



Greek Tragedy and Political Philosophy: Rationalism and Religion in Sophocles' Theban Plays

Peter J. Ahrensdorf

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In this book, Peter Ahrensdorf examines Sophocles' powerful analysis of a central question of political philosophy and a perennial question of political life: Should citizens and leaders govern political society by the light of unaided human reason or religious faith? Through a fresh examination of Sophocles' timeless masterpieces - Oedipus the Tyrant, Oedipus at Colonus, and Antigone - Ahrensdorf offers a sustained challenge to the prevailing view, championed by Nietzsche in his attack on Socratic rationalism, that Sophocles is an opponent of rationalism. Ahrensdorf argues that Sophocles is a genuinely philosophical thinker and a rationalist, albeit one who advocates a cautious political rationalism. Such rationalism constitutes a middle way between an immoderate political rationalism that dismisses religion - exemplified in Oedipus the Tyrant - and a piety that rejects reason - exemplified by Oedipus at Colonus. Ahrensdorf concludes with an incisive analysis of Nietzsche, Socrates, and Aristotle on tragedy and philosophy. He argues, against Nietzsche, that the rationalism of Socrates and Aristotle incorporates a profound awareness of the tragic dimension of human existence and therefore resembles in fundamental ways the somber and humane rationalism of Sophocles.

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