

# Definitions and forms of justice in the eumenides

[Law](#), [Justice](#)



Justice today is often synonymous with the system of courts and trial by jury adopted by our society; however, justice had long been described through the idea of an eye for an eye before the development of western justice. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* shows the transformation from the more primitive retributive justice to the modern procedural justice. Through Athena's jury-based system, the audience finds hope that the jury may "resolve [the pollution] in the truth" (Aeschylus 490) and cleanse the curse following the house of Atreus without further bloodshed.

Diving deeper into Aeschylus' presentation of the courts system, Aeschylus elevates the new form of justice by contrasting the new and old Gods who seem to reveal important characteristics of the methods of justice they support. In describing the nature of the Furies, Aeschylus successfully portrays this divine entity as ancient, dark beings that act without reason. Aeschylus completes the dark, ancient characterization of the Furies by describing them as "Night's eternal children" (Aeschylus 96), making the Furies a dishonorable group that carry out actions with an evil connotation. The Furies represent one of the few remaining pieces of the past divine structure as they have been "kept apart from the whole divine company by Zeus" (Notes 212). Aeschylus subverts the Furies below Athena and Apollo by detailing their separation from the Olympian Gods.

The Furies also are shown to struggle with complex thought and reason. After the trial has been decided in Orestes favor, the Furies fail to find ways to express themselves clearly and instead repeat themselves multiple times. Athena attempts to use persuasion through a logical argument, suggesting that the trial ended "with the votes truly equal, with

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no dishonor for [the Furies]" (Aeschylus 107). The Furies fail to realize the honor of participating in a fair, trial-based decision, and instead focus on their perceived loss of honor because of Orestes acquittal. Aeschylus reveals how the Furies have failed to adapt to the new societal and divine structures, and in their lack of adaptation, they have been deemed outcasts by the rest of the Gods. Contrasted with the Furies, Apollo and Athena are shown as bringers of light and knowledge throughout *Eumenides*. Choosing Apollo as the God that aids Orestes serves as a direct contrast to the Furies dark nature. Apollo is the God of the sun and light, and as Apollo brings light to the world, the new form of a trial system sheds light upon disputes such as the one in this play. In describing his role in Orestes' trial, Apollo describes Orestes as a " suppliant and refugee at my hearth" (Aeschylus 101). Apollo defends Orestes against the darkness of the Furies by providing him with the light and warmth of his " hearth. "

As a result, Apollo seamlessly contrasts with " Night's eternal children" as his warmth and light directly counteract the Furies' darkness. Similar to Apollo, Athena contrasts well with the Furies because she is the goddess of wisdom and logic. Aeschylus details the contrast between Athena's vast wisdom and the Furies lack of wisdom in their encounter at the end of the play. Athena is able to persuade the Furies to serve as divine protectors of Athens by offering them a special role that will make the Furies " rightly held in honour forever" (Aeschylus 1 09). Athena recognizes the Furies long sought desire for honor and respect, so she intelligently finds a mutually beneficial situation that will assuage the complaints of the Furies. In this interaction Aeschylus shows how the intelligent deity, Athena, prevails over the

weak minded entity, the Furies, and, consequently, places the intelligence-based procedural justice system over the instinctual-based retributive justice.

While Aeschylus contrasts the difference in justice between the Furies and the younger Gods, Athena is able to convince the Furies to accept the new societal standards. With the Furies acceptance of hospitality in Athens, they are persuaded to drop their goal to “pursue their own ‘justice’”(Collard lvi), and instead conform to the procedural justice presented by Athena. With their adaptation to procedural justice, the Furies are now “delighting in the gleaming torches” (Aeschylus 113) as they are brought out of the darkness of their prior role among the Gods. In *Eumenides* Aeschylus successfully elevates procedural justice over retributive justice by equating procedural justice with the warm, intelligent gods Athena and Apollo and equating the retributive justice system with the dark, unintelligent Furies.