

In the opening scene, where Athena holds the dialogue with Ajax and displays his madness, her terrible irony might at first suggest that she is a malignant goddess, exulting in the wretchedness of her victim; but any such impression would be soon corrected by those words of calm majesty in which she points the moral for Odysseus. There is no trace of personal malignity in her attitude towards Ajax. She represents the divine power which judges human arrogance; she corrects it; but she has justly measured the offence, and sets a corresponding limit to her chastisement. It is fated that Ajax shall die; but the shadow of Athena's anger does not rest upon his grave, or trouble the worship which her own people render to him.

§ 15. Odysseus, appearing only at the beginning and at the end of the play, is the human exponent of Athena's spirit. In the first scene he is engaged in a pursuit which the goddess declares to be characteristic of him,—the endeavour to track out Ajax, and to ascertain whether he is the author of the onslaught on the cattle. Athena is aiding him, and now, as ever, he is 'guided by her hand.' After witnessing the frenzy of his foe, he at once proves himself her true disciple by the pity which he feels, and by his quickened sense of human nothingness. As Athena says to him, 'The wise of heart are loved of the gods.' At the close of the drama, when he intercedes with Agamemnon, he urges that the career of Ajax must be judged as a whole; that he was their greatest man after Achilles; and that the enmity against him must not be carried beyond death. Agamemnon yields to him: Teucer praises his magnanimity. Yet this magnanimity bears the mark of being Athena's gift; it springs from high intelligence as much as from chivalrous sentiment. Odysseus may, in his turn, be afflicted by a god; he, too, may come to need a grave; and therefore he sympathises with Ajax¹. This is 'to think as befits a man,'—the wise moderation which the gods love, and which, though not disinterested, leads to generous action. When Odysseus shrinks from confronting the herculean maniac, this is not 'cowardice'; if Athena calls it so², it is

¹ V. 124 οὐδὲν τὸ τούτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦμόν σκοπῶν: v. 1365 καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐνθάδ' ἕρομαι.

² V. 75 οὐ σίγ' ἀνέξει μηδὲ δειλίαν ἀρεῖ; M. Patin (*Sophocle*, p. 11) remarks that