religion and tragedy, at their best, are both cosmic in scope, concerned with the problem of evil in an ordered world governed by a good God. They are both concerned with the individual as an individual; only, in a certain sense, religion must be regarded as the voice of God, tragedy as the voice of man. Religion sees things from God's point of view, tragedy from that of man. For religion, God is the Absolute; for tragedy, the individual man is the Absolute. Religion is concerned with the world as it ought to be; tragedy's concern is the world as it is. The problem of religion, starting with God, centres on the waywardness of man; tragedy's problem, starting with man, finds its focus in the waywardness of God. These distinctions, however, must not be made too sharp-edged, and must be recognized for what they are—aids in analysis because of the limitations of language and our processes of thinking.

Tragedy and religion both transcend logic and reason, and run the whole gamut of human experience. They both realize that life is deepest and most difficult when we look inward

rather than outward, and that here is found the inherent conflict of life, expressed by the Greeks in their concept of tension between vitality and law, *hybris* and Nemesis, Dionysius and Zeus; and, in Christianity, by the dual nature in man, and between man and God. They both recognize a similar conflict between Moira and Zeus, and in the Christian doctrines of predestination and free-will.

Both have an invigorating and inspiring effect on the audience or believer, and both, explicitly or implicitly, imply hope for the world and for man. Regarding tragedy, Bradley has this to say: "We remain confronted with the inexplicable fact, and the no less inexplicable appearance, of a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste. And this fact or appearance is tragedy." Without quibbling further on his theory of waste, that seems an adequate summation, not only of the fact of tragedy but of its function; and religion, starting from the same premises, but using a different method, has the same goal in view.
