

Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy: Cities and Transcendence (Routledge Innovations in Political Theory)



Sophocles and the Politics of Tragedy is an inquiry into a fundamental political problem made visible through the tragic poetry of Sophocles. In part I Badger offers a detailed exegesis of three plays: Ajax, Antigone, and Philoctetes. These plays share a common theme, illuminating a persistent feature of political life, namely the antagonism between the heroic commitment to the beautiful and the transcendent on the one hand, and the community's need for bodily safety and material security on the other. This conceptual structure not only helps us understand these plays but also establishes a distinctive vision of the tragic dimension of political life—a vision that can be applied fruitfully to examinations of political projects quite distant from the world of fifth-century Athens. Such an application is the aim of part II, in which Badger coordinates the results of the inquiries of part I and applies them to a consideration of the competing claims of three strands of medieval and early modern political philosophy: ecclesiastical rule, scientific domination, and liberal government. Badger identifies the last of these—early modern liberalism—as a tragic politics that seeks to sustain and contain the tension between transcendent longing and material need.

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