

**'THE FLOWER OF SUFFERING'
A STUDY OF AESCHYLUS' *ORESTEIA* IN THE
LIGHT OF PRESOCRATIC IDEAS**

Nuria Scapin

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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University of St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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at the

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Abstract

My PhD thesis, *The Flower of Suffering*, offers a philosophical evaluation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in light of Presocratic ideas. By examining several aspects of the tragic trilogy in relation to some of Aeschylus' near-contemporary thinkers, it aims to unravel the overarching theological ideas and the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions underpinning the *Oresteia*'s dramatic narrative. My aim is to bring to relief those aspects of the *Oresteia* which I believe will benefit from a comparison with some ideas, or modes of thought, which circulated among the Presocratic philosophers. I will explore how reading some of this tragedy's themes in relation to Presocratic debates about theology and cosmic justice may affect and enhance our understanding of the theological 'tension' and metaphysical assumptions in Aeschylus' work. In particular, it is my contention that Aeschylus' explicit theology, which has been often misinterpreted as a form of theodicy where the justice of heaven is praised and a faith in the rule of the gods is encouraged, is presented in these terms only to create a stronger collision with the painful reality dramatized from a human perspective.

By setting these premises, it is my intention to confer on Greek tragedy a prominent position in the history of early Greek philosophical thought. If the exclusion of Presocratic material from debates about tragedy runs the risk of obscuring a thorough understanding of the broader cultural backdrop against which tragedy was born, the opposite is also true. Greek tragedy represents, in its own dramatic language, a fundamental contribution to early philosophical speculation about the divine, human attitudes towards it, indeed, the human place in relation to the cosmic forces which govern the universe.

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To My Parents

Who taught me passion and dedication

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‘The Flower of Suffering’
A Study of Aeschylus’ Oresteia in the Light of Presocratic Ideas

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INTRODUCTION

I

Setting the Scene

τί γὰρ βροτοῖς ἄνευ Διὸς τελεῖται;
τί τῶνδ' οὐ θεόκραντόν ἐστιν; (Ag. 1487-8)

When halfway through their exchange with Clytemnestra the Argive Elders cry out in despair their rhetorical questions about divine power, their chief preoccupation regards the relationship of god(s) with mortals and their affairs. And although at the forefront of the Chorus' thoughts lies the question of Clytemnestra's regicide and all the events that, having led to it, came up during their altercation with the queen (τί τῶνδε), suddenly, and for a very brief moment,¹ their mind drifts away from the concrete protagonists of the present action and their utterance acquires a universal flavour (βροτοί). 'For what comes to pass for mortals, except by Zeus's doing?' - they say - 'what of all this is not divinely ordained'? This is not an unusual dramatic mechanism: earlier in the *parodos* the recounting of the heightened emotional events that took place at Aulis triggers the Chorus to suspend their narration and to focus instead on the role of divinity in relation to human suffering.² The Choruses and the characters of the *Oresteia* often turn to the divine sphere hoping to find there the ultimate causal explanation for the tragic events in which they are immersed.

That Aeschylus should have endowed his dramatic personae with such inclination is hardly surprising, especially considering that he wrote from within a poetic practice in which it was quite natural to recount traditional stories through the bifocal perspective of myths that were as much about human deeds as they were about gods' participation in them. Yet when one looks just outside the boundaries of those poetic narratives – such as the epic cycle and lyric episodes – from which Aeschylus must have most directly inherited myths and poetic concerns, it is easy to observe a different picture. During the centuries preceding the birth of tragedy, the divine world had also been

¹ At 1489 their focus is again on the murder of the king. Cf. Ch. 7.3.

² More on the *parodos* and the 'Hymn to Zeus' in Chs. 4; 6.

turned into the object of an interest which extended far beyond the projection of the cause of human suffering onto the gods. A growing and more explicit concern with the definition and determination of divine nature *per se* is one of the salient aspects of certain works from this period.

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, for instance, the evolution of the cosmic constituents and the genealogy of the gods form a close-knit explanatory system for both the origin of the universe and Zeus' power and grandeur. But if Aeschylus moved within the same mythological panorama therein developed, he also wrote from within a culture in which early philosophical speculations appeared to have absorbed important features of these poetical cosmogonies. In particular, their tendency to systematise and their propensity to present the divide between cosmic and divine reality as inexorably blurred.

However, with regard to theology, the thoroughly innovative import of certain philosophers can be scarcely denied. It is only through the intellectual enterprise of some of the so-called Presocratic philosophers that the theological debates acquire a more explicit dimension: the archetype established by the poets is attacked, and the aspiration to a less ambivalent theology is first adumbrated. Thanks to some of these philosophers, most prominently Xenophanes and Heraclitus, the ethical and epistemological inconsistencies inherent in the poetic accounts about the gods are subjected to a penetrating criticism of conventional religion.

Most poignantly, it is only in some philosophical fragments that we find the very first appearance of an explicit theorization of divine nature.³ What had been hitherto an implicit theological tension is either rejected or taken to an extreme in the quest for a more refined conception of deity.⁴ By the time Aeschylus wrote his tragedies, discourse about the gods had been complicated and nuanced to a novel extent: only through an understanding of the import of such intellectual innovations, I believe, can one fully appreciate the significance of the 'universalising tone' reverberating through the utterances pronounced by some tragic characters about divinity.

³ Cf. Ch. 1 and Jaeger's remarks in 1947: 4.

⁴ Cf. Int. II.

I.1 *Philosophical inquiries into the Oresteia*

The impetus behind this thesis is the same one which motivated a recent collection: *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought*. Edited by Professor Cairns, this collection brings together the efforts of several scholars united by the belief that ‘the understanding of archaic Greek thought is an indispensable aspect of the interpretation of Greek tragedy to which researchers must now return’.⁵ Like the editor and contributors to this volume, I firmly believe in the importance of a revival of the question of tragedy’s place in the development of Greek thought and that this question has been progressively marginalised to the domain of works of intellectual history.⁶ It is time to restore its centrality in interpretative studies of tragedy itself. Old questions, such as those of divine justice and its relationship to time, cosmic necessity, and human free will, are far from being settled and they can be kept live as long as they are subjected to continuing examination and scrutiny.

However, even within this partial renaissance of debates about tragedy’s roots in the popular thought of archaic Greece,⁷ its potential connection to the early philosophical tradition remains, with few exceptions,⁸ at the periphery of current interest. Seaford has recently drawn attention to this deficiency: ‘surprisingly, there has been very little research on the relations between tragedy and presocratic philosophy’.⁹ This thesis is an attempt to fill this gap.

The fact itself that tragedies responded to the intellectual movements of his day is undisputable. The influence of philosophy can be perceived in several Aeschylean fragments and passages, such as those, for instance, which clearly reflect the tragedian’s interest in contemporary speculations on the causes of natural and biological

⁵ Cairns 2013: ix.

⁶ ‘Over the last decades, neither scholarly works on Greek tragedy, nor the majority of productions, have been primarily concerned with the philosophical question it asks’, Hall 2010: 171-2.

⁷ 2013 saw the publication of *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought* and the conference ‘*Path of Song*’: on the interactions between Greek Lyric and Tragedy (UCL 11-13/04).

⁸ Winnington-Ingram’s 1965 and Allan 2005 contain ideas and suggestions begging for further development.

⁹ 2013: 17.

phenomena: a fragment from the *Suppliants* trilogy identifies the cause of nature's growth with the 'marriage' of Heaven and Earth (fr. 44);¹⁰ fr. 300 and *Suppl.* 559-61 present an explanation of the source of the Nile and *Suppl.* 792-93 one of the origin of snow; Xenophanes' idea that all things come from earth and end in earth seems to be echoed in *Cho.* 127-8; and Anaxagoras' theory on human reproduction is the most probable source of inspiration for Apollo's argument on the male's key role in *Eum.* 657-61. Moreover, as we shall see in more detail, several scholars accept the influence of Xenophanes' theological monotheism on some of Aeschylus' descriptions of Zeus (fr. 70; *Suppl.* 91-103; *Ag.* 160-66; *Eum.* 650-1).¹¹

The key work on which to base any judgment and which contains the largest collection of evidence on this subject is Rösler's *Reflexe vorsokratischen Denkens bei Aischylos* (1970), in which all the individual passages of Aeschylus' tragedies which may be suspected to reflect Presocratic ideas are put under scrutiny. Some of Rösler's negative and positive conclusions are extremely important. One must for instance recall this scholar's firm rejection of every kind of influence of Pythagoreanism on Aeschylus. It is also worth remembering that Rösler recognises in Aeschylus a tendency to move in the same theological direction as Xenophanes and Heraclitus. Since that seminal work, a few other authors have followed Rösler's path and have tried to identify further passages (or simply returned to the same ones) which may be felt to echo Presocratic ideas: Kouremenos analysed a passage from the *Agamemnon* in the light of Parmenides' vocabulary and ideas, and Zaborowski has explored the connection between the epistemological ideas contained in some Presocratic and some Aeschylean passages.¹²

Unlike Rösler, who excludes the possibility that the subject matter of tragedy is dependent on any Presocratic model, both Kouremenos' and Zaborowski's studies seem to go beyond the scope of a mere presentation of verbal parallelism. Indeed, at the outset of his essay, Kouremenos is content to state that 'the link between Parmenides

¹⁰ All Aeschylean fragments are numbered as in *TrGF*.

¹¹ See Hall 2010: 172-182 for further examples and Sommerstein 2010a: 270-1 for an account of Xenophanes' influence on Aeschylus.

¹² Rösler 1970 (reviewed by Garvie 1972); Kouremenos 1993: 259-65. Zaborowski (unpublished paper presented at the conference *Tragedy and Archaic Greek Thought*, Edinburgh 14/06/2008). Cf. Severino 2005.

and Aeschylus is the distinction between seeming and being, the cornerstone of Parmenides' metaphysics and theory of knowledge',¹³ and although he appears to judge sufficient the backing up of such a claim with the limited evidence of two verses from the *Agamemnon* (788-89), his argument certainly entails that what may be seen as traces of intertextuality between Aeschylus and Parmenides must also be taken as proof of conceptual overlapping. However, both approaches still share with Rösler the hermeneutic feature of limiting their analysis to individual passages.

Seaford, by contrast, by reading the *Oresteia* through the idea of 'the unity of opposites', interprets the tragedy as advocating the replacement of a Heraclitean model with a Pythagorean model (thus rejecting Rösler's conclusion). By comparing what he calls 'tragic cosmology' and the cosmology of Heraclitus, Seaford attempts to establish parallels in structure between the works of these authors.¹⁴ In a recent monograph, he focuses on the correlation between social process and philosophical cosmology as well as what he defines as 'confrontational and aetiological space in Aeschylus'.¹⁵ Although, as illustrated below, his understanding of Heraclitus' philosophy differs partially from mine, and the Pythagoreans are not part of my agenda, Seaford is the only scholar who has voiced the urgency of an alternative approach:

[...] almost all the research so far is based on the wrong question, namely 'is the tragedian here alluding to (or influenced by) this fragment of presocratic philosophy? Even an unequivocal 'yes' to this question, which in fact is never possible, would not take us very far. Much clearer and more interesting is that certain basic structures are shared by tragedy and presocratic cosmology'.¹⁶

Besides the dauntingly fragmentary nature of much archaic philosophical material, one can diagnose a profound prejudice as the main cause for such scholarly negligence: namely the still widespread assumption of what is thought to be an unbridgeable rift between philosophical and poetic thought. It is time to override this paradigm.

¹³ 1993: 259.

¹⁴ Seaford 2003: 148.

¹⁵ 2004; 2012.

¹⁶ Seaford 2013: 17.

The kind of research undertaken in this thesis presupposes a deep belief in the benefits deriving from cross-generic approaches. But let us be clear from the start: this is not an attempt to argue in favour of the dependence of Aeschylus on any particular Presocratic model, for I agree with Rösler that the very subject matter of tragedy should discourage any attempt of this sort. To quote Seaford once more: ‘the point is not that the tragedian has read a particular philosopher, possible though that is’.¹⁷ Rather, my enquiry is concerned with exploring the relationship between certain philosophical theories and the *Oresteia*’s tragic world-view in its widest sense.

I.2 Themes and Aims

Given the strong connection between Zeus and *dikê* – established from the very beginning of the *Agamemnon*¹⁸ – it should be no surprise that the majority of scholars who have focused on Zeus in the *Oresteia* have generally concentrated their attention on the issue of divine justice.¹⁹ Yet, as much as the meaning of *dikê* in the *Oresteia* cannot be simply reduced to that of ‘divine justice’, it would be altogether wrong to regard Zeus as a mere champion of justice. While many scholars have tackled the complexity of *dikê* and its development within the plays’ dramatic narrative, many have focused on the confusing aspects of Zeus’ role. The elusive nature of the supreme god in the trilogy has engendered lively debates concerning the god’s function, his relation to the other gods and to human actions, indeed, his very essence.²⁰

The thematic centrality of justice, particularly the ‘justice of the gods’, in the *Oresteia* is unquestionable and universally accepted. Sommerstein writes that if one were compelled to answer the perhaps not very sensible ‘question “what is the *Oresteia* about”, [...] one would certainly wish to say that [...] it is about [...] *dikê* in its three senses of “right and wrong”, “punishment” and “judicial proceeding”’.²¹ As Mitchell-

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See below Ch. 4.

¹⁹ Martina 2007; Cohen 1986; Lloyd-Jones 1971, 1956; Grube 1970; Golden 1962.

²⁰ Cf. Int. II. 1; Ch. 4.

²¹ 2010a: 193.

Boyask more recently restated, ‘justice is *the* great theme of the *Oresteia*, which is largely preoccupied with deciding what, exactly, “justice” means’.²² Sensible studies have also shown how *dikê* is not presented by Aeschylus as a monolithic entity. Goldhill, who has devoted a whole chapter to an in-depth analysis of the ‘shifts and plays of meaning’ of the word in the three plays showed how the centrality of *dikê* in the trilogy is something ‘enacted’: it is conveyed through its dynamics and developments. As the tragedy advances through the slow unfolding of the hypothesis of a disjunction between legal and retributive justice, the self-perpetuating nature of retributive justice is put into question. This disjunction is developed and maintained through the constant dialectical interplay of the various meanings of *dikê*, ranging from the personified ‘Justice’ and the abstract ‘right’, through ‘retribution’ and ‘punishment’ to the particular and concrete legal senses of ‘law-case’.²³ Indeed, to borrow Vickers’ definition: ‘“justice” is one of the most Protean concepts’.²⁴

The nuanced complexity with which one of the central themes of the trilogy is depicted has led to the obvious consequence: although much agreement can be found with regard to which kind of questions the *Oresteia* asks, surprisingly, very little agreement can be found with regard to which answers the *Oresteia* gives. This is especially true in the case of *dikê*. The multifarious interpretations the *Oresteia* has received could loosely be grouped as almost invariably belonging to either one or the other of two overarching and mutually exclusive critical positions. The first one, which has been correctly defined as a ‘commonplace of the interpretation of the textual dynamics of *dikê*’,²⁵ asserts that the trilogy dramatizes a movement by means of which *dikê* as legal justice replaces in a definite way *dikê* as a retributive justice.²⁶ The amalgam of views purporting this basic interpretation, in which Aeschylus is seen as a ‘prophet of Zeus’, Zeus as a ‘champion of Dike’,²⁷ and the *Oresteia* as a tragedy with an ‘happy ending’, has been firmly rejected and moderated in various ways, especially by those who laid

²² 2009: 98.

²³ Goldhill 1986: 33-56.

²⁴ Vickers 1973: 27. This is a small selection from many authoritative voices (*Cf.* Ch. 6: n. 497).

²⁵ Goldhill 1986: 37.

²⁶ *Cf.*: Lloyd-Jones, 1971: 86-7; 90; Winnington-Ingram, 1954: 23, 1983: 155; and Kitto, 1961: 92, Stanford 1977:13; Seaford 2003: 161, 2011: 273.

²⁷ Lloyd-Jones 1956: 67.

emphasis on the ‘tyrannical aspects’ of Zeus’ governance.²⁸ No doubt, ‘whether the problem of defining *dikē* has been resolved at the end remains a matter of scholarly controversy’,²⁹ and Seaford is perhaps right in suggesting together with Goldhill that the choice of whether to read for closure or ambiguity may be determined – at the very end – by the basic theoretical and political orientation of the interpreter.³⁰

This thesis offers an interpretation of the *Oresteia* in the light of Presocratic philosophy. By focusing on the theological and ontological dimension of this trilogy, my aim is to bring to relief those aspects of the *Oresteia* which I believe will benefit from a comparison with some ideas, or modes of thought, which circulated among the Presocratic philosophers. I explore how reading some of this trilogy’s themes in relation to Presocratic debates about theology and cosmic justice may affect and enhance our understanding of the theological ‘tension’ and metaphysical assumptions in Aeschylus’ work. In particular, it is my contention that Aeschylus’ explicit theology, which has often been misinterpreted as a form of theodicy where the justice of heaven is praised and a faith in the rule of the gods is encouraged, is presented in these terms only to create a stronger collision with the painful reality dramatized from a human perspective. Thus, Vlastos is right in writing that ‘Aeschylus here labour[s] in the same cause as Xenophanes and Heraclitus’, but such labour consisted not – as he also claims - in an attempt ‘to *moralize* divinity’.³¹

By setting these premises, it is my intention to confer on Greek tragedy a prominent position in the history of early Greek philosophical thought. So if, as stated above, the exclusion of Presocratic material from debates about tragedy runs the risk of obscuring a thorough understanding of the broader cultural backdrop against which tragedy was born, the opposite is also true. Greek tragedy represents, in its own dramatic language, a fundamental contribution to early philosophical speculation about the divine, human

²⁸ Cf. Fraenkel 1962: 111; Cohen 1986: 131; Goldhill 1984: 56; 51; Martina, 2007.

²⁹ Mitchell-Boyask 2009: 100.

³⁰ Seaford 2003: 163. Di Benedetto 2011, although recognising a ‘lieto fine’ (p. 128) in the trilogy, also attributes to the expectations of the reader the capability of determining his critical judgment (p. 111).

³¹ 1952: 116.

attitudes towards it, indeed, the human place in relation to the cosmic forces which govern the universe.

I.3 *Some objections to Seaford's argument*

The ostensible overlaps between Seaford's approach and mine require that I carefully present and discuss what are instead our points of divergence. However, since Seaford has developed his complex theory over more than ten years and deploys the most disparate concepts – such as those of Norden's *Satzparallelismus*, Bakhtin's chronotope, collective ritual, and monetised exchange – a detailed criticism of every aspect of his theory is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I focus on what I consider to be the main differences between Seaford and my own position with regard to our interpretation of the *Oresteia*. In particular I will concentrate my efforts on rejecting two of Seaford's major points: first, his understanding of Aeschylus' Zeus and Presocratic ideas of the divine as the products of the influence of abstract monetary value; second his interpretation of the action in the *Oresteia* as a movement 'from the Heraclitean unity of opposites to their Pythagorean reconciliation'.³²

Seaford's interpretation of the *Oresteia* in relation to Heraclitean and Pythagorean thought relies on two overarching assumptions, both of which I cannot espouse. First, I find myself at odds with the overly optimistic belief that one could unequivocally account for the genesis of certain tendencies of thought at any point in history. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of Seaford's theory is his interpretation of the abstract characteristics of the Aeschylean Zeus and of some of the ultimate principles of Presocratic thought as the cosmic projection of the 'near-omnipotence of abstract monetary value'.³³ Second, I would reject Seaford's progressive interpretation of the action of the *Oresteia* as a movement from a previous state of conflict to a 'final settlement in which the opposites are definitely differentiated and reconciled'.³⁴ Let's put each argument under closer scrutiny.

³² 2010: 17.

³³ 2010: 184.

³⁴ 2003: 162.

Given the highly speculative content of Seaford's 'marxising' theory I am not set here upon disproving it. My intent is rather to highlight the most questionable assumptions underpinning his argument. Based on the historical observation that the development of Presocratic ideas of an all-pervasive, semi-abstract, notion of the divine paralleled the development of a monetised society, the theory infers a unidirectional relation of causality. According to it, technological and material developments related to the diffusion of money preceded, and caused, the development of new notions of the divine.

Whereas the tendency of certain Presocratic thinkers to postulate abstract philosophical principles can indeed be brought into relation with the genesis of social developments underpinned by mobilization of value through the use of monetary technologies, establishing unidirectional causal links between these two parallel developments seems a quite unlikely achievement. Correlation does not equate to causation. Yet, Seaford seems determined to read the philosophical and literary tendency towards abstract conceptions as the unidirectional product of social development, as his definition of a '*monetised Zeus*' in Aeschylus or the statement that Heraclitus' logos '*reflects* the very same [...] combination of features of the power of money' testify.³⁵

My contention is that Seaford's argument is not able to demonstrate its ambitious goal. The granularity at which the historical and literary evidence supports the argumentation is not sufficient to establish what would be the actual causal direction between the two events discussed, let alone to demonstrate that there is a causal link at all. The notion of an abstract divine and of abstract monetary value can indeed be related, but it is impossible to establish what came first and, more importantly, which intellectual process influenced the other. For instance, we can imagine there might have been a bidirectional relation of causality, namely, a reciprocal influence between philosophical speculations and economical developments. Or even, the social developments related to money may have themselves originated from philosophical and intellectual speculations. In conclusion to this point, Seaford's theory has the merit of bringing to the fore a correlation between intellectual and social developments which is worth considering, and for this it must be praised. However, I do not think that a direct relation

³⁵ 2012: 256; 250; italics mine.

of causality has been demonstrated by his argument, and I would therefore reject Seaford's hypothesis that Aeschylus' 'conception of Zeus has been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the perceived omnipotence of abstract monetary value'.³⁶

Let's turn now to Seaford's progressivist interpretation of the *Oresteia*. As previously mentioned, Seaford interprets the action of the *Oresteia* as a movement from the Heraclitean unity of opposites to their Pythagorean reconciliation.³⁷ This overall interpretation of the trilogy is itself based on two different and intertwining assumptions. First, the cosmos of Heraclitus is envisaged as a place in which 'opposites are' always either 'identical with each other, or ceaselessly transformed into each other', and his model is juxtaposed to the 'cosmos constructed by fifth-century Pythagoreanism', in which 'we can detect the idea that opposites retain their identities in being combined into a stable whole'.³⁸ Second, the final disposition of the forces in *Eumenides* represents an ultimate form of differentiation of these opposites: a release and resolution in which 'well-being is achieved by differentiation of the opposites with one prevailing over the other'.³⁹ I will thereby proceed by illustrating in a concise form my reservations with regard to both of Seaford's arguments.

To begin with, it must be said that Seaford's theory is based on the fundamental observation that the interplay of opposites has a key role in the style and dramatic development of the *Oresteia*. The pervasive tension between opposites is indeed a noteworthy feature of this trilogy; it is a theme which invests the drama at various levels of its unfolding, and a theme which I myself set out to explore in depth later in this study. However, although Seaford and I share this premise, our interpretative approach differs quite substantially. In particular, I would reject both his account of the Heraclitean notion of the unity of opposites and of the dramatic development of the *Oresteia* as inaccurate and slightly oversimplified.

³⁶ 2010: 187.

³⁷ 2013; 2003.

³⁸ 2013: 20.

³⁹ 2013: 22.

Indeed, in portraying the Heraclitean unity of opposites as either an inescapable conflation or an unceasing cycle of transformation, Seaford does not cover the whole range of modes of unity of opposites available in the fragments of the philosopher. On the contrary, if we rely on the study of Kirk,⁴⁰ it may be argued that there are at least three modes in which this essential unity is manifested: a relativistic unity, in which the same object is regarded in opposite ways by different observers (e.g. fr. 61, 13, 9) or in which the same observer ascribes different attributes to the same object (e.g. 58, 59, 60, 103, 48, 23, 111); a cyclical unity, in which opposites are the same because they perpetually succeed one another (e.g. 88, 126, 57, 99); and an organic unity, in which opposites are connected as antithetical poles of the same nexus (e.g. 10, 51, 67). Instead, in Seaford's argument, the notion of a harmonious unity, in which the opposites are different, yet conjunct by the same nexus, is removed from the cosmos of Heraclitus to be exclusively attributed to the Pythagorean cosmos. The outcome is a rather reductive and impoverished representation of the 'tautly vital, twangingly alive, strainingly static cosmos' of the philosopher, whose obscure and subtle thinking could hardly be constricted within a simple model.⁴¹

What is more, the whole action of the *Oresteia* is presented by Seaford as a movement from the unity of opposites, as it can be perceived especially in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, to a differentiation of the opposites in which one prevails over the other, as can be perceived in *Eumenides*. In my opinion, this account does not properly describe the progression of the last play's action. While the beginning of *Eumenides* – in which the Olympians face the Chthonian Erinyes – does indeed depict a differentiation of opposing divine powers which were previously perceived and addressed by the characters as uniting their force, yet the final stage of the trilogy offers a further dramatic shift. After Orestes' acquittal and the Olympians' attempt to overpower the Erinyes, the latter threaten to perpetrate the cycle of vendetta by unleashing plague on Attica. This perpetration of violence is avoided thanks to a further reconfiguration of divine roles: the Olympians and the Chthonians join forces in the new institution of the Areopagus and the trilogy concludes thus with a new 'unity of opposites'.

⁴⁰ 1954: 72-258; K.R.S. 2007: 188-193.

⁴¹ Brann 2011: 90.

This all-embracing interpretation of *Eumenides*, about which Seaford and I disagree, could be broken further into three smaller points for the sake of clarification. To begin with, Seaford thinks – together with Hester, Winnington-Ingram, Conacher and Podlecki – that in the trial of Orestes the votes of the human jurors are equal and that the tie is broken only by Athena’s casting vote.⁴² Conversely, following Gagarin, Kitto, Goldhill and Sommerstein among others, I believe that Athena votes as a member of the jury (at 735) and that it is her vote which brings about the tie. The exact number of the jurors as well as the exact effect of Athena’s vote is a much-disputed issue. While a good summary of arguments and counter-arguments on this problem can be found in Sommerstein’s commentary,⁴³ I want to focus here on the significance of adopting one view or the other. Whereas according to Seaford’s interpretation, the vote of Athena – who is envisaged as a divine authority operating apart from the human jury – resolves a ‘potentially disastrous unity of opposites’,⁴⁴ the interpretation adopted by me suggests that at the end of the play the question of matricide remains unanswered and the tension remains unsolved.⁴⁵

It should also be recalled how, at *Eum.* 470-2, Athena declares the question of matricide to be a matter both too great for mortals to judge by themselves and too delicate for her to judge alone (470-2), implying thus that the case can only be properly handled by Athena and the people working *in conjunction*. Hence, I believe that Seaford’s interpretation of Athena as a separate divine judge would undermine ‘the spirit of a play which narrows to an extraordinary extent the gulf in power between men and gods’,⁴⁶

⁴² 1995; 2003. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1983: 125, n. 110, for a list of important – although not decisive – points regarding why it must be so.

⁴³ 1989: 221ff; cf. Podlecki 1989: 182; 211-3 and Sommerstein 2010c.

⁴⁴ 2003: 154.

⁴⁵ Cf. especially Goldhill 1986: 29-31, 37-51; 2004: 26-37 and Cairns 2005: 306-7.

⁴⁶ Sommerstein 1989: 224-5. Cf. Mitchell-Boyask 2009: 107. Cf. Plato’s *Protagoras*: ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας (322a). According to the myth recounted, the fact that humans were made partakers of divine portion is at the origin of their civic evolution following which they will acquire their most distinctive skill: ἡ πολιτικὴ τέχνη (322b). Just as in *Eum.* the divine origins of civic virtue in the myth contrast with their purely secular origins in the *logos*. Since all human beings have right and respect (δίκη καὶ αἰδώς, 322c-d), the Athenians, with their democratic system, are justified in letting all citizens deliberate.

and which emphasises the importance of solidarity and persuasion in the face of an otherwise indissoluble tragic circumstance.

Seaford also recognises in both the figure of Athena and the final settlement of Olympians and Chthonic forces after the trial two examples illustrating the ultimate differentiation of the opposites: indeed, with regard to Athena, Seaford claims that she is ‘female endorsement [...] of a universal asymmetrical relationship between male and female’; with regard to the second question, he claims that ‘the gods of the upper and lower world are emphatically differentiated so as to enable the incorporation of the latter into a new order controlled by the former’.⁴⁷ Yet, Seaford’s thesis could be counter-argued by reading the same evidence as an endorsement of precisely the opposite view. Indeed, far from symbolising ‘a differentiation of opposites’, I take each example as evidence in support of the idea that the finale of the *Oresteia* should be read in the light of an ultimate reconnection of opposed forces into a single unity.⁴⁸

To sum up, Seaford’s theory has the merit of introducing and exploring at length the notion that Aeschylean tragedy and the *Oresteia* in particular share certain basic structures with Presocratic philosophy. However, some of his basic hypotheses are questionable and lead to what I regard as unsatisfactory conclusions.

From the next chapter onwards I will provide my own interpretation of the *Oresteia*. As I am convinced that a thesis which sets out to explore the interactions between Presocratic philosophy and Greek tragedy requires the development of a new model of interpretation, the next chapter is dedicated to consolidating my methodological premises regarding issues of interpretation of the text of the *Oresteia*, its relationship to the preceding poetic tradition, and the relationship between archaic poetry and early philosophical fragments. As I hope will emerge from next chapter and the whole thesis, such a hermeneutical effort can make a substantial contribution to current trends of research on generic interaction between tragedy and archaic Greek thought.

⁴⁷ 2003: 161.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ch. 8.4.

II

Aeschylus and the Early Greek Philosophical Tradition: Methodology

II.1 The violent grace of divine justice in the Oresteia

During the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon*, after having illustrated a specific sort of disposition among those dispensed by Zeus for mortals, the Chorus complete their line of thought by describing the intervention of the gods (δαίμονες) in human affairs as a χάρις βίαιος: a ‘violent grace’.⁴⁹ Through the compressed force of this oxymoronic expression, the Argive Elders convey, most poignantly, the kernel of a complex religious attitude. Indeed, if Greek tragedy contains an unyielding tension between the alternating projection of both tyrannical force and divine benevolence onto the gods, then the gods’ χάρις βίαιος may be taken as a quintessential expression of this tension.⁵⁰

The contradictory essence of this religious attitude, which Greek tragedy largely inherits from the preceding poetic tradition, may be interpreted as an oscillation between two opposite and mutually exclusive ways of envisioning the interaction of Zeus and the other gods with mortals.⁵¹ The characters of Greek epic and tragedy are made to voice both conceptions: utterances expressing blind faith in the gods’ ethical awareness

⁴⁹ *Ag.* 176-83. This intentionally loose translation is mine.

⁵⁰ Fraenkel 1962: 111 and Lloyd-Jones 1993: 26 are antithetical examples of alternative readings to the one I offer. I tend to reject those readings which reflect utterly negative or positive theological understandings of the *Oresteia*. Some important contributions I disagree with are, on the side of Fraenkel: Martina 2007; Cohen 1986: 134; Pope 1974 criticised by Conacher 1976. On the side of Lloyd-Jones: Smith 1980 also criticised by Conacher 1983. Recent interpretations more attuned to mine are: Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 84-8; Schenker 1994; Conacher 1987. Schenker 1994 and Bollack 1981 contain a more thorough survey of opinions. For more on the ‘Hymn’ cf. Ch. 4.

⁵¹ Cf. what Winnington-Ingram defined – adopting Murray’s term – as ‘the Inherited Conglomerate’: that two-fold tradition which ‘included both the jealousy and the justice of heaven’, 1965: 39.

coexist with those expressing despair over finding a convincing explanation for divine behaviour and design; utterances expressing faith in divine vigilance over human existence coexist with those expressing scepticism about the seriousness of the gods' commitment to justice.

This unresolved tension is long-lived: not only it can be found in antiquity, but is also reflected and perpetuated by modern scholarship. Re-enacting this ancient oscillation, today's criticism swings often between mutually exclusive theological readings of these texts: some, by attributing to Zeus and the gods a regime of pure caprice, tyranny and injustice, reject the view of those who look in these texts for the pledge of a supreme theodicy. A third group of critics argue instead that Greek epic poetry, tragedy, or both, attain no final certainty, but that they are instead open to as wide a multiplicity of readings as those expressed by the fictional figures who inhabit them.⁵² This is neither the place to enter the specificities of the debate nor the place to do justice to the subtleties of each specific approach. By means of the preceding outline I simply mean to sketch the critical panorama on the question of 'divine justice' and to site my work against it: throughout this thesis, I maintain that the *Oresteia* provides no definite resolution nor should it be read according to either of the extreme hermeneutics just delineated.

In this chapter, however, I will return to the question obliquely and focus on one aspect of this debate which has received little attention. It is my aim here to illustrate one of the most fundamental assumptions behind my thesis as a whole. I argue that the constant tension between opposite religious attitudes which pervades the *Oresteia* may be read as a *self-aware* response to some of the ideas and the theological debates of the time. Through the variegated voices of its characters and choruses, the *Oresteia* seems to constantly create the lure of a comprehensive theology only to frustrate the desire it instils. The pervasive sense of the presence of the divine in the trilogy reveals an unmistakable reference to the need of those who experience or witness the constant

⁵² The secondary literature is vast. For the first view see Martina 2007 and Cohen 1986 (Sommerstein 2010b: 164-70 restricts it to the *Agamemnon*); for the second view see Seaford 2012; 2003; Lloyd-Jones 1970; 1956; Winnington-Ingram 1983; 1954 and Allan 2006; 2005: 75-77; for the third view see Vernant 1988 Goldhill 2004; 1986 and Halliwell 2004; 1990.

cycle of action and suffering to find reassurance in a level of significance beyond that of human existence. Yet at each step of this process – from the specific instances of isolated odes to the larger scheme of each play and the whole trilogy – this need is instigated only to be thwarted. The hope of reading a final horizon of meaning is repeatedly invited only to be repeatedly defied.

Indeed, various laudable efforts have been made to illustrate the depths of this ‘tragic religion’, and the tension originating from the alliance of opposite moods and perspectives has been detected and underlined at various levels of the drama. Some scholars have focused on Aeschylus’ wide-ranging exploitation of choral voice in all its possible modulations;⁵³ others have chosen to focus on Aeschylus’s exploitation of the polysemy of certain vocabulary such as, most notably, in the language of *dikê*;⁵⁴ and others again have insisted on the open-ended nature of the *Oresteia*’ finale in order to point out how the dilemma of justice receives, in fact, no conclusive resolution.⁵⁵ These approaches, the results of which I share and adopt as the foundations of my own work, all fail, however, to account for one specific question, namely, why is this tension so subtly and carefully insisted upon? In other words, why does the *Oresteia* constantly offer such alluring and carefully constructed prospects of significance, only to then reveal the illusory nature of such mirages?

There is, of course, a logic that is intrinsic to the genre, and those with the sensibility to reach the depths of this tragedy have already offered partial answers to the questions posed. However, in this thesis I intend to explore a path that has scarcely been followed before: I offer an interpretation of the *Oresteia* in the light of some of the ideas, or modes of thought, which circulated among the Presocratic philosophers. In this chapter, I will focus on refining my working hypothesis: I will do this by underscoring the weight which pre-existing debates about the nature and role of the gods may have had in influencing the shape of the *Oresteia*’s theological concerns.

⁵³ Fletcher 1999; Athanassaki 1994. For choral polyphony in Greek tragedy see Calame 2013: 35-57 and in general Gagné and Hopman 2013; for a study of *oratio recta* in Classical Greek Literature see Bers 1997.

⁵⁴ Cf. Int. I.2; Ch. 6.1: n. 497.

⁵⁵ Cf. n. 45.

II.2 *Self-reflective statements and 'metatheological' discourse*

The self-reflective nature of the *Oresteia*'s theological discourse may be sensed in its development at various levels of the drama: whether we focus on specific utterances and claims or on the larger framework of the plays, the question of the gods' relation to humans emerges as a prominent concern. Yet, for the most part, the theological dimension of this tragedy is construed so as to remain implicit within the narrative sequence and the dramatic situations of the plays: the human desire to come to terms with divine justice becomes more harrowing when it is aroused as a latent necessity rather than an overt demand.

But this constant attention and emphasis laid on theological questions makes them at times so highly charged that they must, by necessity, abandon the various dramatic disguises under which they lurk and burst into the open. When this happens, then, the implicit theological dilemmas of the drama break through the surface of lyrics or recitatives to become explicit and, what is more, explicitly self-reflective. The various exchanges between the Chorus of Erinyes and the Olympian gods on matters of seniority, capacity, and power at the end of the trilogy, may be perhaps a vaguely grotesque example of it, but still a case in point: with their direct participation and behaviour, the gods in *Eumenides* seem literally to embody that 'notion of clashing divine personalities' which ensures 'that no simple and reassuring scheme of divine justice' is 'possible'.⁵⁶ In a sense, the whole culmination of the trilogy with the intervention of divine figures previously addressed only abstractly can be taken as a final concretization of a previously implicit theological tension, as well as a final unmasking of that unremitting longing for a direct confrontation of men with gods.

But long before reaching the final play, in fact, throughout the trilogy, the text is time and again interspersed with religious statements in which the discourse about the gods

⁵⁶ Allan 2005: 77.

becomes self-aware and self-reflective. When taken cumulatively, these passages create a sense of what could be defined as the ‘metatheological’ dimension of the text. Let’s begin with the first *stasimon* of the *Agamemnon*, in which the Chorus sing:

[...] οὐκ ἔφα τις
θεοὺς βροτῶν ἄξιοῦσθαι μέλειν,
ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις
πατοῖθ’· ὁ δ’ οὐκ εὐσεβής. (369-72)

In the first part of this ode, the Chorus revere the greatness of Zeus, who is seen as the executioner of divine retribution, and interpret the capture of Troy as a punishment of Paris (362-6). In the passage quoted, the Chorus reject the ‘impious’ claim of a generic and indefinite τις, and thereby introduce a self-aware juxtaposition between their theological stance and that supposedly represented by this pronoun. Unflinching faith in the mechanism of divine retribution is here explicitly opposed to the scepticism of those who question the benevolence of the gods.

Two main observations must be made. First, the use of the indefinite pronoun, which is widely understood here as a Greek narratorial device for negation and not as an attack *ad personam*, allows the Chorus to present their theological statement against an undifferentiated collectiveness.⁵⁷ Second, the Chorus convey their position through the same syncopated iambics deployed in the *parodos* to describe the sacrifice of Iphigenia (192-275). The implications of such metrical choice are perhaps not entirely self evident and thus this point requires further elucidation.

Various scholars have already drawn attention to the association of syncopated iambics with the theme of divine retribution,⁵⁸ but there is something particularly interesting about the connection between the first *stasimon* and the last three strophic pairs of the *parodos* which this rhythmic pattern suggests. Pure faith in divine benevolence is here uttered in the same metre by means of which the sacrifice of an innocent – epitome of

⁵⁷ De Jong 1987. For standard Homeric classifications of *tis*-speeches see also De Jong 2004: 177-8; and De Jong, Nünlist and Bowie 2004 for a variety of studies on the function of anonymous spokesmen.

⁵⁸ Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 251; Kitto 1955; Scott 1984.

what is most unsettling about divine justice – had previously been described. What is more, as the first *stasimon* progresses in the same rhythm, the Chorus' reflection on the course of retribution shifts the focus from Zeus' punishment of Paris to the foreboding of punishment for overly successful sackers of a city (i.e. Agamemnon). The metrical unity works as a homogenous façade behind which lies a hidden tension: a tension inherent in a conception of justice in which the executioner is doomed to become as culpable as the sinner.

In other words, metre emphasises here, as it did in the *parodos*, the unity of two contradictory theological conceptions: the Chorus undergo one of their recurrent emotional transitions from confidence in their ability to read the purpose of the gods to uncertainty and anxiety over finding the foundations for such self-confidence: the initial claim of a Chorus ready to denounce the impiety of those who doubt the ethical commitment of the gods gives way to 'an anxiety (μέριμνα) that waits to hear of something happening under cover of night' (459-60). If then iambic rhythm points to the thematic motif of retributive justice, the formal unity deriving from it is the cover of a shifting subject matter: divine justice moves from being perceived as a reassuring and benevolent mechanism to becoming the source of the Chorus' anxiety. The initial religious statement of the Chorus is therefore corroded from within: its significance unfolds in full only when the psychological and emotional pattern in which it is inserted is also taken into account.

But another passage captures even better the explicit and self-reflective nature of some of the Chorus' theological statements. As previously mentioned, Aeschylus inherited from the Archaic Age both the longing to find justice in the ordering of the universe and the incongruities this longing necessarily had to wrestle with. The partial solution of interpreting disaster as divine punishment is the most traditional answer to one such incongruity. It springs from the attempt to purify the divine from any trace of sheer malignity (such as was probably implied in the original idea of the φθόνος τῶν θεῶν) and to attribute a consoling causality to the otherwise unbearable meaninglessness of human suffering. Indeed, as noticed by Winnington-Ingram, 'in a famous chorus of the

Agamemnon the old idea is rejected that excessive prosperity alone is sufficient to account for disaster'.⁵⁹ The ode reads thus:

παλαίφατος δ' ἐν βροτοῖς γέρων λόγος
τέτυκται, μέγαν τελεσ-
θέντα φωτὸς ὄλβον
τεκνοῦσθαι μηδ' ἄπαιδα θνάσκειν,
ἐκ δ' ἀγαθᾶς τύχας γένει
βλαστάνειν ἀκόρεστον οἰζύν.
δίχα δ' ἄλλων μονόφρων εἰ-
μι· τὸ δυσσεβὲς γὰρ ἔργον
μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει,
σφετέρᾳ δ' εἰκότα γέννα·
οἴκων γὰρ εὐθυδίκων
καλλίπαις πότμος αἰεῖ. (750-62)

With regard to the content of this ode, scholars have long puzzled over what conception of the φθόνοϛ θεῶν Aeschylus may have had.⁶⁰ What should indeed be noted is that in this ode of the *Agamemnon*, the Chorus explicitly refer to a γέρων λόγος that is – they claim – παλαίφατος ἐν βροτοῖς, in order to place themselves against it. If intratextuality and religious terminology remind us of the first *stasimon*, it is important to notice how what was there a generic refusal of a vaguely impious claim acquires here, in the second *stasimon*, a more specific colouring: the Chorus' reference to an old doctrine that is 'long since spoken among mortals' is of course a much more substantial depiction of the position they set out to refuse.

Whereas in the first *stasimon* the Chorus rejected what came across as the opinion of a *minority*, here their renewed theological claim is set in opposition with an old and well-established mode of thought. This said, it seems to me that the traditional belief the Chorus self-consciously reject must be the cruder conception of the φθόνοϛ θεῶν, in which the gods visit misfortune on the owners of extreme prosperity. Interestingly – a further confirmation of the polyphonic nature of this tragedy – *Agamemnon* appeals

⁵⁹ Winnington-Ingram 1965: 37.

⁶⁰ Fraenkel 1962: 349-50.

precisely to the religious conception here rejected by the Chorus in the scene immediately after this ode. Indeed, as the king resolves to tread on the purple fabrics ‘of the gods’ he also voices a concern to avoid the φθόνοϝ which he fears may come upon him as a consequence of this arrogant and sacrilegious act.⁶¹ This is part of the reason why setting a discussion in terms of ‘Aeschylus’ conception’ of φθόνοϝ θεῶν, as was done in the past, may not be very profitable.

What is more, coming back to the second *stasimon*, it should also be noted that although the Chorus claim to differ from others and to be single in their thinking (δίχᾳ δ’ ἄλλων μονόφρων εἰμί, 757-8), as commented by Sommerstein among many others, ‘there is nothing new’ about the belief they state.⁶² For, of course, the idea of a δυσσεβὲς ἔργον that breeds more impious deeds (πλείονα τίκτει, 758-9), reinforced by the gnomic statement, ‘an old act of outrage is wont to give birth to a new young outrage’ (φιλεῖ δὲ τίκτειν ὕβρις μὲν παλαιὰ νεάζουσιν [...] ὕβριν, 763-6), closely recalls several Solonian fragments.⁶³ Hence, the Chorus’ affirmation and its claim of singularity raises the question of the *Oresteia*’s relation to the preceding poetic tradition. In the next section I will continue my introductory presentation of the self-reflective religious aspects of this tragedy in the light of contemporary and preceding theological debates.

II.3 *Archaic poetry: towards an explicit theology?*

Several poets before Aeschylus had already sensed the incongruities deriving from the reading of divine punishment as a manifestation of divine justice. Most of the problems presented by the *Oresteia* in association with it had already been developed during the

⁶¹ Sommerstein 2008: 110-11 rejects the transmitted reading θεῶν and the idea of any divine φθόνοϝ from this passage, but his argument is not entirely persuasive. As pointed out by Fraenkel 1962: 430 ‘the fact that the gods perceive and act πρόσωθεν is mentioned several times in the *Oresteia*’, and the antithesis between what is proper for a god and for a man colours the scene since 944ff. In my opinion Agamemnon is here made to voice a concern about human jealousy with a phrasing that would have unmistakably evoked in the audience the idea of φθόνοϝ θεῶν. Cf. Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 169.

⁶² Sommerstein 2008: 89.

⁶³ 4.6-9; 6.3-4 (Cf. *Thgn.* 153-4.); 13.7-16. All Solon’s fragments are numbered as in W². For more on Solon cf. Ch. 3.2.

poetic tradition of the archaic age and had their root, unsurprisingly, in the Greek hexametric corpus of Homer, Hesiod, the Epic and the Theban Cycles. Although most Aeschylean tragedies probably derived their mythological content directly from the Epic Cycle and Theban Cycle – with the *Cypria* being particularly relevant for the *Oresteia* – which makes it all the more regrettable that they have survived only in fragmentary form, already the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contained in embryo most of the questions with which the *Oresteia* is concerned.⁶⁴

There are three major sets of disturbing implications attached to the view that the gods always punish human wrongs, all of which are alluded to in both the *Oresteia* and the Greek epic corpus. First, the disparity of the punishment. The narrative of the Trojan War, which is of course the overarching narrative of the *Iliad*, draws attention to the disproportionate suffering involved for those who must pay for their errors, such as the destruction of a city in exchange for the abduction of a woman, or the extension of punishment to the innocent, such as in *Il.* 24.27-30, where Troy, Priam, and his people are strongly juxtaposed to the follies of the lone Alexander.⁶⁵ Of course, the same narrative is one of the background narratives of the *Oresteia* and the anxiety with regard to disproportionate human suffering is often voiced in those very passages in which the theme of the war emerges more prominently. In particular, the great *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* – with its remarks on the death of Greeks and Trojans for the sake of ‘a woman of many men’ (62-7), and the powerful depiction of the sacrifice of Iphigenia (104-59; 185-249) – is infused with many such reflections. The human perspective on war leads to questioning the very nature of the divine, as the ‘Hymn to Zeus’ (160-86) makes explicit.

Second, both guilt and punishment seem to belong to a larger cosmic order, in which various divine forces concur at times and are in discord at others, and in which human action seems often triggered – if not fully determined – by superior necessity.⁶⁶ In a universe shown to rest ‘upon a balance of power that is vulnerable to the turbulence of

⁶⁴ Cf. Ehnmark E. 1935; Greene 1944; Allan 2006: 1-35.

⁶⁵ καὶ Πρίαμος καὶ λαὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ’ ἄτης (*Il.* 24.27). Cf. Allan 2006: 12-3.

⁶⁶ ‘For’, as nicely put by Greene, ‘there stands behind the gods a shadowy reality, a fixed order rather than a power, a divine conscience, at times gathering moral grandeur, at times dreadful and oppressive to man, the reality known as *Moirai*’, 1944:13-4; cf. Ehnmark 1935:75.

competing divine wills',⁶⁷ guilt seems often divinely dictated as well as punishment, with the disturbing implication that human beings have to pay for a crime for which they are only partially responsible.⁶⁸ This theme receives a similar treatment in the *Oresteia*, in which various crimes are prompted by the gods, such as Artemis with regard to Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia or Apollo with regard to Orestes' matricide, and the final play of which dramatizes the reorganization of conflicting deities into a new cosmic order.

Finally, both in the *Iliad* and the *Oresteia* divine punishment is not always instantaneous and the pattern of deceit and punishment is conceived as potentially extendable over more than one generation. Hard to appease, divine anger is conceived as something that can remain and mature over a long period of time as in the case of Poseidon's anger against Troy due to Laomedon's fault in the *Iliad* (21.441-57),⁶⁹ or the curse on the House of Atreus which Cassandra's visions make manifest in the *Oresteia* (1090-2; 1095-7). In short, Aeschylus' dramatization of the disturbing nature of divine justice in the *Oresteia* relies upon a series of theological premises that were already at work in Homer and emerge clearly from the *Iliad*: the disproportion of divine punishment, Zeus and the Olympians' relation to destiny, and the longevity of divine anger, presented as something which can last through various generations.

If a scholar like Dodds found 'no indication in the narrative of the *Iliad* that Zeus is concerned with Justice as such', this may be, among other things, because the narrative of the *Iliad* is only peripherally concerned with the justice of Zeus.⁷⁰ Hesiod's works, by contrast, are directly focused on justice. While the very *structure* of the *Theogony*, culminating in the ascendancy of Zeus, expresses the supremacy of his justice and the establishment of the present theological order, *Works and Days* underlines the importance of justice, which Zeus has given humans to set them apart from animals

⁶⁷ Allan 2006: 8.

⁶⁸ For two illuminating examples see the oath-breaking of Pandarus in *Il.* 4.64-108 which 'serves as a recapitulation of Trojan guilt' (Allan 2012: 56) and which is prompted by Athena and Hera with Zeus' consent and when Zeus considers sparing Sarpedon even though his death is *πάλαι πεπρωμένον αἶσῃ* (16. 441).

⁶⁹ Lloyd-Jones 2002: 2; *cf.* Allan 2006: 6.

⁷⁰ Dodds 1951: 32.

(278-9).⁷¹ This is not to claim that Hesiod's divine justice is more advanced than Homer's, but simply that his account of its mechanisms in his works is perhaps more straightforward. As West wrote: 'Hesiod's arguments for Dike and for work are essentially of a very simple form. Dike is good because the gods reward it. Hybris is bad because the gods punish it'.⁷² Similarly, Greene is right in claiming that 'the whole poem [*W&D*] is, among other things, a protest against *hybris* and a plea for *dikê*' in which 'the just flourish and the gods punish injustice'.⁷³

However, in Hesiod just as in Homer, disproportion and blindness mark such retributive justice (*W&D*, 238-247) as well as the idea that divine punishment may extend beyond one generation (*W&D*, 281- 4). Moreover, in *Theogony*, Hesiod also addresses the question of Zeus' relationship to the fixed order of a superior necessity by means of genealogical connections. The idea of an ineluctable cosmic necessity is conveyed through those divine guilds or divine pluralities such as *Moirai(i)* and *Eriny(e)s*.⁷⁴ Particularly noteworthy is the 'double pedigree'⁷⁵ of the *Moirai*, first described, along with *Moros*, *Thanatos*, the *Keres*, *Nemesis*, *Eris* and other powers, as progeny of Night (210-25) and thus underlining their association and affinity with the obscure powers of Death, Destiny, and Strife,⁷⁶ but also identified later, along with the *Horai* (*Eunomia*, *Dikê*, and *Eirene*), as progeny of Zeus. Thus the *Moirai* move from being powers who allot men good and evil and who punish transgression (217-22) to being powers tightly connected to Zeus' new regime of peace, law and order. I do not think, as West seems to suggest, that the only significance of the *Moirai*'s novel mention in relation to Zeus is merely 'to make it plain that in critical cases their power is subordinate to his'.⁷⁷ Rather, their double mention has a twofold purpose: first, that of underlying their indefeasible role within any divine order, whether old or new; second, that of underlining the flexibility of their connection: the *Moirai* appear here as forces that are susceptible to the divine order's alteration, and have the capacity to adapt and adjust their function to

⁷¹ [...] ἐπεὶ οὐ δίκη ἐστὶ μετ' αὐτοῖς· | ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἔδωκε δίκην. Allan 2006: 27-28; West 1966: 1.

⁷² West 1978: 47.

⁷³ Greene 1944: 29; cf. *W&D*, 213.

⁷⁴ West 1966: 32.

⁷⁵ Greene 1944: 29.

⁷⁶ Similarly West 1966: 36.

⁷⁷ West 1966: 37.

the new balance of powers. At the end of the *Oresteia*, the *Erinyes* are persuaded to abandon their stubborn avenging anger, thus altering the role allotted to them by *Moirai* (333-40), and to accept their new residence with Athena, Zeus and Ares in order to preside over human affairs and cherish their prosperity. And it is thus perhaps no negligible detail that Aeschylus deliberately adapts the Hesiodic tradition in order to make the *Erinyes* daughters of Night, born ‘to be a punishment (ποινή) for the blind and for those who see’ (321-3), and thereby turns them into the sisters of the *Moirai* (415-7).

The legacy of this set of problems can be recognised in the extant fragments of the 6th century’s poets, in particular in Solon and the poets of the *Theognidea*. Since Solon’s attention is mainly directed towards the promotion of his political role in Athens – his archonship, his reforms and his ideas⁷⁸ – his considerations of divine retributive justice fall within a narrower range. His work does not have the cosmic breadth of his epic predecessor: Solon’s poetry does not purport to account for the order of the universe and for the place of men and gods in this order, but rather for the order of his city-state and the meaning of justice in relation to this order. Solon’s reflections on justice are chiefly reflections on economic and political justice and, like those in Hesiod’s *W&D*, they revolve around a central concern: the just acquisition of wealth and stability in conjunction with the poet’s personal apprehension for his own reputation:

Μνημοσύνης καὶ Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου ἀγλαὰ τέκνα,
 Μοῦσαι Πιερίδες, κλυτὲ μοι εὐχομένῃ·
 ὄλβον μοι πρὸς θεῶν μακάρων δότε καὶ πρὸς ἀπάντων
 ἀνθρώπων αἰεὶ δόξαν ἔχειν ἀγαθήν. (13W².1-4).⁷⁹

However, since like Homer and Hesiod before him Solon recognises in the gods the guarantors of human justice, several of his fragments appear to raise the same set of problems to which I referred above.

⁷⁸ Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 19-44; Gerber 1999: 6.

⁷⁹ All translations of Solon are from Gerber 1999.

Although this is not the place for an in-depth analysis of the whole of Solon's work, it should nonetheless be acknowledged that there is what has been defined as a 'bifurcation' in his conception of justice.⁸⁰ Following Jaeger, Vlastos argues that in 4W² Solon describes the operation of justice through the 'observable consequences of human acts within the social order', thus presenting the 'rational *dikê* of the *polis*' as a natural, self-regulative and dynamic principle acting within the poet's reconstruction of Athenian institutions.⁸¹ This original way of presenting justice has been contrasted with Solon's traditional account of the role of the gods and inscrutable reality of *Moirai* in 13W², in which 'his sense of justice' seems to 'resolve, like Hesiod's, into the pious faith that justice will triumph over *hybris* in the end'.⁸² This attempt to bring together and contrast various conceptions of justice, especially the social dimension of the polis against the cosmic dimension of divine retribution, represents of course a noteworthy precedent for the *Oresteia* and I shall return to it in due course.⁸³ Here, I limit myself to a few remarks about the more conservative strand of Solon's thought and his personal adaptation of traditional problems around the central issue of the acquisition of wealth in 13W².

Throughout the first part of the 'Prayer to the Muses' (13.1-32), divine justice is equated with retribution, which strikes those who acquire wealth unjustly:

χρήματα δ' ἰμεῖρω μὲν ἔχειν, ἀδίκως δὲ πεπᾶσθαι
οὐκ ἐθέλω. πάντως ὕστερον ἦλθε δίκη (7-8).

Thus, the vengeance of Zeus (τίσις, 25) is inevitable, although it may not always strike immediately (ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν αὐτίκ' ἔτεισεν, ὁ δ' ὕστερον 29), and as in Homer and Hesiod, if the culpable man himself escapes and the 'pursuing destiny of the gods' (θεῶν μοῖρ' ἐπιοῦσα) does not reach him in time, then 'the innocent pay the penalty, either the children or a later progeny' (31-2). Thus far Solon's account seems to repeat the simple scheme of Hesiod's logic: it is acceptable to pursue ὄλβος but not at the cost of acting hubristically and unjustly, for that leads, sooner or later to ruin (ἄτη, 13).

⁸⁰ Vlastos 1946:75.

⁸¹ 1946: 65-8; 82. Cf. Greene 1944: 38: 'here is an explanation of human good and evil in purely human terms.'

⁸² Vlastos 1946: 77; Cf. 1944: 36-9.

⁸³ Cf. Ch. 3.2.

‘Zeus oversees every outcome (ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς πάντων ἐφορᾷ τέλος, 17)’ and preserves the order of things by punishing those who have a ‘sinful heart’ (27-8).

However, as the movement of thought progresses through the elegy, the justice of the gods seems almost to be doubted. In this elegy which Lattimore has defined as ‘self-generating series of connected ideas’,⁸⁴ Solon explores the extreme implications of the thought that even the innocent person is at times struck by the gods:

Μοῖρα δέ τοι θνητοῖσι κακὸν φέρει ἡδὲ καὶ ἐσθλόν
δῶρα δ’ ἄφικτα θεῶν γίγνεται ἀθανάτων (63-4).⁸⁵

This is the human perspective (θνητοί, 33) on divine justice, which unlike that of Zeus does not oversee every τέλος but is confined to the frustrating contemplation of the irrational immediate,⁸⁶ in which:

ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν εὖ ἔρδειν πειρώμενος οὐ προνοήσας
ἐς μεγάλην ἄτην καὶ χαλεπὴν ἔπεσεν,
τῷ δὲ κακῶς ἔρδοντι θεὸς περὶ πάντα δίδωσιν
συντυχίην ἀγαθήν, ἔκλυσιν ἀφροσύνης (67-70).

While the elegy progresses in what could be considered the second part of the poem (33-76), Solon ‘emphasises the uncertainty of man’s lot’,⁸⁷ for whom both good and evil come from *Moirai*, a power so inscrutable that at times even he who strives to act rightly appears to fall into a great calamity. As the inadequacy of human understanding is contrasted with divine omniscience, the poet’s emphasis shifts from divine retribution to the uncertainty of human life in relation to the pursuit of wealth. Contrary to Vlastos’ interpretation, even within his most traditional strand of thought Solon’s ‘sense of justice’ seems far from being resolved into the ‘pious faith’. Instead, the juxtaposition of a human perspective with divine omniscience seems to determine a further bifurcation in his thought or, rather, an oscillation between two gnomic and antithetical half-truths:

⁸⁴ Lattimore 1947: 162.

⁸⁵ Cf. Raeburn and Thomas 2011: xl.

⁸⁶ Similarly Lattimore 1947: 166.

⁸⁷ Greene 1944: 36.

one which regards the gods as the infallible guarantors of retribution, the other which regards the gods as inscrutable and almost ill-willed potencies. The whole poem ends as it begins on the note of divine retribution (75-7).

The corpus of the late 6th century *Theognidea* takes Solon's bifurcations of thought to an extreme breadth. Human beings are at times presented as fully responsible for their condition (833-6), at others they are depicted as puppets of the gods (e.g. 133-42; 157-8; 169-78, 585-90). The oscillation between the views that gods punish malefactors while rewarding those who act rightly and that the gods act in an inscrutable and capricious way is more palpable than ever. Moreover, as reflections on the human condition reach the pessimistic commonplace of the μὴ φῦναι ἄριστον (425-28; 179-81), those on the nature of divine justice acquire at times the tone of a bewildered protest and earnest resentment (373-92) and the very nature of divine justice is called into question: πῶς ἐστὶ δίκαιον [...]; (743).

Thus the *Theognidea* offers a complex scenario. Even those fragments containing a reflection on divine retribution present traditional problems with a new fervour and urgency. There is evidence of the usual concern with the belatedness of divine punishment (203-8; 731-52), but also of a bolder attitude. At times, this traditional concern seems to amount to a certainty that even a 'timely prayer' (καίριος εὐχή, 341) will most certainly fail to lead to a timely 'retribution' (τίσις, 345); at others, it reaches the virulence of an explicit longing for an alternative system of justice (731-40). There is also evidence of a concern – like the one voiced by the *Iliadic* Hera with regard to Zeus sparing Sarpedon's death – with the relation of divine justice with other compulsive forces which shape human existence:

[...] δοίην δ' ἄντ' ἀνιῶν ἀνίας·
αἶσα γὰρ οὕτως ἐστὶ (344-5)

πολλῷ τοι πλέονας λιμοῦ κόρος ὤλεσεν ἤδη
ἄνδρας, ὅσοι μοίρης πλείον' ἔχειν ἔθελον. (605-6)

And the human condition is often depicted as if determined by a combination of psychological and cosmic binding limitations:

φροντίδες ἀνθρώπων ἔλαχον, πτερὰ ποικίλ' ἔχουσai,
μυρόμεναι ψυχῆς εἵνεκα καὶ βιότου. (729-30)

[...] ἔμπης δ' ὅ τι μοῖρα παθεῖν οὐκ ἔσθ' ὑπαλῦξαι.
ὅττι δὲ μοῖρα παθεῖν, οὗτι δέδοικα παθεῖν (817-18).

As Greene aptly put it, the content of several fragments of the *Theognidea* is truly ‘stuff for tragedy’.⁸⁸ Indeed, Aeschylus inherits that bifurcation in the conception of divine justice, those paradoxes, and dilemmas, which were present in the poetic tradition from Homer and Hesiod onwards but that had acquired a more explicit and urgent dimension in the poets of the 6th century.

In a sense then when the Chorus of the second *stasimon* of the *Agamemnon* claim to differ from others in their belief, and they do so by using a language that is highly reminiscent of Solon’s fragments, their statement is metaliterary as much as it is metatheological. It is not only an assertion of self-reflective theology but it is also an assertion of self-reflective poetics. Through implicit verbal affiliation Aeschylus places the figures of the Argive Elders within the debate conducted by the preceding poetic tradition. But he does so in a way that invites his audience to simultaneously read the Elders’ claim as acknowledging a fair degree of indebtedness to that tradition as well as suggesting an aspiration to rival it. The metaliterary quality of such a passage may prompt us to recognise that the whole of the *Oresteia* may be read as highly dependent on the mythological material and the archaic thought of the poetic tradition as well as sufficiently complex to rival the scope of the theology therein developed.

⁸⁸ Greene 1944: 42.

II.4 *A world teeming with gods: philosophical theology and theistic philosophy*

Various components which unite the early philosophical tradition to the early poetic tradition – especially with regard to intellectual content, poetic form and comprehensive aspirations – have been brought to the foreground in recent years and sensitively studied.⁸⁹ Here I confine myself to some issues pertaining the theology of early Greek philosophy.

If on the one hand one may regard cosmogonic poems such as Hesiod's *Theogony* as early quasi-rationalistic theories of everything and as an inevitable prelude to philosophical cosmologies,⁹⁰ on the other hand one cannot fail to observe how the world depicted by early philosophical accounts remained, as Thales seems to have said, 'full of gods': [...] πάντα πλήρη θεῶν εἶναι.⁹¹

Jaeger's Gifford Lectures, delivered in St Andrews in 1936, have been regarded by some as a turning point in the study of the early Greek Philosophy.⁹² No doubt, they consolidate the kind of approach which in the English speaking world had been promulgated by Cornford⁹³ and which pays due attention to the elements of continuity between religious and philosophical thought.⁹⁴ Since the time of Jaeger, the philosophical poignancy of the theology of early Greek thinkers has been underlined

⁸⁹ Curd and McKirahan 2011: 2-7; K.R.S. 2007: 7-74; Most 2006: 332-362; Allan 2005: 71-81; Algra 1999: 45-65; Vlastos 1952: 97-123.

⁹⁰ Cornford 1912: 17-9; Jaeger 1947: 10-17; K.R.S. 2007: 34-46; 71.

⁹¹ Aristot. *De An.* A5, 411a7-8.

⁹² These lectures were subsequently (1947) collected in a volume entitled *The Theology of Early Greek Philosophers*, which received numerous reviews: some which insist on its almost paradigm-shifting role (Tait 1953, Marcus 1949, Vlastos 1952: 101), some more neutral (Callahan 1947, Allen 1949, Frank 1950, Crahay 1968); others which minimise its importance (Morrison 1949 and Hamilton 1950: 106: 'it does not really add very much to what has for some time been established as the orthodox view' in England).

⁹³ Cornford 1912.

⁹⁴ *Contra* to the 'positivistic' approach from the previous generation: cf. Burnet 1945, Tannery 1930, and Gomperz 1912, who treated the Presocratics as forerunners of modern scientists.

by several scholars who have enriched our understanding of this difficult topic with numerous and subtle insights.⁹⁵

Presocratic inquiries into cosmology, physical, and ontological realities are often characterised by religious terminology, so that it is not always entirely clear where one should draw the line.⁹⁶ The most obvious examples are perhaps those represented by cosmological or physical descriptions which take advantage of the connotations and suggestiveness of divine names such as Heraclitus' Zeus (32) and Erinyes (94), Parmenides' Eros (13) and the names of gods conferred by Empedocles on the four roots (B6). Not to mention that, as Vlastos reminds us, 'few words occur more frequently in their fragments than the term "god"', a fact which can be easily verified upon a quick glance at the word-index contained in the DK edition, where the term *theos* is followed by eight columns of listing against – for instance – that of *physis* followed by six columns only.⁹⁷ Maybe due to a sense of continuity with the poetic tradition,⁹⁸ maybe due to the need to justify the scope of their enterprise through the aggrandising lexis of the religious discourse, or maybe due to a genuine perception of some aspects of nature as divine, the early Greek philosophers marked their accounts with a subtle, yet undeniable, overlap between the descriptions of divine realities and those of the natural world.⁹⁹

Yet, 'divine' terminology cannot be considered simply as a hollow involucre for a new enterprise struggling to find a new identity and new forms of expression. Conversely, as Broadie said, 'there can be no doubt that the identity at some level of description between divine reality and the subject matter of natural science shaped the course of

⁹⁵ Cf. Vlastos 1952 and Broadie 2006. Other important discussions: Guthrie 1966: 131-144, Adomenas 1999; Most 2007 and Sassi 2009: 80ff. See also Betegh 2006 and Mikalson 2007, although their focus is not on the Presocratics. Drozdek 2007, seemingly ignoring the debate which developed around Jaeger's thesis, presents an interpretation too extreme to be accepted (i.e. the investigation of the *arché* coincides with a meditation on divine essence).

⁹⁶ That is, if such a line could be drawn at all. Indeed, some scholars maintain that Presocratic philosophy should be studied 'as an indivisible organism, never considering the theological components apart from the physical or ontological', Jaeger 1947: 7.

⁹⁷ Vlastos 1952: 97; DK 1964.

⁹⁸ Cf. Most 2006: 332-362.

⁹⁹ 'To think of them as mere naturalists, bracketing off their speculations from religious belief and feeling, would be to take a very anachronistic view of their thought', Vlastos 1952: 98.

early Greek philosophy in fundamental ways'.¹⁰⁰ Caught in between the demand of a long-established poetic tradition and the drive towards a revolutionary way of thinking, the theology of early Greek philosophy is an interesting amalgam of intermingling discursive tendencies.

It may therefore prove methodologically useful to distinguish between those texts that deploy a religious terminology or which feature concepts of divinity from those which theologise in a more systematic manner. As pointed out by Broadie: 'To theologise is not simply to theorize using such concepts in a nonincidental way. Rather, it is, for instance, to reflect upon the divine nature, or to rest an argument or explanation on the idea of divinity as such, or to discuss the question of the existence of gods, and to speculate on the grounds or causes of theistic belief'.¹⁰¹ And although I would not go as far as Broadie in claiming that by these criteria, 'Hesiod's *Theogony* is not a work of theology',¹⁰² I would certainly argue that by these criteria Hesiod's *Theogony* is an hexametric poem about the origin and the role of the gods in the universe, which relies on a series of implicit and unreflective theological suppositions. Indeed, 'in such a context, speaking about the cosmos meant speaking about the gods, and theories about the origin of the cosmos (cosmogonies) were actually the genealogy of the gods (theogonies)'.¹⁰³

With regard to Aeschylus' relation to Presocratic theological ideas, a further methodological premise is necessary. The distinction between implicit and explicit modes of theological discourse, so insistently pursued here, was – most likely – of little concern to him. A divide that is difficult for us to draw, must have been even less clear for an author whose primary agenda was not that of entering a philosophical debate as such but that of writing a powerful tragedy. Rather, it is probable that Aeschylus had been influenced in his depiction of the gods of the *Oresteia* not only by the explicit challenges offered by the Presocratic philosophers but also by the ideas which took shape in Presocratics' cosmological and rational inquiry, especially considering the

¹⁰⁰ Broadie 2006: 206; Cf. Guthrie 1966: 131-2; 144.

¹⁰¹ Broadie 2006: 205.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Algra 1999: 46.

idiosyncratic religious language by means of which they were presented. And if the power of this tragedy relies – in large measure – on a reflection over the interpenetration of the function of gods with the suffering of men, one may expect that such prominent theme would be treated so as to match the gravity imposed by the demands of its author's times. These demands had been set, in many ways, by the Presocratic philosophers, who, through their explicitly theological charges attacked that poetic tradition on which Aeschylus' works were so dependent, and who, through their highly 'religious' description of the 'basic principles' of reality, opened a whole new vista on the working of the cosmos and the role of 'the divine' within it.

In this thesis, I focus on a restricted group of thinkers: namely those whose inclination has – arguably – been that of developing the notion of a single metaphysical principle and who can be therefore set apart from the material monists on the one side, and the pluralists on the other. Thus, I deal with Anaximander, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. In dealing with the fragments of these thinkers I adopt a thematic approach and I concentrate on three levels of their discourse. First, I focus on the explicit assertions about the nature of god. Second, I discuss religious language which does not necessarily involve an explicit theological concern. Last, I concentrate on descriptions which although focusing on an object of enquiry which is not declared 'divine' nonetheless make use of attributes and concepts traditionally associated with god(s). This thematic approach seems to me the only viable method to do justice to the irreducible complexity of this material, in which not every statement containing concepts of divinity can be classified as theological nor can the theology of early Greek philosophers be reduced only to those sentences that deploy an explicit theological language.

PART 1

Philosophical Theology and Cosmic Justice in Presocratic Philosophy

CHAPTER 1

Explicit Theological Innovations: Xenophanes' God

1.1 *Theology is separate from nature*

In presenting his theology, Xenophanes shows a remarkable awareness of the separateness of such inquiry from that about other matters:

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὗτις ἀνὴρ ἴδεν οὐδέ τις ἔσται
εἰδὼς ἄμφι θεῶν τε καὶ ἅσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων·
εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών,
αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε. δόκος δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται. (B34)¹⁰⁴

In this fragment, widely discussed for its bold epistemological claims,¹⁰⁵ besides offering some remarks about human knowledge, Xenophanes also makes a reference to his own teachings: [...] ἄμφι θεῶν τε καὶ ἅσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων. In the same fashion of Heraclitus (B1) and Parmenides (B7), the poet himself provides here some guidance on how his writings must be treated in order to achieve whatever knowledge is available to mortals. Because of this, scholars concur that fragment 34 implies a poem of some magnitude and that it must come from an important juncture of that poem, covering either a proemial or conclusive position.¹⁰⁶ Yet in referring to his teachings as he does here in line 2 Xenophanes is both somewhat reticent and elaborate and only a close analysis of the text can lead to a proper understanding of its implications, which can be regarded as problematic and revelatory at the same time.

The first question to be understood concerns the definition and the relationship between ἄμφι θεῶν and ἅσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων. Whereas the first element (ἄμφι θεῶν),

¹⁰⁴ The critical edition for fragments and testimonials used in this chapter is Graham 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Often in conjunction with B35, B36, B18, and B38. The epistemological content of this B34 is discussed in Ch. 5.1, *cf.* in particular n. 444.

¹⁰⁶ *Cf.* Barnes 2002: 83 for the former view; Leshner for the latter, 1992: 160.

as Kirk states, can be simply understood as ‘about the gods’ (i.e. ‘about theology’),¹⁰⁷ the second element is perhaps a bit more problematic. Based on a comparison with Alcmaeon’s fragment 1 and the treatise *On Ancient Medicine*, Barnes suggests that ἅσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων refers specifically to Xenophanes’ natural inquiry.¹⁰⁸ Lesher endorses this view by pointing out how fragments 27 and 29 also describe Xenophanes’ ‘accounts of nature [...] in the form of generalizations about *panta*’.¹⁰⁹ In this way line 2 is taken to mean ‘the discourse about the gods (in general) and what I say about the whole of nature’. Although neither of this can be conclusive, I am inclined to read the fragment as I have just paraphrased for an additional reason.

Since we know from Xenophanes’ other fragments that the gods are indeed among the matters debated by him, the broader reading ‘about the gods and the things I say about everything’ would undoubtedly strike us as peculiar. Instead, the separate mention of ἄμφι θεῶν from ἅσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων underlies Xenophanes’ desire to state his understanding of the gods as complementary yet separate objects of enquiry from that on nature. A similar spirit emerges from the different atmosphere of B32:

ἦν τ’ Ἴριν καλέουσι, νέφος καὶ τοῦτο πέφυκε,
πορφύρεον καὶ φοινίκεον καὶ χλωρὸν ἰδέσθαι

in which Xenophanes offers a naturalistic explanation of the phenomenon of the rainbow. Hence, as neatly put by Lesher ‘The demythologized naturalism of his scientific outlook neatly complements his denaturalized theology’.¹¹⁰ Xenophanes is wary not to merge the two separate objects of human understanding and of his own inquiry: gods and nature.

From the few fragments we have, it is clear that Xenophanes thought methodically about theology (B10-17, 23-26) and about the physical world (B27-31, 37), yet it is difficult to establish how these areas were connected. An important fact to bear in mind

¹⁰⁷ Cf. K.R.S. 2007: 180 against the particularistic reading ‘about the gods of conventional religion’ advanced in the past (e.g. Deichgräber 1938: 1-31).

¹⁰⁸ Barnes 2002: 139-40.

¹⁰⁹ Lesher 1992: 168.

¹¹⁰ Lesher 1992: 5.

in relation to this issue is that, as Broadie already observed, it seems that Xenophanes ‘never in solemn metaphysical style spoke of the basic substance as all-encompassing or running through all’.¹¹¹ This is to say that, surprisingly, the descriptions of natural phenomena and of divine nature never overlap.¹¹² Because of this and because of what has been said before concerning Xenophanes’ self-aware distinction between the theological and scientific discourse, it is methodologically possible to treat each topic in disjunction from the other (something, as it will become progressively evident during this chapter, which is rather exceptional for early Greek philosophy).¹¹³ I shall therefore proceed by limiting my discussion to Xenophanes’ fragments about the gods.

1.2 *Proper speech and moral behaviour*

As recently stated by Lesher ‘Xenophanes was the first Greek thinker to offer a complex and at least partially systematic account of the divine nature’.¹¹⁴ Undoubtedly, he was the first Greek thinker we know of to apply philosophical reasoning to the topic of the gods. The fragments containing Xenophanes’ thought on this theme can be conveniently divided and grouped under two heads: a destructive criticism (B16-21) and a constructive theology (23-6). Although the fragments vary highly in terms of tone and content - where the critical ones are more chiding and caustic as opposed to those announcing god’s properties that are loftier and solemn - they often all denote a deep concern with ‘what is proper’ for us to do and say. The preoccupation with pious utterance and moral behaviour is a *fil rouge* running through the whole of Xenophanes’ writing and a disposition that seems to have influenced his theological thought in important ways. The following two excerpts from this philosopher’s longest fragment exemplify such concern with piety and moral behaviour:

¹¹¹ Broadie 2006: 209.

¹¹² At least not in Xenophanes’ fragments. The situation is very different in his testimonia: cf. Aristotle’s account in A28, 30, and other accounts which assimilate his thought to Parmenides’, such as Palto (A28) and Simplicius (A31). By this I am not arguing in favour of a form of secularization: the point is not that statements about the greatest god are not about nature, but that they are about it at a deeper-than-phenomenal level.

¹¹³ Cf. Jaeger 1947: 40-1 for an interesting depiction of the *sui generis* character of Xenophanes.

¹¹⁴ Lesher 2013: n. 3.

χρῆ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν θεὸν ὑμνεῖν εὖφρονας ἄνδρας
εὐφήμεις μύθοις καὶ καθαροῖσι λόγοις· (B1, 13-14)

ἄνδρῶν δ' αἰνεῖν τοῦτον ὃς ἐσθλὰ πίων ἀναφαίνει,
ὥς οἱ μνημοσύνη καὶ τόνος ἄμφ' ἀρετῆς,
οὔτι μάχας διέπων Τιτήνων οὐδὲ Γιγάντων,
οὐδέ <τε> Κενταύρων, πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων,
ἢ στάσιας σφεδανάς, τοῖς οὐδὲν χρηστὸν ἔνεστι·
Θεῶν <δὲ> προμηθεῖν αἰὲν ἔχειν ἀγαθόν. (19-24)

The broader context of Xenophanes' fragment 1 is that of an appropriate sympotic experience. The poet describes a merry atmosphere and an opulent banquet scene where everything is clean and fragrant (1-12). Following such descriptions, the first remark about how to hymn to the gods (13-14) picks up some of the general features of this setting: the two adjectives εὖφρων¹¹⁵ and καθαρός employed here to describe the attitude of men and the quality of their speech recall the καθαρὸν ζάπεδον (1) and the κρατῆρ [...] μεστὸς ἐὐφροσύνης (4) of the opening lines. The uncommon tone of wholesomeness of this poem is thus granted by the parallel description of the physical setting and the moral injunction that follow at 13-14.

The verse that comes immediately after the poet's instruction on how to honour god shifts the focus from piety in speech to moral action (τὰ δίκαια [...] / πρήσσειν, 15-16) and its novelty and poignancy has been noted by several commentators.¹¹⁶ With regard to this point, it is difficult to resist the temptation to recall that scene from Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* in which Electra asks the Chorus for advice on what words she should utter in her prayer to the gods (τί φῶ; 87; 118; πῶς εὖφρον' εἴπω; 88) during the libation on the tomb of Agamemnon. The Chorus-leader, after having heard Electra's doubts about the two possibilities of either conventional and, given the circumstances, hypocritical words on the one hand, or total silence on the other, encourages her to follow a third path: namely to pray for the murderer to be killed in

¹¹⁵ See Halliwell 2008: 109-10 for a discussion of ἐὐφροσύνη (elation or exhilaration of subjective well-being) as a defining emotion for the atmosphere of the symposium in archaic and classical Greek literature.

¹¹⁶ Reinhardt 1959: 128ff; Fränkel 1975: 327; Marcovich 1978: 8; Leshner 1992: 52. Conversely, Graham underlines the conventionality of Xenophanes' approach to piety, 2010: 130.

return (121). In this way, this stichomythia presents a dramatic shift from a concern with proper speech to a concern with proper action (120-1) which culminates with Electra's final prayer at 124ff. Here, most significantly, after having asked for justice to be made for her father, Electra adds a demand for herself: to be both wiser and more reverent in deed than her mother (αὐτῇ τε μοι δὲς σωφρονεστέραν πολὺ / μητρὸς γενέσθαι χεῖρά τ' εὐσεβεστέραν, 140-1).¹¹⁷ Although the atmosphere of these two poetic passages is very different, in each of them the poet underlines the connection between proper speech, divine intervention, and the potential for righteous action. Xenophanes' constructive instructions to the symposiasts in the first half of this fragment contrast sharply with the criticisms contained in its second half (see above 19-24).

Xenophanes' fragment 1 combines a conventional call for moderation in drinking (cf. *Thgn.* 467-96, 503-8; *Anacreont.* 356a 5-6; eleg. 2) with a rejection of traditional myths.¹¹⁸ Unlike in the second elegiac fragment of Anacreon,¹¹⁹ conflict - here described by Xenophanes both as μάχας [...] of Titans, Giants, Centaurs, and as στάσιας σφεδανάς- is not rejected in the light of its juxtaposition with the preferable tales of love, but rather because it is improper and worthless (τοῖς οὐδὲν χρηστὸν ἔνεστι) for a man's 'striving for virtue' (τόνος ἀμφ' ἀρετῆς). To talk about divine warfare in the manner of 'men of former times' (τῶν προτέρων), would not match the demand for reverent words and pure speech of line 14, it would not allow, as the closing line of the fragment suggests, to always hold the gods in high esteem: Θεῶν <δὲ> προμηθείην αἰὲν ἔχειν ἀγαθόν.

Thus this fragment introduces in a nutshell some of the tenets of Xenophanes' theology: constructive directives are combined with a demolishing charge against traditional behaviour and a deep preoccupation with the pedagogical impact of divine storytelling infiltrates its sympotic atmosphere. Indeed, without any reference to Xenophanes' other

¹¹⁷ Cf. Goldhill 1984a.

¹¹⁸ The theme of moderation in drinking in connection to an intellectually uplifting sympotic experience will be further elaborated in Plato's *Symposium*. Cf. 176aff.

¹¹⁹ οὐ φιλέω ὅς κρητῆρι παρὰ πλέῳ οἰνοποτάζων | νείκεα καὶ πόλεμον δακρυόεντα λέγει, | ἀλλ' ὅστις Μουσέων τε καὶ ἀγλαὰ δῶρ' Ἀφροδίτης | συμμίσγων ἐρατῆς μνήσκεται εὐφροσύνης, Campbell 1988: 146.

fragments, it would be harder to determine the precise rationale behind the poet's rejection of old fictions about divine conflict. Yet fragments 10-12, in which Xenophanes' critical targets are made explicit, may help to shed some light on the issue: Homer, from whom 'all have learnt since the beginning' (ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ' Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες B10), together with Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are 'blameworthy and disgraceful for men' (ὅσσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνειδέα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν, B11, 2; cf. B12). The characterization of Homer and Hesiod as pillars of Greek education and of the content of their teaching as blameworthy and disgraceful betrays Xenophanes' intrinsic concern with moral education.¹²⁰

In this light, it is easy to agree with Marcovich's understanding of the rationale behind Xenophanes' rebuke at B1, 19-24 as theological in nature:¹²¹ these old fictions are mendacious and, what is more, they may instigate immoral behaviours in the listeners. Most commentators have already drawn a comparison with Plato's treatment of poetry in *Rep.* 2.377b ff. where stories of divine illicit deeds are condemned on the basis that they could be used to legitimise human misconduct.¹²² Similarly to Xenophanes' fragment 1, Plato's Socrates too is willing to save hymns and praises to the gods: ὕμνους θεοῖς καὶ ἐγκώμια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, (*Rep.* 10.607a) and the extensive points of contacts between both authors' treatment of poetry may shed light on the seriousness of Xenophanes' enterprise. The πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων – which Socrates by using the same 'moulding' metaphor will more scornfully define as τοὺς ἐπιτυχόντας ὑπὸ ἐπιτυχόντων μύθους πλάσθέντας (*Rep.* 2.377b)¹²³ – must be rejected not simply 'because they introduce an element of discord into a harmonious occasion',¹²⁴ but because of the dangers inherent in poetry's immoral depiction of divine activity. It is

¹²⁰ Cf. Babut 1974: 83-117: 'c'est lui qui a inauguré la grande querelle entre philosophie et poésie qui s'est poursuivie à travers tout l'histoire de la littérature grecque', p. 117.

¹²¹ 1978: 13.

¹²² Sassi 2013: 286; Warren 2007: 46; Broadie 2006: 209; Most 2006: 336-337; Leshner 1992: 53; Marcovich 1978: 26ff; Eisenstadt 1974: 145ff.

¹²³ Eisenstadt suggests that the whole metaphor of the moulding of children may owe its origin to the Xenophanean πλάσματα τῶν προτέρων, 1974: 145. Cf. Pl. *Tim.* 26e4-5.

¹²⁴ Bowra 1953: 10.

thus in the light of this overarching concern with pious utterance and moral behaviour that the rest of Xenophanes' theological fragments must be analysed.¹²⁵

1.3 *On the nature of god(s)*

For the sake of clarity, I present together all the fragments I intend to assess next. Although some will be singled out for special attention, it is important to bear in mind the complete picture at all times. This choice will also enable me to organise the fragments in a coherent whole and to make cross-references when necessary. Unlike the majority of commentators I will invert the order in which Xenophanes' theological fragments are customarily presented, for I believe this disposition can offer various interpretative advantages. Thus, I shall begin with four famous fragments conveying traces of a 'constructive theology':

εἷς θεός, ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος,
οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοῖος οὐδὲ νόημα. (B23)

αἰεὶ δ' ἐν ταῦτῳ μῖμνει κινούμενος οὐδέν
οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαί μιν ἐπιπρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλλη. (B26)

ἄλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει. (B25)

οὔλος ὄρῳ, οὔλος δὲ νοεῖ, οὔλος δέ τ' ἀκούει. (B24)

In this first set of fragments Xenophanes claims the existence and describes some traits of one god of exceptional physical and mental power, a god who is 'unlike mortals in body and thought' (23, 2). Yet mortals seem not to recognise the profound dissimilarity

¹²⁵ Xenophanes' critique of traditional myths was referred to by Aristotle as the epitome of philosophical complaints about the theological incorrectness of poetry in book 25 of the *Poetics* (1460b35). This represents further evidence in support of the centrality and seriousness of Xenophanes' concern with poetry's theological misrepresentation. Cf. Halliwell 1998: 11-13; 15-7; 231-3 and 2011: 215; 220-1.

between this god and themselves and they persevere in projecting some of their most defining characteristics onto the gods:

ἀλλ' οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεούς,
τὴν σφετέρην δ' ἐσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνήν τε δέμας τε. (B14)

Αἰθίοπες τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε
Θρηῆκές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς <φασι πέλεσθαι> (B16)

ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ'> ἢ λέοντες
ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεςσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἅπερ ἄνδρες,
ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας
καὶ <κε> θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν
τοιαῦθ' οἷον περ καὶ τοὶ δέμας εἶχον <ἕκαστοι>. (B15)

In this second set of fragments it is thus possible to identify one of Xenophanes' central concerns and the cornerstone of his 'destructive' theology, namely, mortals' conceptions of the gods.

Taken as a whole, these fragments undoubtedly give the impression of being an attempt on Xenophanes' part to theologise in novel terms and to apply unprecedented argumentative strategies to the question of divine nature (see for instance the repetitive use of adversative constructions in 14,1;15,1; 25,1; 26,1). However, the extent of his originality is hard to measure and scholars still struggle to find an agreement even on the most fundamental issues. In order to adhere to the broader scope of this chapter, I will limit my discussion to two central themes of his constructive theology: the question of god's power and the related question of god's physicality/abstraction.

From the extant fragments, it does not seem that Xenophanes espoused monotheism, although this theory has been foisted upon him by ancient and modern commentators alike. Ancient doxography is soaked in Eleatic language and logic (e.g. Plato, A29; Aristotle, A28, 30; Simplicius, A31)¹²⁶ and the notion of oneness is often conflated with

¹²⁶ See Barnes 2002: 89 for an alternative list.

that of unity. Of course, this makes it hard to assess the reliability of what is reported. Our only direct evidence for a potential notion of ‘one single god’ is our fragment B23 (εἷς θεός) and even so the very next phrase, with its jarring ‘gods’ in the plural (θεοῖσι), produces serious difficulties for the supporters of this theory. Nonetheless, various scholars have attempted a defence of Xenophanes’ monotheism by dismissing the poet’s references to the gods as inconsequential allowances. Thus, for instance, in K.R.S it is argued that the expression ‘greatest among gods and men’ must be taken as a ‘polar’ usage of the kind used in Heraclitus’ fragment B30 (κόσμος τόνδε [...] οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν [...]) bearing no polytheistic implications.¹²⁷ Attention has also been placed on the emphatic position of the opening εἷς and further references to the gods in other fragments (e.g. B1; B14; B34) discounted as petty concessions made while speaking of the gods of popular superstition.¹²⁸ Finally, Barnes argued that Xenophanes was an ‘*a priori* monotheist’ and that the expression ‘greatest among gods and men’ should be regarded as ‘highly concise epitome’ of a logical argument against the possibility of a plurality of gods.¹²⁹

Personally, I do not regard the above interpretations compelling enough to make a solid case in favour of monotheism. I have already analysed the seriousness in tone of fragments 1 and 34, and considering the emphasis on true utterance about the gods given by the poet in those fragments, it would have been an astonishing carelessness on Xenophanes’ part to argue here for the existence of one single god by mentioning his superiority among a plurality of gods. Indeed, a slack handling of religious terminology in fragment 23 would be inconsistent with his preoccupation with pious utterance elsewhere declared. Moreover, considering the potentially revolutionary import of such conception, one may wonder along with Stokes, ‘whether a convinced monotheist in an unreceptive polytheistic society would cloud the issue by a mention of plural gods which is at best ambiguous, in the very context where he is firmly stating his revolutionary view’.¹³⁰ In conclusion to this point, I do not think that Xenophanes’

¹²⁷ K.R.S. 2007: 170. Cf. Barnes 2002: 603 n. 13, for further examples of polar expressions.

¹²⁸ Fränkel 1973: 331; Guthrie 1981: 1, 360-402.

¹²⁹ Barnes 2002: 92.

¹³⁰ Stokes 1971: 76.

mention of ‘gods’ in the plural can be dismissed a negligible oversight and that the notion of monotheism was not among his innovations.

Still, line 1 of B23 seems to suggest the existence of a single god of unsurpassable power: a divine entity incapable of being subjected by any other god or mortal. Because of it some scholars¹³¹ have chosen to describe the theological relation between the εἷς θεός and the other gods of B23 through the formula of ‘henotheism’, ‘a monotheism of perspective’ according to which there is only ‘one god on which everything else (including the other gods) depends’.¹³² The suggestion is no doubt seductive. However, insofar as this term was first coined to describe the early stages of Christianity, it inherits from that debate an emphasis on the numerical issue which is misplaced. In applying the term ‘henotheism’ to Xenophanes’ doctrine some caution must be called for.

Considering the fragments presented above, it should become immediately apparent how the numerical issue was not as much a concern of Xenophanes as it is ours. In particular, I fail to see any preoccupation with the question of *whom* to worship: instead a clear prominence is given to the question of *how* to develop an appropriate discourse about divinity. The language of B26, in which it is said that it is not ‘fitting’ (ἐπιπρέπει, 26, 2) for a god to move here and there, picks up the same normative way of thinking about divinity of fragment 1.¹³³ Additionally, although this thinker’s line of argumentation can hardly be reconstructed with any precision, it seems clear that no fragment contains anything one could count as a defence of god’s singleness.¹³⁴ It must hence be assumed that – within his explicit programme of moralization – Xenophanes’

¹³¹ Bonazzi 2016: 21, n. 58; Sassi 2013: 285; Warren 2007: 48. Cf. Gemelli Marciano, who in 2005: 118-34 and 2007: 348-9 argues that Xenophanes may have been inspired by the distinctively aniconic tradition of Persian religion. See Sassi 2013: 293ff. for a rejection of this nonetheless interesting theory.

¹³² Assmann 2004: 23.

¹³³ For this connotation of the verb cf. Leshner 1992: 111-2.

¹³⁴ Barnes 2002 attempts to show the logical and inferential connections between several divine attributes which he all see as deriving from Xenophanes’ initial monotheistic assumption. However I follow Leshner in believing that ‘The most serious difficulty with these reconstructions is that there is not a single instance within Xenophanes’ explicit comments on *this* subject, of that systematic, inferential, or logical point of view’, 1992: 116.

interest in the divine was qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. My following analysis will hopefully lend some support to this thesis.

Where then does the originality of Xenophanes' constructive theology lie? The answer to this question may be summarised as following: Xenophanes' theological innovation consists in having conceived of a 'single god of unusual power, consciousness, and cosmic influence' (B23-6),¹³⁵ whose grandeur required it to be ingenerated (B14), motionless (B26), and incapable of being subjected by any other force, or of being compared to mortals in either body, mind (B14; 23) or moral stand (which could be inferred from B11; 12).¹³⁶ Rather than focusing on the question of one or many, Xenophanes seems devoted to introducing a novel ethical notion according to which the divine should not be conceived as conflicting with the divine and according to which several theological properties must inevitably follow. In order to appreciate these properties' innovative value it is important to analyse the language in which they are couched and to contrast them directly with those ascribed to the gods of the Homeric-Hesiodic pantheon.

Of course, exceptional power and exceptional knowledge had already been associated with the gods, especially with Zeus, of the hexametric corpus:

Ζῆνα θεῶν τὸν ἄριστον αἰέσομαι ἡδὲ μέγιστον,
εὐρύοπα, κρείοντα, τελεσφόρον, ὅστε Θέμιστι
ἐγκλιδὸν ἐξομένη πυκινούς ὀάρους ὀαρίζει.
ἴληθ', εὐρύοπα Κρονίδη, κύδιστε μέγιστε. (HH. 23)

Similarly to the god of Xenophanes' B23, who is said to be μέγιστος among gods and mortals (ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι), in this Homeric Hymn, Zeus' grandeur is described in analogous terms: first, two superlative adjectives (with μέγιστος in the same metrical position as in B23) indicate his supremacy over the other gods (Ζῆνα θεῶν τὸν ἄριστον [...] ἡδὲ μέγιστον, then a sequence of three adjectives emphasise his exceptional awareness, authority and power (εὐρύοπα, κρείοντα, τελεσφόρον).

¹³⁵ Leshner 1992: 99.

¹³⁶ Cf. Barnes' discussion in 2002: 84-99.

Although the first two verses convey already by themselves the impression that this god must be not ‘like mortals in body or thought’, his wisdom is further emphasised by what represents the key-note of the composition: we are offered a picture of Zeus whispering words of wisdom (πυκινούς ὁάρους) in Themis’ ears as she leans over to listen. The composition with the internal object (ὁάρους ὁαρίζει) underlines both the physical utterance and the importance of this element: Zeus is a god who can speak words of wisdom to other gods.¹³⁷

A similar conception of Zeus emerges from the epic poems and is echoed in Solon’ elegiac poems (Ζεὺς πάντων ἔφορᾷ τέλος, 13.17). His far-seeing perspective and synoptic view (εὐρύοπα) is described by both Homer and Hesiod (*Il.* 8.51-2; *W&D* 267) and is probably a direct cause of his formidable knowledge of everything (εἶδ’ οἶδεν ἅπαντα, *Od.* 20.75). Similarly, Zeus’ power to accomplish things (τελεσφόρος) is famously epitomised by the Homeric depiction of a god who is capable of shaking great Olympus with a single nod (*Il.* 1.525-30) and to ensure thus fulfilment of a promise (οὐδ’ ἀτελεύτητον, ὃ τί κεν κεφαλῇ κατανέωσω, *Il.* 1.527). Is then Xenophanes’ critique of the Homeric-Hesiodic portrayal of the gods (B10-12) aimed only against its immoral content? Or does it also entail a reform of the way humans conceive of the supreme god in both the form of his body and the manner of his thinking?

With regard to this latter question, the second set of fragments (B14-16) is particularly revealing. Writing through the moralising humour of a genre later called *sillos*, Xenophanes condemns human conception of divinity by claiming that different races credit the gods with their own distinctive characteristics (B16) and, through a *reductio ad absurdum*, he couches the same point by saying that animals would do the same if they possessed humans’ means of representation (B15). The isomorphic fallacy is then extended beyond the relativistic conceptions of Ethiopians and Thracian to the whole of humanity in B14, in which οἱ βροτοί are criticised for believing the gods to be born, to wear clothes, and to have a voice and a body. Recent and extensive studies, by focusing

¹³⁷ And to Themis in particular. On the *Homeric Hymns*: Faulkner 2011; Richardson 2010; Rayor 2004; West 2003a; Crudden 2001; Zanetto 1996; Cassola 1991.

on B14 in connection to divine epiphanies, have convincingly interpreted it as a condensed critique of physical anthropomorphism of the kind which emerges from the Homeric poems.¹³⁸ In particular, the nowhere else mentioned ‘genetic fallacy’ has been related to the notion of the gods as those ‘who always are’ expressed by the traditional epithet αἰὲν ἔόντες (*Il.* 1.290; *Theog.* 21, 33, 105). In this way Xenophanes can be understood as ‘drawing out in an explicit fashion a latent contradiction’¹³⁹ in the poets’ conception of divine eternity, according to which gods are immortal but are also described as having been born in successive generations.¹⁴⁰ What is more, it should be noticed how, due to its mention of divine δέμας, B14 can be directly linked to B23: in this way the fragment can be read as a partial expansion of the notion that god *is not* like mortals with regards to its physical form (B23). However, it should also be noticed how its content is still expressed in negative terms, and nothing at all is added about the god’s νόημα. For further clues on how god’s mind differs from that of humans, one must turn to fragments 24-6 in which god’s properties are also avowed through a language that is affirmative.

Only from a close reading of these fragments is it possible to appreciate in full how drastically does Xenophanes depart from a Homeric/Hesiodic depiction of god’s body and thought. To begin with, as opposed to the Zeus of the epics, who is seen entering his abode, driving his chariot, sitting on his throne (*Il.* 1. 533; 8. 438-9; 8. 443) and all sorts of actions involving physical motion, Xenophanes’ god αἰεὶ δ’ ἐν ταῦτῳ μῖμνει κινούμενος οὐδέν (B26). Commentators have offered disparate interpretations of the reasoning that may have led Xenophanes to this idea,¹⁴¹ and it is particularly difficult to establish whether the notion of divine immobility sprang from a process of critical reflection on the Homeric/Hesiodic depictions of the gods or from a process of logical inference.¹⁴² All Xenophanes has to say about it is simply that movement is not ‘fitting’ (ἐπιπρέπει) for a god, and whatever opinion one may form about what reasoning

¹³⁸ Sassi 2013: 286ff; Lesher 1992: 86-9.

¹³⁹ Lesher 1992: 87; Heitsch 1983: 128.

¹⁴⁰ This seems confirmed by *Rhet.* 1399b where Aristotle reports that Xenophanes would have equated the impiety of those who say that gods die to that of those who say that gods are born, for both imply a time when gods were not.

¹⁴¹ See Lesher 1992: 112 for a discussion of the relevant literature.

¹⁴² See K.R.S. 2007: 170 and Barnes 2002: 85 for antithetical views on this point.

brought him to such conclusion is bound to remain a matter of speculation. One way or the other, it is evident that this conjunction of omnipotence and restfulness in Xenophanes' depiction of his god sharply departs from the Homeric tradition, in which divine swiftness was often singled out as a privileged indication of divine power.

Xenophanes' god is also endowed with telekinetic mental power: from his immovable position, and 'completely without effort' (ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο), he can 'shake all things by the thought of his mind' (νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει, B25). Now, two chief considerations must be made in relation to this fragment: one regards the choice of the words νοῦς and φρήν, the other regards the subtlety by which this fragment challenges the imaginary of the poetic tradition. In combining the words νοῦς and φρήν Xenophanes seems to suggest a cognitive relationship between these two entities which is difficult to establish and yet seems too emphatic to be dismissed as perfunctory. To begin with, in choosing two terms often deployed to designate a mental faculty, Xenophanes wants to stress here, no doubt, what Lesher defined as the 'god's sheer intellectuality'.¹⁴³ However, as demonstrated by Heraclitus' fragment B104 (τίς αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν;), a distinction in meaning between the two terms does exist and most commentators have attempted to preserve it in their translations.¹⁴⁴ As recently pointed out by Pelliccia, the Homeric νοῦς resembles 'our word "insight" in doing duty as both a faculty or process and its product; functionally sometimes opposed to the others as reason to emotion'.¹⁴⁵ Most importantly, νοῦς, as opposed to φρήν which is generally located in the chest (or near the diaphragm),¹⁴⁶ seems to lack a physical seat and tends to have an abstract meaning ranging across a wide spectrum: 'idea, thought, scheme, plan or other product of thought'.¹⁴⁷ Hence, if taken –as I think it should be– as a genitive of source,¹⁴⁸ I believe its meaning comes close to that of 'intentional thinking'

¹⁴³ 1992: 107; Cf. Fränkel 1973: 331.

¹⁴⁴ See Lesher 1992: 107 for a list of examples. With regard to Heraclitus' fragment however, Diano has argued that: 'le due parole non hanno valore tecnico: si potrebbe anzi dire che la disgiunzione eraclitea νόος ἢ φρήν vale quanto la congiunzione in Archiloco [...] ἀλλὰ σοῦ γαστήρ νόον τε καὶ φρένας παρήγαγεν', in D.S. 2001: 169-70.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. entry 'Mental Organs' in Finkelberg 2011: 509-10; similarly Webster: 'Nous, however, is a verbal abstract and verbal abstracts in Greek mean not only a process but also the agent or the result of the process', 1957: 149. The most important work on the organ words is Jahn 1987.

¹⁴⁶ e.g. ἐνὶ φρεσὶ καρτερὸν ἦτορ (Solon, 4c).

¹⁴⁷ Lesher 1992: 108.

¹⁴⁸ As opposed to a possessive genitive.

which would be appropriate to describe the origin of a cosmic shaking actuated by the mental activity of a god. However, insofar as φρήν is in principle the name of an organ,¹⁴⁹ the construction νόου φρενί represents an inversion of the relationship one would generally expect: even when the noun φρήν is used as a metonymy its meaning would shift from physical to abstract (i.e. ‘brain’ to ‘mind’) and for this reason, one would expect the relationship of these two terms to be the opposite: ‘the thought (νοῦς) of his mind (φρήν)’. Now, there are two possible explanations for Xenophanes’ choice: either φρήν has been subjected to a double metonymic shift (i.e. from ‘midriff’ to ‘mind’ to ‘thought’) as it begins to happen in post-Homeric poetry (e.g. θεῶν φρένας in Solon 4. 2) where it sometimes came to mean ‘intention’, or Xenophanes wanted the reader to perceive a certain degree of physicality in his description. In both cases, the general meaning would be ‘by the active thinking originating from his mind’, but the second reading has the advantage of introducing a semantic shade that would be rather in keeping with the notion of a thought capable of ‘shaking’ the whole of things. Seen against the tradition of the Homeric Zeus, who was capable of shaking great Olympus by a simple nod of his brow, Xenophanes’ fragment seems to be creating and playing with two important points of contrast: first, the sheer intellectuality of his god, his contrasted against the rudimentary conception of Homer’ anthropomorphic Zeus, and second, the horizon of what the god can reach is extended from mount Olympus to ‘the whole of things’, so as to remove any suggestion of the god’s locability and at the same time restate the god’s ubiquitous immediacy.

Finally, fragment 24 seems to round out this conception: if B25 describes the quasi-physical properties of god’s powerful thinking, B24 describes the god’s body in terms of pure awareness. In fact, following Leshner and Kirk I understand οὔλος as meaning ‘the whole complete in all its parts’,¹⁵⁰ and to read the fragment as conveying the notion that this divinity ‘has no separate organs of sense or thought’: thus, as Kirk translates, ‘All of him sees, all thinks, and all hears’.¹⁵¹ Indeed, the notion of an omniscient and omniscogitant being clashes with the notion of a separate νοῦς, and B25’s νόου φρενί must be then understood in the light of B24 as a thought originating from the ‘whole’

¹⁴⁹ Pelliccia 2011: 509; Jahn 1987; Webster 1957: 149.

¹⁵⁰ Leshner 1992: 103.

¹⁵¹ Kirk 2007: 170.

thinking being of the greatest god. Certainly such god can be claimed to be οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσι ὁμοῖος οὐδὲ νόημα (B23).

I shall close this section with some concluding remarks. It must be observed how Xenophanes' effort to conceive of the gods beyond the fallacy of physical anthropomorphism and in terms of moral excellence and cognitive superiority results in a curious blend of abstract and corporeal properties. The question of god's body (δέμας) and thought (νόημα) seems to engender several tensions (which had already been noticed by Aristotle, A30).¹⁵² This becomes evident when one considers some of his fragments together: whereas fragment 14 seems to suggest that god should be conceived entirely without a body, fragment 23 points rather to the notion that god does have a body, although unlike those of mortals. The same tension can be equally perceived in the remaining fragments: if god has a body, he does not, however, use it to move, for this would prevent him to act everywhere with the same immediacy (B26); moreover, god is bestowed with a synoptic awareness and mental power (B24; B25) which could hardly be available to normal organs, yet Xenophanes conveys it nonetheless through the language of sense-perception (ὁρᾷ/αἰκούμεν).

The tension between corporeal and non-corporeal elements in Xenophanes' description of the god is bound to be present in an account that, like this one, is caught between a tradition whose myths taught one to conceive of the gods in anthropomorphic form and the agenda to introduce a new way of thinking about divinity. It has been noted how in combining the idea of a motionless entity which shakes all things, Xenophanes 'seems to approach the Aristotelian concept of the unmoved mover';¹⁵³ however, the emphasis on god's superiority among other gods together with Xenophanes' lingering inclination to conceive of some aspects of his god in bodily terms, pull his conception simultaneously back towards the Homeric Zeus 'who sees from afar'.¹⁵⁴ In chapter 5.3,

¹⁵² On this point see Kirk's remark in K.R.S. 2007: 171.

¹⁵³ Broadie 2006: 211.

¹⁵⁴ When with Xenophanes philosophical theology began to be seduced by the idea of god's perfection, the very notion of perfection had yet to be detached from the realm of physicality. So, for instance, in order to provide a visual handhold within his highly abstract thought, Parmenides compares his notion of a perfect Being to a 'well-rounded sphere', offering thus a sense-based account of something otherwise highly abstract (B8.42-4). Cf. K.R.S.: 'Once again

I show how a similar alternation between abstract and corporeal depictions of the god can be found in Aeschylus' representation of Zeus. But first I must turn to the fragments of other Presocratic thinkers, whose reflection about the divine reached an entirely new extent.

we face a puzzling choice between a literal and metaphorical interpretation of "limit". [...] Parmenides [...] in making all reality a finite sphere introduces a notion whose own logical coherence must in turn be doubted', 2007: 253.

CHAPTER 2

God and the Unity of Opposites: Heraclitus

This chapter treats the two themes of god and unity and their relationship in Heraclitus' fragments. In focusing on these aspects of Heraclitus' thought, this chapter is inevitably indebted to a long and solid scholarly tradition, and has particularly benefited from the works of authors such as Fränkel, Kirk, Vlastos and Kahn.¹⁵⁵ However, the choice of these themes, which will prove especially fruitful in my study of Zeus, *dikê* and the unity of opposites in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, must not be misinterpreted: it is not an attempt on my part to claim that Heraclitus was, after all, a pure theologian and metaphysician.¹⁵⁶ Due to the cryptic language of his style and the dearth of authentic evidence, Heraclitus is among those thinkers who have been subjected to the most deforming type of extreme interpretations.¹⁵⁷ No doubt, past scholars interested in the theme of the divine in Heraclitus had to claim a right to its study against reductionist views of the kind that depicted him as a pure ancient logician¹⁵⁸ or physicist.¹⁵⁹

However, much work has been done since then to restore a certain balance of interpretation and, although some scholars persist in claiming that 'Heraclitus constructed [...] a physical science of a standard Milesian type',¹⁶⁰ it is nowadays possible to pay due attention to the ontological and theological aspects of his thought whilst preventing the pendulum from swinging too high in its reactionary sway.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Fränkel 1938: 230-44; Kirk 1951: 35-42; 1954; Vlastos 1952: 97- 123; 1955: 337-68; Kahn 1964: 189-203; 1979.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Vlastos: 'In any case, it is clear that the 'divinity' of his World Order is seriously meant as a genuine religious object which *could* be worshipped by the enlightened', 1952: 99; Burkert 'Heraclitus [...] combines radical criticism with the claim for a deeper piety to be derived from insight into the essence of being', 1985: 309 (partially rejected by Adomenas 1999); Fränkel: 'The paramount concern of the early Greek philosophers was metaphysics', 1938: 230 (later criticised by Kirk 1954: 197); Drozdek 2007 (criticised by Sassi 2009: 81).

¹⁵⁷ 'The truth is that Heraclitus attracts exegetes as an empty jampot wasps; and each new wasp discerns traces of his own favourite flavour', Barnes 2002: 57.

¹⁵⁸ Calogero 2012.

¹⁵⁹ In particular the 'positivistic' tradition (cf. Int. II. 4: n. 94.)

¹⁶⁰ Barnes 2002: 61.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Int. II. 4. Brann's recent volume (2011) represents a level-headed and most engaging presentation of Heraclitus' thought for the general public.

Heraclitus' enquiry was a far-reaching attempt to explain the workings of the universe in both its hidden 'nature' and its multifarious manifestations. As such, the content of his remarks – which ranges from the political to the ontological, from the natural to the cosmological, from the ethical to the psychological – is irreducible. All these aspects, I believe, converge within a single comprehensive framework. His theological fragments are themselves essential tesserae of this grand mosaic.

Just as Xenophanes does, Heraclitus too inveighs against Homer (B56; B42; B105) and Hesiod (B40; B57), rejecting their authority and mocking their supposed intelligence. It is therefore a twist of the knife when Heraclitus, in criticising Xenophanes as a 'polymath without insight',¹⁶² groups him together with Pythagoras and Hesiod: two figures severely criticised by Xenophanes himself. The fragment runs thus:

πολυμαθίη νόον ἔχειν οὐ διδάσκει· Ἡσίοδον γὰρ ἂν ἐδίδαξε καὶ
Πυθαγόρην αὖτίς τε Ξενοφάνεά τε καὶ Ἑκαταῖον (B40)¹⁶³

But what might Heraclitus' allegation be? Whereas, as shown above, Xenophanes refuted Hesiod's mythological account on the basis of its immoral portrait of the gods, and mocked the Pythagorean doctrine of the reincarnation of the soul (B7),¹⁶⁴ Heraclitus seems to focus on another target. At least, the notion of divine conflict, which much troubled Xenophanes about Hesiod and Homer, seems clearly to be accepted and even preached by Heraclitus himself, and it rather represents a fundamental point of contrast between the two.¹⁶⁵

The fragment is composed of two parts: the first one claiming that what we may translate as 'much learning' does not teach 'νόον', the second part being explanatory (γάρ) of the first one. With regard to the content, in the light of Heraclitus' positive

¹⁶² Broadie 2006: 213.

¹⁶³ DK edition (1964) unless otherwise stated.

¹⁶⁴ For a detailed commentary see Leshner 1992: 79-81.

¹⁶⁵ See Broadie 2006: 213. According to Aristotle in *Eud. Eth.* 1235a25, Heraclitus reprimanded Homer for wishing that conflict would vanish among gods and men, for this would prevent that harmony resulting from contrariety and opposition. Cf. B67; B53; B80.

remark about the practice of inquiring into many things (B35),¹⁶⁶ it must be inferred that ‘much-learnedness’ itself is not the problem.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the fragment does not condemn πολυμαθία *per se*; it simply claims that *savoir nombreux* alone does not guarantee either ‘insight’ or, depending on one’s reading of the object-noun, a ‘learned mind’. It is rather the virtue of νόος, or rather the lack thereof, in Hesiod, Pythagoras, Hecataeus and Xenophanes, that triggers Heraclitus to attack them as well as elsewhere to attack those who follow their teachings (B57; B104). We must therefore attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of such a notion – so salient in Heraclitus’ assessment of past and present authorities – in both this fragment and in the broader context of Heraclitus’ thought.

With regard to B40 the Greek allows for νόον to mean either ‘mind’ or – taking it as a kind of proleptic accusative of result – ‘insight’. However, the latter translation is more suitable and more attuned with the rest of the fragments. Apart from B40 and B140, in which the term is used to point out what other people’s knowledge falls short of, νόος also features in another revelatory fragment. In B114, 1, Heraclitus discloses the real *sine qua non* of every insight:

ξὺν νόῳ λέγοντας ἰσχυρίζεσθαι χρὴ τῷ ξυνῶ πάντων [...]

Through a masterly deployment of homonyms, the Ephesian reveals what one must by necessity (χρὴ) rely on (ἰσχυρίζεσθαι) in order to speak with insight (ξὺν νόῳ λέγοντας): insight depends on ‘what is common to all’ (τῷ ξυνῶ πάντων), where ‘the word “all” can be taken to mean simply “all mankind” or “all things” (including mankind)’.¹⁶⁸ Most cunningly, the present punning enables Heraclitus to establish both an internal link as well as an external link with other fragments. If on the one hand the paronomasia ξὺν νόῳ/τῷ ξυνῶ works as a powerful stylistic device to emphasise the

¹⁶⁶ B40, as suggested by Kahn 1979: 105, could perhaps be read in conjunction with B22, in which the painstaking work of the gold miner could be held as a paragon for the hard work of the inquirer.

¹⁶⁷ Although, some scholars seem to think so: Kahn 1964: 191. Heraclitus’ attitudes towards ‘polymathy’ and *historia* remains controversial: although the majority of scholars agree that ‘polymathy’ should be regarded as a necessary but not sufficient condition to develop insight (Hussey 2006), there are still some dissenting voices (Granger 2004: 235-61).

¹⁶⁸ Robinson 1987: 155.

internal connection between the two concepts of ‘insight’ and ‘commonality’, at the same time it seems meant to resonate with several other fragments (ἄξύνετοι, 1,1; 34,1; ξυνόν, 103, 113; τῷ ξυνῶ, 2,1; ξυνοῦ, 2, 2).

Indeed, each of these fragments adds important nuances to the twofold message conveyed by B114, namely that ‘everyone’ or ‘all things’ are linked together in some important way and that human insight must be based on such understanding. Since, once juxtaposed, fragments 2 and 113 seem to restate the message of 114 with remarkable force and clarity, they can be selected here for special attention:

διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ ξυνῶ. τοῦ λόγου δ’ ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ
πολλοὶ ὥς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν. B2

ξυνόν ἐστι πᾶσι τὸ φρονέειν B113

Once again the two main ideas of B114 are repeated: the necessity of following ‘what is common’ (χρὴ τῷ ξυνῶ/δεῖ τῷ ξυνῶ) as well as the epistemological claim that humankind possess a common faculty that, when properly exercised, would put them in contact with ‘that which is common’. However both notions are presented here enriched by further details as well as bonded by an even stronger tie. Heraclitus adds that ‘although (the) *logos* is common’, the majority of people live as if they had a ‘private understanding’ (ἰδίαν φρόνησιν); they live as such although thinking (τὸ φρονέειν) is common (ξυνόν) to all.

Similarly, the same notion can be glimpsed in B1, in which, in order to express the fact that humans are uncomprehending of the *logos*, Heraclitus calls them ἄξύνετοι, that is, deprived of that ‘collective’ faculty that is at the core of every *cum-prehensio*. In this sense, being ἄξύνετοι neatly corresponds here to having an ἰδίαν φρόνησιν; what is common (the *logos*) can only be grasped by what is common to all (τὸ φρονέειν), and in order to speak mindfully, to use the *logos* (λέγοντας) with insight (ξὺν νόῳ), one has to follow what is common (τῷ ξυνῶ) and eschew what is private (ἰδίαν).

Returning now to fragment B40 from which we started and in which Heraclitus claims that much-learnedness does not teach insight (νόον), it is possible to advance the hypothesis that Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus have been grouped together because of their (alleged) inability to follow ‘that which is common’.¹⁶⁹ Heraclitus probably does not deem their knowledge to draw strength from that which is ξυνός, and which in the fragments I quoted thus far is sometimes defined as the *logos* (B2), sometimes as a certain way of thinking (B113), and that in the rest of B114 is most noticeably compared to the law of a city-state (ὅκωσπερ νόμῳ πόλις) that like ‘every human law’ (πάντες οἱ ἀνθρώπειοι νόμοι) is nourished by ‘one divine law’ (ὑπὸ ἐνὸς τοῦ θείου).

The selection of these four names, far from being random seems to include only authoritative names who represent various attempts to provide exhaustive accounts of reality and who undeniably share a pronounced interest in divinity: the mythological approach of Hesiod’s *Theogony* is coupled with – the ‘other face’ of Greek religion – Pythagoras’ mystical wisdom, and the duo is then followed by two embodiments of the contemporary critical attitude: Xenophanes and his theological innovations are paired with Hecataeus and the demythologising spirit of his genealogy. As suggested by Broadie, then, we may suppose that, among other things, ‘Heraclitus saw himself as theologising, and as doing it better than these others’.¹⁷⁰

But what may then be the relationship between Heraclitus’ discourse about the divine and his recommendation to heed ‘that which is common’? This question cannot be answered before a clearer understanding of what ‘that which is common’ is has been achieved. During my analysis of B40, I have been led to touch upon the theme of ὁ ξυνός in several fragments and I have lingered in particular on B114, B2, and B113. However I have deliberately refrained from defining ‘that which is common’ – this theme will be further investigated next.

¹⁶⁹ A survey of this debated topic is beyond the scope of this chapter. Cf. Gomperz 1912, and more recently: Robinson 1987: 107; Kahn 1964: 191; Dupont-Roc 1971: 5-14; Burkert 1972: 210; Babut 1976: 464-496; Marcovich 2001: 64ff; Broadie 2006: 213; Hussey 2006: 89-90.

¹⁷⁰ Broadie 2006: 213.

2.1 *That which is common*

There are two chief observations to be made regarding what Vlastos sees as Heraclitus' peculiar doctrine.¹⁷¹ First, Heraclitus claims several things to be common: besides B2, B113, and B114 (quoted above), in which the *logos*, thinking, and the law are defined as *ξυνός*, in B80 and B89 the same adjective is attributed to conflict (*πόλεμος*) and the world (*κόσμος*) respectively.¹⁷² The sweeping resonance of this adjective bears philosophical significance: the connection between spheres usually thought as separate – such as the personal, the political, and the universal – is marked through style before being declared in content. Second, the notion of commonality is linked, through the notion of *logos*, to that of unity:

Τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδε ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασι [...] B1.1-4

διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ ξυνῷ. τοῦ λόγου δ' ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὥς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν. B2

οὐκ ἐμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφὸν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι. B50

The shift from the notion of commonality to that of unity can be sensed most strikingly in the comparison of B2 with B50. If in B2 Heraclitus claims that *logos* is common and therefore it should be followed, in B50 he reveals what can be achieved by following the *λόγος* *ξυνός*. Once again, a poignant pun (*λόγου/ὁμολογεῖν*) emphasises – and creates – a significant connection between two elements of the sentence, and the action described in B2 as ‘following that which is common’ is here more specifically described as an act of ‘agreement’. It is not sufficient to have listened (*ἀκούσαντας*) to the *logos*,

¹⁷¹ Vlastos 1947: 166.

¹⁷² Although B89 employs its variant *κοινός*. For this and other linguistic reasons the fragment has been doubted (Diels, Reinhardt, Walzer and Kirk). However, I believe the philosophical content of the fragment to reflect Heraclitus' genuine thought. Cf. Robinson 1987: 138 and D.S. 2001: 112 for arguments in favour and against the authenticity of B89.

one has to be *δμόλογος* with it, lining up one's own *logos* to the general *logos* that Heraclitus encourages everyone to follow. Thus, like the pun on the words *ξυνός/ἄξύνετοι* which links B2 to B1 and the way they deal with the question of proper understanding, B50 is in turn related to the same question by means of another *jeu de mots*.

The *incipit* of B50 with its stark contrast between Heraclitus-the-speaker and a more impersonal spoken-*logos* (οὐκ ἐμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου) is particularly noteworthy. Because of it, B50 – together with B1 and B2 – has been at the heart of the heated controversy over the meaning of *logos*.¹⁷³ According to Kirk, since ‘a contrast between a speaker and his *λόγος* is too bizarre’, this fragment perfectly exemplifies his theory that *logos* cannot be assimilated to Heraclitus’ word and it must mean ‘something outside himself’.¹⁷⁴ By contrast, those who identify *λόγος* with Heraclitus’ account see no large difficulty in distinguishing between Heraclitus as an individual and Heraclitus as the spokesman of a universally valid and objective message.¹⁷⁵ The next word of the fragment, the aorist participle ἀκούσαντας, which of course tightens the bond between B50 and B1, is also relevant for this controversy. A great many times the point has been made in the scholarship about this fragment that the verb ‘to hear’ is perhaps more suited for a discourse than for a ‘pattern’ or ‘formula’, and equally numerous have been the responses arguing that the verb can also mean ‘to obey’ or ‘pay attention to’.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ There are three main schools of thought: first, those like Kirk 1954: 38 who deny that ‘there is any reference implied by the word *λόγος* in B1 or any other extant fragment to the actual words or teaching of Heraclitus. Cf. also Marcovich 1975: 326; 2001: 8; Fattal 2005: 61, 67-8; and Guthrie 1952: 96, although the latter is willing to accept that *logos* is first of all the message Heraclitus brings. Second, those who argue the opposite: *λόγος* in B1 cannot mean anything else except Heraclitus’ word. (Burnet 1945: 133; West 1971: 124-29; Robinson 1987: 114; Dilcher 1995: 12-13; D.S. 2001: 111; cf. Hussey 2006: 92-3, who writes that ‘at the most basic level, Heraclitus’ *logos* coincides with what Heraclitus is saying: it is the story about the way things are’ [...] yet its authority ‘can be none other than the impersonal kind of authority that is intrinsic to *reason* or *rationality*’. Third, those who argue in favour of a mixed interpretation (cf. n. 177).

¹⁷⁴ 1954: 67

¹⁷⁵ E.g. West 1971: 127; Robinson 1987: 114; D.S. 2001: 111.

¹⁷⁶ Brann 2011: 16-17. Indeed against Robinson’s point that ‘one does not listen to patterns, or structures’, 1987: 114, it can be argued that one does not listen *only* ‘to persons, and the things they say’.

The question is thorny and I do not suggest that a straightforward answer can be given. However, I am inclined to join those scholars who think that no reductive interpretation of Heraclitus' *logos* can – and should – be provided.¹⁷⁷ My main reason for thinking this is the deliberate complexity of Heraclitus' style.¹⁷⁸ B1 is a case in point. The length of every commentary *ad loc.* testifies to the extreme ambiguity and richness of Heraclitus' verbal construction.¹⁷⁹ Even more than Xenophanes, Heraclitus displays a preoccupation with careful utterance and unremitting faith in the inexhaustible resources of language that is perhaps only matched by Aeschylus: both excelled not in 'shimmering ambiguity but in fixed equivocation: clear meanings, but two' – or more – 'at once'.¹⁸⁰ Because of my firm belief in the intentionality of Heraclitus' ambiguous formulation, I am inclined to think that by λόγος he intended both his own account as well as the (intelligible) expression in language of the cosmic structure according to which all things are one.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Kahn in 1964: 192: 'from the very first sentence of his book, Heraclitus' use of the word *logos* reflects the fundamental ambiguity of the term: on the one hand, a specific utterance, on the other hand, an orderly relationship between things which is reflected in discourse, including the quantitative relationship reflected in a calculation or ratio'; (Cf. also 1979: 98-100). This position is shared by Diels, Kranz, Busse, Gigon, Minar (see surveys indicated below), and more recently by Robinson 1987: 77; 114; Sassi 2009: 152; Graham 2010:186-7; and Brann 2011. One could add those interpretations who add/substitute the meaning of 'Truth' to that of 'discourse': Gigon 1935: 4ff.; Mazzantini 1945; Marcovich 2001: 8. This conception is rejected by both Kirk 1954: 40 and D.S. 2001: 102. For a good survey cf.: Kirk 1954: 33-47; Z.M. 1961: 24; 151-61; D.S. 2001: 90-108 and p. 101 n. 1-2 in particular. For studies on the polyvalence of the term λόγος at Heraclitus' time and the intentional ambiguity of the philosopher's style: Minar 1939: 323; Kahn 1964: 191; 1979: 87-100; Fattal 2005: 58-69; Brann 2011: 10-13. More on the use of *logos* in Heraclitus: Guthrie 1981: 420-24, Calogero 2012; Verdenius 1967; Fattal 2005; Johnstone 2009; Brann 2011.

¹⁷⁸ For word-puns see Snell 1926: 369-73. For the use of *formulae* see Fränkel 1938: 309. For two details analysis of the structure of B1 see Kirk 1954: 46-7 and D.S. 2001: 105.

¹⁷⁹ E.g.: fourteen pages in Kirk and twenty in D.S. In the following translation I try to convey part of this ambiguity: *Of this logos that (always) is (true) humans are (always) uncomprehending both before and after they have heard it. Although everything happens according to this logos they are like people of no experience.*

¹⁸⁰ Brann 2011: 23. Cf. Kahn 1979: 87-95 who argues that Heraclitus uses *resonance* and *linguistic density* to convey philosophical meanings. By *resonance* Kahn refers to the way passages are stylistically linked together, by *density* he refers to the multiplicity of ideas expressed by a single word or phrase. See also Emlyn-Jones 1976: 96 who speaks of 'elliptical mode of utterance' and 'deliberately paradoxical' language, and Sassi 2009: 155ff. who speaks of 'costruzione intenzionale di un testo polisemico' (p. 159). The comparison with Aeschylus is not new: cf. Kahn 1964: 193 and 1979: 7: 'The literary effect he aimed at may be compared to that of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: the solemn and dramatic unfolding of a great truth, step by step, where the sense of what has gone before is continually enriched by its echo in what follows'.

Thus, with κατὰ τὸν λόγον in B1, I believe that what is being said is both that everything happens ‘as explained in this account’ but also ‘according to an ordered, reasonable, and harmonious pattern’. Moreover, as conveyed through the energetic protreptic tone of B2 and B50, Heraclitus insists that his message should not be passively assimilated, since everyone must actively *comprehend* it (refer also to B114 above). Heraclitus’ λόγος is a proper formulation derived from a correct agreement – a correct ὁμολογεῖν – with ‘that which is common’, yet everyone possesses the epistemological faculty to recognise the content of the λόγος. It should be added here that it is precisely due to the λόγος manifesting itself in discursive terms that reality’s latent harmony is accessible to each human being; it can be heard and followed and eventually Heraclitus’ own voice can be put to rest (B50).¹⁸¹ But what wisdom (σοφόν ἐστιν) does one gather from following that which is common? Here is the λόγος’s announcement: ἔν πάντα εἶναι.

2.2 *Everything is one*

[...] ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστιν ἔν πάντα εἶναι. B50

συλλάψεις ὅλα καὶ οὐκ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον [καὶ]¹⁸² ἐκ πάντων ἔν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα. B10

ἔν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτῃ κυβερνᾶται¹⁸³ πάντα διὰ πάντων B41

So, if in the last part of B50 Heraclitus declares that it is wise to agree that ἔν πάντα εἶναι, it is perhaps also wise to question the meaning of such a declaration: what kind of unity is this? Kahn has gone as far as to declare that the proposition ἔν πάντα εἶναι ‘is the earliest extant statement of *systematic monism* [...] ever made in

¹⁸¹ ‘Heraclitus likens the possession of real knowledge to the comprehension of language, and the structure of the world to the structure of language’, Curd 1991: 531.

¹⁸² καὶ Graham.

¹⁸³ ὅτῃ ἐκυβέρνησε DK. Cf. n. 233.

Greece'.¹⁸⁴ Kirk and Marcovich, crediting Heraclitus with the same primacy of intellectual achievement, talk instead of a unity that *lies under* all existing things.¹⁸⁵ Both definitions reflect their authors' lopsided emphasis on unity and distort Heraclitus' meaning through the anachronistic lenses of post-Eleatic (Kahn) and post-Aristotelic (Kirk) language and concepts. In particular, the widespread habit of describing the Heraclitean notion of unity as a 'substratum' or as something 'underlying' and 'essential' betrays an understanding of the relationship between unity and diversity as a relationship envisaged in hierarchical terms. According to this view, the separateness of things in the world is regarded as apparent and superficial and its unity as something more essential.¹⁸⁶ This dichotomy cannot be right, and some fragments seem indeed to suggest that the opposite may also be true. For instance in B48, B60, and B61 it seems rather that a fundamental diversity or contrariety is concealed under an apparent unity. Hence, I believe that Heraclitus regarded unity and diversity as having an equal ontological status. Since a full defence of this position has already been offered by Emlyn-Jones,¹⁸⁷ I will limit myself here to a few textual observations.

Taken together, these fragments display a remarkable feature: each deploys a different combination of the adjective nexus εἷς/πάντα to express the notion of unity. Once again, an important philosophical point is conveyed through careful formulation: there is unity, yes, but a unity made out of a plurality. Indeed, the plural form πάντα, in keeping with the general tendency of the archaic Greek language to use the plural for abstract concepts, was a standard way to denote the whole of reality.¹⁸⁸ Yet, it may be presumed that Heraclitus perceived in this linguistic tendency another instance of the λόγος's capacity to mirror the basic structure of reality. Thus the plural form πάντα, used as a collective singular, reflects the plurality of the apparently disconnected

¹⁸⁴ Kahn 1979: 131, emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁵ Kirk 1954: 70; Marcovich 2001:106, emphasis mine. The notion of an 'essential unity' or a 'substratum' is widely shared and is suspiciously akin to Aristotle's οὐσία.

¹⁸⁶ 'Heraclitus [...] stresses the first or synthetic view *against* the second, conventional, analytical approach. [...] he considered that wisdom lay in being able to regard them synthetically', Kirk in 1954: 176 (emphasis mine).

¹⁸⁷ 1976.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Ch. 1.1. Also, see Mourelatos 1973, where he argues that the notion of the world as a collection of discrete and unconnected things underlies much archaic Greek literature.

phenomenological world, about which the veridical λόγος, imposing the yoke of the numeral adjective, also declares the simultaneous unity.

Moreover, the accusative-plus-infinitive construction of B50 allows for a certain ambiguity to persist: in between ἕν and πάντα it is not clear which one must be taken as the subject and which as the predicate. Thus, syntax conveys that equal reality is to be attributed to both elements: ‘everything is one as well as one is everything’ expresses an identity which works both ways round.¹⁸⁹ This back and forth from a synthetic and analytic perspective on the notion of unity is best exemplified by B10 and the last part of the fragment in particular, ἐκ πάντων ἕν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα, where the difference between the two segments separated by καί is, as Hackforth describes it, that in the former ‘the world is a differentiated *unity*’ whereas in the latter ‘the world is a *differentiated* unity’.¹⁹⁰ A temporal reading¹⁹¹ of the preposition ἐκ would not be in keeping with the first part of the fragment, in which the same concept is anticipated in alternative terms. Rather, ἐκ should be understood as marking the theoretical shifts of perspective¹⁹² from differentiation to unity and vice versa.

The first part of B10 allows us to introduce another key-notion in this philosopher’s thought: namely, that unity is, above all, a unity of opposites. Eschewing any uniformity of expression, a substantial number of fragments describe opposites (or engender oppositions) of various kinds, and although scholarly opinion is divided on what kind of unity they each time involve, the fact that they represent a basic pattern in Heraclitean thought is undisputable.¹⁹³ B10 falls into this pattern, yet not as squarely as it is sometimes assumed.¹⁹⁴ Already Kirk chose to locate this fragment after those he believes display concrete examples of the opposites’ different modes of unity, and following Snell, argued that those B10 contains are not characteristically Heraclitean

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Dilcher 1995: 101.

¹⁹⁰ Cited in Kirk 1954: 179.

¹⁹¹ See Gigon 1935: 20ff and 40ff and Kirk’s rejection of it in 1954: 172ff.

¹⁹² Or ‘dialectical movement of thinking’, Adoméas 1999: 112.

¹⁹³ For a variety of opinions on Heraclitus’ opposites cf. Kirk 1954: 166-201; Emlyn-Jones 1976; Kahn 1979: 185-204; Mackenzie 1988: 1-37; Dilcher 1995:103.

¹⁹⁴ *Contra* Gigon

pairs of opposites.¹⁹⁵ The noun συλλάψεις (Lorimer, Snell, Kirk, Marcovich, Kahn, D.S.), which is preferable to συνάψεις (DK, Burnet, Gigon) because the corruption from the former to latter is more likely than the converse,¹⁹⁶ is enigmatic and most commentators have assigned it a sense, like that of Snell's *Zusammensetzungen*, that is supposed to be exemplified by the three pairs of opposites that follow.¹⁹⁷ Kahn, adding a further nuance, translates it instead as *graspings* to be understood 'both in the physical and the cognitive sense'.¹⁹⁸

Translation problems aside, the most important points to be made here are two on which most commentators concur: first, συλλάψεις is clearly subject rather than predicate; second, ὅλα καὶ οὐκ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον differ from the more concrete and specific pairs of opposites deployed in other fragments (e.g. B88), in that they are raised from the particular to the universal. Whereas opposite like day and night, waking and sleeping, etc. are directly instantiated in nature in a way that humans can concretely experience, the three pairs of opposites of B10 are conceptual antitheses reached through a binary logic of the kind of 'yes' and 'no'. Thus, as the products of basic affirmation and denial, conceptual antitheses like those described by 'whole and not whole' could hypothetically be applied to any subject.

In virtue of these characteristics, it has rightly been observed that B10 can be taken as a sort of summary of Heraclitus' doctrine of opposites.¹⁹⁹ Hence, once agreed that ἐν πάντα εἶναι, it is also wise to agree that the comprehensive reality described by the nexus ἐν πάντα is a unity-plurality pervaded by opposites. The impression of this pervasiveness may be strongly sensed in the last fragment quoted above (B41), in which πάντα διὰ πάντων is another powerful linguistic artifice expressing the notion of a pluralized totality. This fragment, strongly linked to B50 by means of verbal parallels (σοφόν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι, B50, ἐν τὸ σοφόν [...] πάντα διὰ πάντων B41), will be more thoroughly analysed in the following sections in which I will show, among

¹⁹⁵ 1954: 72; 202.

¹⁹⁶ D.S. 2001: 126.

¹⁹⁷ 1941: 84-7. See Kahn 1979: 281 for a survey of translations.

¹⁹⁸ 1979: 282.

¹⁹⁹ Kahn 1979: 283.

other things, that πάντα διὰ πάντων can be fully understood only in the light of Heraclitus' doctrine of the 'divinised' opposites.

2.3 *God and the unity of opposites*

In Heraclitus, 'god' is one of the names employed to address the unapparent unity in which opposites find themselves combined:

ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός.
ἁλλοιοῦται δὲ ὅκωσπερ <?>,²⁰⁰ ὁκόταν συμμιγῇ θυώμασιν, ὀνομάζεται
καθ' ἡδονὴν ἐκάστου. B67

Echoing the stylistic structure of B10, ὁ θεός is here placed in apposition with four pairs of eight nouns in the nominative. This list of nouns, together with the comparative clause that follows, amounts to the only explicit definition of deity in Heraclitus' extant text²⁰¹ and thus deserves careful consideration.

Obviously, the importance of this fragment has not gone unnoticed and its content, style, and philosophical significance have been the object of special attention by Fränkel, Kirk, Deichgräber, and Kahn.²⁰² Other fragments dealing with the divine sphere can be divided into two groups: those which deal with it explicitly and those which refer to an ultimate power or entity transcending traditional anthropomorphic conceptions of god(s) but that would have been nonetheless perceived as retaining divine properties. Among those containing explicit mention of the divine sphere, three major sub-groups can be identified: a first group refers to specific gods in mythical terms (B15, B23; B28; B94),²⁰³ a second refers to generic 'gods' in order to restate the traditional divide between divine and human knowledge (B78, B79, B83, B102),²⁰⁴ and a third creates a mysterious equivalence between mortals and immortals as an instance

²⁰⁰ <πῶρ> DK.

²⁰¹ Kahn 1979: 277; Robinson 1987: 127.

²⁰² Fränkel 1938: 230-44; Kirk 1954: 184-201, Deichgräber 1963: 490-6 (a summary of which can be found in Marcovich 1965: 305) and Kahn 1979: 276-81.

²⁰³ Although almost never in a traditional sense.

²⁰⁴ Few other fragments (B5, B24, B30) refer to gods and human in parallel terms. Cf. n. 254.

of the *coincidentia oppositorum* (B62). However, some fragments (e.g. B30, B53, B80, B90) seem to invoke supreme principles. In two instances, these are overtly contrasted with the notion of ‘god’ as traditionally understood: B30, in which ever-living fire is said not to have been made by either gods or men and B53, in which war is said to render some gods and other men.

Hence, B67 stands out as a unique theological dictum, in that it conflates traits from both sets of fragments: it refers to a single god but without using a specific name or recognisable mythical attributes, and this god is described as a higher entity akin to those like war, justice and fire. Most importantly, as will become apparent through careful textual analysis, Heraclitus’ configuration of unity and oppositions in B67 is elevated, by means of vigorous stylistic synthesis, to the rank of divine matter.

The fragment is formally divisible into two sentences whose syntactical peculiarity has been effectively brought out by Kahn’s commentary.²⁰⁵ Connected by the particle δέ, these two sentences are characterised by a sharp formal contrast: the first amounts to a list of nine nouns in the nominative lacking any verbal connection, the second, however, is introduced by the verb ἀλλοιοῦται, and develops in a complex comparative clause containing a temporal subordinate (ὅκωσπερ ὀκόταν) and lacking (unless we provide one) any subject noun. It is in this ‘formal asymmetry’ that Kahn finds a ‘*prima facie*’ reason for resisting the editorial temptation to introduce a subject noun into the sentence’.²⁰⁶ This issue is much debated and most editors, finding that no sense could otherwise be restored, print some noun after ὅκωσπερ. Although ‘fire’ (DK) has perhaps been the most popular, other suggestions such as ‘air’ (Zeller), ‘myrrh’ (Heidel) and ‘olive oil’ (Fränkel) have been attempted.²⁰⁷ However, since as admitted by Kirk ‘the implication of the image is the same’,²⁰⁸ the real question is whether a subject should or should not be provided. Leaving this question temporarily open, I shall next consider each portion of the fragment individually. I will return to this problem later in

²⁰⁵ Kahn 1979: 276-7.

²⁰⁶ 1979: 277.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Kirk 1954:191ff who himself prints πῦρ.

²⁰⁸ 1954: 197.

the course of my analysis, after more light has been shed on the content of this important saying.

It is crucial to note that the four pairs of opposites are organised in chiasmic order²⁰⁹ AB-BA CD-DC that can be divided into two parts: ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη and χειμὼν θέρος are derived from the natural sphere and πόλεμος εἰρήνη and κόρος λιμός are derived from the human and social sphere.²¹⁰ The chiasmus establishes a strong sense of interconnectedness between the two parts. Moreover, as already recognised by Hippolytus – whose comment on this sequence was: τὰναντία ἅπαντα, οὗτος ὁ νοῦς – the formal symmetry according to which these four pairs of opposites are organised suggests that they stand for all other contraries in the universe.²¹¹

In light of this, B67 seems to share a unique feature with B10 and scholars often study them in conjunction.²¹² Just as in B10, opposites are elevated from the particular to the universal in B67, yet each fragment achieves this through a different method. Whereas B10 focuses on the modes of unity and contrariety between opposites rather than on concrete examples, B67 employs concrete and (probably) emblematic specimens of opposites²¹³ only to assert the unity of *all* pairs of opposites in the figure of god. Nevertheless, some of the conclusions reached at the end of my analysis of B10 will bear on my evaluation of the nature of this identification and, as a consequence, of the nature of ὁ θεός.

As already partially anticipated, the impression of fixity created by a definition composed of a list of nouns without any verbal connection is shaken by a series of circular conceptual movements: the cyclic alternation ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη and χειμὼν θέρος, applied by means of stylistic symmetry to some aspects of the human condition πόλεμος εἰρήνη and κόρος λιμός, as well as the universal value of oppositions

²⁰⁹ Day (warmth-light = +) night (cold-darkness = -) winter (cold-darkness = -) summer (warmth-light = +) | war (hardship = -) peace (comfort = +) satiety (comfort = +) hunger (hardship = -).

²¹⁰ Marcovich 2001: 415.

²¹¹ A point on which most commentators since Fränkel 1938: 231-2 concur.

²¹² Kirk 1954: 166; Emlyn-Jones 1976: 107 and Kahn 1979: 276-86.

²¹³ See Emlyn-Jones 1976: 106 and Kahn 1979: 279.

conveyed through chiasmic disposition. Now, it is interesting to notice how the chiasmus generally highlighted by scholars – one based on a negative-positive alternation AB-BA CD-DC – is contained within a larger chiasmic figure. Night and day can in fact be interpreted as a daily expression of the yearly opposition of winter and summer: a smaller cycle within a larger cycle. Similarly, hunger and satiety can be related to war and peace through a causal link (war causes hunger, peace brings satiety) and as individual consequences of larger socio-political premises. In this way, AB can be perceived as being contained in BA and CD as containing DC, so that the whole sequence ab-BA CD-dc is enclosed within the larger chiasmus x-X Y-y (contained-containing-containing-contained).

This device bears on our reading of the fragment in several ways. To begin with, it reinforces the thesis that this list must be taken as standing for ‘all opposites’. It can be read metonymically as ‘concrete for abstract’. Then, the chiasmus x-X Y-y, focusing more on the relationship between the various ‘unities’, emphasises their role as inseparable nexuses (the inseparability of day from night, winter from summer etc.) and interlocking pieces of a harmonious whole (days within seasons, seasons within years, etc.). The hidden, yet fundamental, harmony produced by the unity of opposites that is alluded to here through style is more explicitly addressed in other fragments. For example, it is seen in the *παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη* of the bow and the lyre (B51b) or by the *ἁρμονίη ἀφανής* being better than one *φανερή* (B54) and echoes of it can be probably heard in the equation between *δίκη* and *ἔρις* (B80).²¹⁴

In virtue of their juxtaposition with the only unpaired noun *ὁ θεός*, these unities-in-opposites find a place of identity or *coincidentia* in the notion of god. The importance of the difference between unity (*ἐν*) and identity (*τὸ αὐτό*) has been thoroughly explored by Emlyn-Jones with whom I fully concur.²¹⁵ Indeed, a major distinction between the various modes of the unity of opposites in Heraclitus is that between unity envisaged in terms of unavoidable succession – such as day and night – and unity envisaged as *coincidentia*. By *coincidentia* I mean the kind of simultaneous unity which can be

²¹⁴ B80 is analysed in Ch. 3.3.

²¹⁵ Emlyn-Jones 1976.

recognised in things like the way up and the way down (B60), the bow-life whose job is death (B48), and the straight and crooked way of writing (B59); or which can be recognised in actions like living and dying (62), being and not being, entering and not entering (B49), wanting and not wanting (B32).²¹⁶

Hence, the first half of B67 appears to be very dense in meaning and to contain allusive references to all levels of Heraclitus' thinking about opposites: their all-pervasiveness, their unity, the way their unity resolves at times in paradoxical identity.²¹⁷ Now some observations must be added with regard to the god/unities-in-opposites identity. First, it must be emphasised that this fragment claims that god is the unity of opposites as much as that the unity of opposites is god. It follows that an innovative representation of god depicted in terms of universal principle is counterbalanced by a characterisation of the unity-in-opposites in divinised terms.

A further circularity can be identified between ὁ θεός and the four pairs of opposites. God coincides with the unity of opposites as the unity of opposites coincides with god: ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα. Like in B10 the focus is simultaneously on the ἓν of god as much as on the πάντα of the united opposites. Moreover, just as the συλλάψεις can be perceived as being defined by each pair of opposites in turn – ὅλα καὶ οὐκ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον – as well as by all three pairs and the *kind* of oppositions they stand for taken together, in a similar manner, ὁ θεός is each pair of opposites that follows as well as the fundamental pattern they represent when they are taken as a whole. This is where the second part of the fragment adds an interesting nuance to the picture.

Whereas the first part of the fragment contains a definition of the relationship between god and the unity of opposites which is open to a multiplicity of perspectives, the second part of the fragment seems to adopt a more restricted outlook. The synoptic perspective of god as the sum of every unity of opposites recedes into the background while the specific identification of god with each pair of opposites gains prospective

²¹⁶ For important precautions on the use of this formula see Dilcher 1995: 103ff.

²¹⁷ On Heraclitus' paradoxes see Mackenzie 1988: 1-37.

prominence. The circular notion of god as each pair of opposites and of each pair as an unmistakable manifestation of the divine is thus explored through the idea of change and naming. The idea of ‘alteration’ is introduced by the first verb of the fragment ἀλλοιοῦται, while the idea of name-acquisition by the corresponding indicative ὀνομάζεται, so that a formal link is established between the two verbs. While the subject of ἀλλοιοῦται is clearly ὁ θεός, as mentioned above, the question of whether ‘god’ should be considered as well the subject of ὀνομάζεται is controversial and most editors resolve to provide a different subject-noun after ὅκωσπερ.

Kahn’s idea of holding ὁ θεός as the only subject of the sentence is attractive to the extent that it blocks out every possibility of interpreting ‘god’ as some form of unchanging substratum: god actually becomes other in kind (ἀλλοῖος). The simile introducing another term of comparison (whether fire, oil or whatever it might be) may induce us instead to conceive of change as something only apparent. However, notwithstanding Kahn’s shrewd argument in favour of it,²¹⁸ I still think, together with Kirk, that the idea of either god or any of the pairs of opposites ‘being mixed with spices’²¹⁹ is intolerable. Perhaps then fire, considering its centrality in Heraclitus’ fragments relating to change (B30, B31a, B90) and its treatment as divinised element (B66, B90),²²⁰ remains the best guess, provided that some fundamental points of interpretation are clearly stated.²²¹

The first point to be made regards the aforementioned link between ἀλλοιοῦται and ὀνομάζεται. Those critics who hold the view that god must be understood as some sort of underlying substance tend to interpret ἀλλοιοῦται in connection with ὀνομάζεται as describing a superficial change: the sort of alteration involved in the acquisition of a

²¹⁸ 1979: 279-81.

²¹⁹ 1954: 191.

²²⁰ In Graham’s words: ‘the substance that is not a substance, the substance that is a process’, 1997: 37. Lack of space prevents a longer discussion. In brief, I believe that fire was a privileged element for Heraclitus for it allowed him to express through an apparently Milesian category the notion of ‘unchanging change’ (see below). The resonance between the two expressions ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα (B10) and πυρός τε ἀνταμοιβή τὰ πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἀπάντων (B90) is indeed worthy of notice.

²²¹ This philological problem is extremely difficult and I feel inclined to suspend any definite judgment – some important philosophical problems related to this part of B67 can be discussed regardless of the textual solution adopted.

different name. Yet, this reading does not do justice to Heraclitus' attitude towards language and names, which are regarded as having the same ontological status as reality.²²² Only by assuming that names represent something real about the object they are attached to can the bow mentioned in B48 be understood as such a stark instantiation of the paradoxical unity of life and death. Indeed, the opposition between name and function presupposes that the two hold the same degree of reality; according to any other interpretation B48 would read as saying something extremely banal or unworthy of mention. Instead, we know that elsewhere (B51b) the bow has earned together with the lyre the status of object-token of that *παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη* on which the cosmos rests. Hence *ὀνομάζεται*, if anything, reinforces the notion of change introduced by *ἄλλοιοῦται*, instead of watering it down.

In my opinion then, B67 states that *ὁ θεός* undergoes real change. What sort of change is this? The first part of the fragment suggests, most likely, a change from one pair of opposites to the next, although the fact that *ἄλλοιοῦται* may also apply to change between opposites themselves cannot be entirely ruled out.²²³ Meanwhile, circularity of style makes clear that god cannot be identified with any of its specific alterations *per se*. God is not an underlying and unchanging substance,²²⁴ but ceaseless alteration; as such, it can be compared to the back-turning harmony mentioned in B51b. Whereas the bow and the lyre owe their function to the 'back turning harmony' produced by the tension between their opposed extremities, god is the ultimate unity in which all pairs of opposites can meet in harmonious tension. The fragment expresses thus in theological language one of Heraclitus's fundamental principles: the notion of unceasing change. The interminable dialectical movement produced by the careful disposition of words in B67 shows that only a skilfully arranged *λόγος* could capture and convey the ever-eluding definition of *ὁ θεός*.²²⁵

²²² Calogero 2012: 88ff, Kirk 1954: 198ff.

²²³ Kirk 1954: 198; Marcovich 2001: 417.

²²⁴ E.g. *contra* Robinson 1987: 128.

²²⁵ For a similar point about 'change itself' being 'unchanging' *cf.* Nehamas 2002: 50.

2.4 *Wisdom, immanence, separation and governing plan*

The theme of god and naming is also central to fragment B32, which, together with B41, can be used to endorse some of the conclusions reached above in my analysis of B67.

ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα (B32)

ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτετι κυβερνᾶται πάντα διὰ πάντων (B41)

Both fragments begin with the same subject-group ἐν τὸ σοφὸν and are therefore strongly linked together through the common theme of wisdom. Whereas in the former, ἐν τὸ σοφὸν seems to establish a link between the two spheres of wisdom and the divine, in the latter it immediately harks back to the teachings of the λόγος, according to which it is wise (σοφόν ἐστίν) to agree that everything is one (ἐν πάντα εἶναι, B50).²²⁶ Next I will analyse each of these two fragments in turn.

The beginning of B32, ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον, yields innumerable readings, the most exhaustive survey of which can be found in Kirk.²²⁷ To begin with, I believe that μοῦνον should be read with the subject rather than with what follows.²²⁸ Kirk and Marcovich, adopting the same punctuation (two commas: one after ἐν, another after μοῦνον), translate ‘One thing, the only truly wise’²²⁹ and ‘One (being), the only (truly) wise’²³⁰ respectively. Thus, following DK, they interpret μοῦνον as limiting the attribution of σοφόν, even though μοῦνον does not occupy in this sentence an actual attributive position (i.e. ἐν τὸ μοῦνον σοφόν).

²²⁶ σοφόν has a forth occurrence in B108, another controversial fragment which, due to space restrictions, regrettably cannot be discussed.

²²⁷ 1954: 393.

²²⁸ So, for instance, by reading μοῦνον together with the noun at the end of the phrase: ‘to be called by the name of Zeus only (or ‘alone’). For this most unnatural position cf. Hoelscher and West, reviewed in D.S. 2001: 164.

²²⁹ Kirk 1954: 392

²³⁰ Marcovich 2001: 445.

However, reading *μοῦνον* together with *ἐν* has its disadvantages too: primarily that of having to allow a very weak meaning of *μοῦνον*. This is the problem, for instance, in Diano's solution – 'One thing only, wisdom'²³¹ – in which *ἐν* is the subject and *τὸ σοφόν* its apposition. Kahn's solution has the same and yet a further formal problem: leaving the whole devoid of punctuation, he translates *ἐν* as predicate, 'The wise is one alone'. This reading results in broken syntax between the first and the second part of the fragment. No doubt, the fragment is difficult and (I believe) intentionally ambiguous, so that the effort to reduce its meaning to one exclusive reading is probably misplaced. Rather, it seems more sensible to assume that stylistic ambiguity may testify here for Heraclitus' effort to appropriate, as we shall see, the term *τὸ σοφόν* to a new use.

To turn away from details of textual interpretation, it is clear how in this fragment Heraclitus playfully interacts with traditional ideas and definitions of god and divine wisdom. In the previous chapter, I discussed Xenophanes' fragment 23, in which 'one god' is said to be 'unlike mortals in body or thought', as well as several other fragments in which god's sheer intellectuality and mental power is further stressed and developed (B25). Although in other Heraclitean fragments, the superiority of divine knowledge to human knowledge is expressed in comparable terms to Xenophanes' B23 (e.g.: *ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει*, B78), Heraclitus' B32, together with B67, begins to give shape to a profoundly new conception of deity and wisdom.

Read in close connection to Xenophanes' 23, Heraclitus' 32 presents a reversed disposition of its elements; whereas the former begins with the notion of a single supreme god (*εἷς θεός*) and ends with a remark about its intellectual superiority (*νόημα*), the latter begins with the notion of a single wise thing or wisdom (*ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον*) at the same time accepting and refusing a nominal identity with the supreme god of traditional mythology (*Ζηνὸς ὄνομα*). The impersonal neuter *ἐν*, as opposed to the Xenophanean masculine *εἷς*, marks an even more dramatic break with the anthropomorphic conception of god. The transpersonal representation of deity conveyed by the subject *ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον* reminds us of the highly non-

²³¹ 'Una sola cosa, la sapienza', in D.S. 2001: 33. Kahn 1979: 267.

anthropomorphic god of B67 and its identity with a sequence of united pairs of opposites. Indeed, the very first determination of this ἐν τὸ σοφόν is precisely provided by its paradoxical will: οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει must be understood – just like ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντα in B10 – as a simultaneous rather than temporal process. The uniqueness of this wisdom is *prima facie* expressed through a further tension of opposites: it is a wise thing (or wisdom) that ‘wants and does not want’ something at the same time.

What is wanted and not wanted is of course the name of Zeus: a further playful rebuke against traditional mythology. Just like Xenophanes’ εἷς θεός who retains some of the characteristics that poets often attribute to the chief Olympian, Heraclitus’ god may be understood as retaining some of Zeus’ qualities while rejecting others. However, as most commentators remark, the choice of using Ζηνός instead of Διός (used in B120) points perhaps to a deeper reading. The play on the words Ζηνός-ζῆν, through which the name of Zeus is linked to the verb ‘to live’, was in fact a popular one at the time and employed, for instance, by Aeschylus (*Suppl.* 584ff) and Plato (*Crat.* 396aff). In the context of Heraclitus’ fragments, names and etymologies must of course be taken seriously, so that the connection between Zeus and the principle of life, after which ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μῶνον accepts and refuses to be named, allows us to suggest a tentative link between B32 and other fragments. Similarly to B48, in which the name of the bow is ‘life’ in spite of its function of bringing death, the antithetical will of ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μῶνον to be called by the name of ‘life’ may point to the fundamental antithesis of life and death so present in Heraclitus’ thought.

Hence, especially when examined in the light of B67, B32 can be seen as partially reaffirming – by means of puns and subtle formulations – a notion of deity envisaged in terms of the unity of opposites. The two fragments not only share the important themes of identity and names, but also those of antithesis and paradox. Of course, B32 contains an important additional element, for it establishes a significant link between the two notions of deity and wisdom. This link is reiterated in the next fragment we shall discuss (B41), the opening words of which entirely match, with the exclusion of μῶνον, those of B32.

Already cited above in connection with other fragments which describe the whole of reality in terms of a pluralised unity, this fragment brings our enquiry full circle. Indeed, as previously shown, the expression πάντα διὰ πάντων is best understood in light of B10 as an interlocking plurality of opposites. That conclusion can now be brought together with some of those reached more recently. Thus the discussion will develop through two major points: first, I shall argue that B41 must be also understood in close relation to B67 and B32 as a further development of the theme of the divinised opposites; second, I will argue – against extreme transcendent interpretations²³² – that Heraclitus’ attempt to appropriate the notions of wisdom and god to a new use contains a tension between the two conceptions of immanence and separateness.

The text as we have it is corrupt and of the current emendations suggested, I am tentatively inclined to follow, together with Marcovich among others, that which assigns γνώμη the meaning of ‘plan/ordinance’ and prints the feminine form of ὅστις in the dative (ὁτένη) together with the present κυβερνᾶται.²³³ The central point is that there is only one kind of wisdom: the knowledge (ἐπίστασθαι) of that γνώμη which governs the whole of reality.²³⁴ What does γνώμη mean here? Is it related to the γνῶμαι of B78, which Heraclitus claims to be exclusive ownership of the divine? Indeed a γνώμη that governs the whole of reality seems to retain divine associations. But are we to understand it as an independent entity, some form of consciousness, that, similarly to Anaxagoras’ νοῦς, is separate from the cosmos about which it has full knowledge (γνώμην γε περὶ παντὸς πᾶσαν ἴσχει, B12. 9)?²³⁵ In the context of this and other fragments, I believe that this transcendent interpretation should be rejected. Rather, as a divine principle, γνώμη is best understood as a plan, ordinance, or the like, which acts on reality through reality itself: πάντα διὰ πάντων. Once again, I think

²³² Reinhardt 1959: 205.

²³³ This solution was conjectured by Deichgräber 1938: 14 n. 5 and accepted by Vlastos 1955: 352ff. and Marcovich 2001: 449ff. For extensive discussions and alternative choices: Robinson 1987:108 (ὁτένη ἐκυβέρνησε); Kirk 1954: 386 (ὅκη κυβερνᾶται); Kahn 1979:170ff (ὅκη κυβερνήσαι).

²³⁴ I reject a reading of γνώμην as an internal accusative to ἐπίστασθαι (Heidel, Reinhardt, Gigon and Kirk) as highly unusual. Kirk argues in favour of it in 1954: 388ff. This interpretation is criticised by Vlastos 1955: 352ff, Guthrie 1981: 429, Marcovich 2001: 451 and D.S. 2001: 114.

²³⁵ On the topic of ‘mind’ in Anaxagoras’ B12 cf. Leshner 1995: 125-42 and Laks 1993: 19-38, 2002: 7-31.

that Heraclitus is referring here to the divine principle of the unity of opposites, a principle inherent in the world.

Both the imagery evoked through the verb κυβερνᾶν and the formulation πάντα διὰ πάντων point to this inherent conception. If Anaximander's ἄπειρον was similarly described by Aristotle as all-governing, it was indeed also described as all-embracing (καὶ περιέχειν ἅπαντα καὶ πάντα κυβερνᾶν, A15+B3). In Heraclitus' B41 the expression διὰ πάντων represents an important point of contrast with the notion of περιέχειν. Far from operating from outside the universe as an all-embracing principle, Heraclitus' γνώμη is that immanent principle according to which everything is governed through everything else. Although the primary meaning of the preposition διὰ is probably causal, the beautiful nautical metaphor allows for the expression διὰ πάντων to be read in a locative sense as well.²³⁶ This vivid imagery has poetic force: by following the divine ordinance of a cosmic helm, everything is steered through the ocean of everything.

The divine in Heraclitus coincides with this 'ocean' and the ordinance that regulates the movements of everything through this harmonious whole: to realise that is to have gained the one and only wisdom there is. But if ὁ θεός is one thing with the whole universe, this universe must be conceived as a collection of united opposites (B67). Heraclitus' conception of deity is as far as it could get from anthropomorphic depictions, yet in his theology there is no room for 'absolute transcendentalism'.²³⁷ In other words, god is the plan, the wisdom, and the principle according to which ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ ἐξ ἐνός πάντα (B10): to hold on to the metaphor of B41 a bit longer, it is the pluralised unity of reality which is stirred by its own internal governing principle (πάντα διὰ πάντων).

However some scholars, especially those who, as discussed above,²³⁸ are inclined to lay special emphasis on unity to the disadvantage of plurality, seem to recognise 'one being,

²³⁶ Kirk 1954: 390.

²³⁷ Kirk 1954: 399.

²³⁸ § 2.

the only truly one’ as ‘a transcendent metaphysical principle’.²³⁹ Two fragments in particular could offer some ground for this kind of perspective:

τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει Κεραυνός B64

ὁκόσων λόγους ἤκουσα οὐδὲις ἀφικνεῖται ἐς τοῦτο ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅ τι²⁴⁰
σοφόν ἐστι, πάντων κεχωρισμένον B108

In B64 the idea of a ‘thunderbolt that steers all things’ may suggest governance from afar. The employment of the κεραυνός, Zeus’ traditional weapon, may also be taken as a metonymy for divine agency. Moreover, because its verb οἰακίζειν recalls κυβερνᾶν, B64 is often read in conjunction with B41, and the transcendent interpretation extended from one to the other or vice versa.

The second fragment, B108, is one out of four – the remaining three we all saw above (B32, B41, B50) – which contain the neuter form of σοφός. The first half of the fragment ‘Of all those whose accounts I have heard, none has got so far as this:’²⁴¹ makes it clear that its primary context is within Heraclitus’ polemics against πολυμαθία.²⁴² A possible reading of κεχωρισμένον is, as recently pointed out by Nehamas, that of ‘different’, in the sense that what Heraclitus reveals is ‘radically different from what ordinary views of the world suggest’.²⁴³ Yet a stronger sense of the fragment could perhaps be that which reads σοφόν, usually in conjunction with B32, as referring not to wisdom but to a Wise Being²⁴⁴ ‘set apart’ (κεχωρισμένον) from everything else.²⁴⁵ In this way, the fragment could convey the notion of what Reinhardt defined ‘an intelligence beyond all things’.²⁴⁶

²³⁹ Marcovich 2001: 446.

²⁴⁰ ὅτι Graham.

²⁴¹ Tran. by Kahn 1979: 114.

²⁴² E.g. Kahn 1979: 114; D.S. 2001: 170.

²⁴³ Nehamas 2002: 47. See also Marcovich 2001: 441, Mackenzie 1988: 11 n. 24, and Kirk 1954: 399.

²⁴⁴ So Marcovich in 2001: 441, although he then argues that this being must be understood not as separated but as different from ‘traditional ideas of god’.

²⁴⁵ Robinson 1987: 152;

²⁴⁶ 1959: 205.

These objections can be easily dismissed. With regard to B64, it is obvious that Heraclitus is engaging with the traditional concept of Zeus' weapon to turn it into something new. Just as in B32, in which ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον is willing and unwilling to be called by the name of Zeus, the thunderbolt of B64 is and is not Zeus' traditional weapon. As most commentators have already supposed, the thunderbolt should perhaps be associated with the notion of (divinised) fire,²⁴⁷ and it seems to me yet another vivid symbol expressing the notion of a divine principle that is immanent in the world. With regard to B108, even if one wanted to insist on the (unlikely) notion of a wise being or wisdom set apart from everything, it must be immediately clarified that separation does not necessarily imply transcendence.

As explained above with reference to the expression ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντα, Heraclitus often uses figurative movements to describe conceptual shifts of perspective. Similarly, if σοφὸν were to be conceived as the divine being of B67 and B32, I think that its separateness (κεχωρισμένον) should be taken as another conceptual shift. The following statement by Curd can be contrasted with that of Reinhardt: 'Heraclitus presumes that the object of knowledge is something real, unified and apart; this assumption is itself a part of a metaphysics of things'.²⁴⁸ Just as the discourse (λόγος) about things is common to them, yet it can be conceived of separately (χωρίς), so god is one with the whole of the universe, yet may be conceived as ὁ θεός.

To sum up, both B32 and B41 are key to our understanding of the theological aspects of Heraclitus' philosophy. Each of them picks up and develops in a specific direction some of the ideas contained in B67 (and other fragments) concerning the divine sphere. In particular, they explore the notions of divine names and divine immanence further as well as containing more allusions to the theme of the unity of opposites. Most notably, these two fragments have in common the theme of wisdom and are important for an understanding of Heraclitus' effort to appropriate this concept to a new use. Only now, after each fragment has been individually discussed, can I conclude my analysis with a general remark about the connection between human and divine wisdom.

²⁴⁷ Leshner 2006: 233; Marcovich 2001: 424-5; Kahn 1979: 271ff.

²⁴⁸ Curd 1991: 538.

Apart from some remarks on the epistemological divide between gods and humans, Heraclitus seems to hold that all human beings share the capacity to understand (B113, B116).²⁴⁹ Most poignantly, when humans come close to that which is σοφόν they automatically seem to come closer to the divine sphere in its broader sense. Or, to use Leshner's words, they seem to gain 'cosmic insight'.²⁵⁰ Let us finally bring together the four relevant fragments for a brief collective examination:

[...] ὥστε γινώσκειν ὃ τι σοφόν ἐστὶ πάντων κεχωρισμένον B108

[...] ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι. B50

ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτετι κυβερνᾶται πάντα διὰ πάντων
B41

ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μούνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα B32

Since the general meaning of these sayings has already been explored, I can here direct my attention to the striking resonance and peculiar use of the neuter σοφόν. In each case the presence of this word announces a special kind of knowledge, one deriving from the ξυνὸς λόγος and leading to the understanding that everything is one (B50) and that everything is stirred through everything (B41).

Whereas the majority of interpreters agree that in B108, B50, and B41 σοφόν must refer to human knowledge while B32 to divine knowledge,²⁵¹ nevertheless Heraclitus' curious choice of ἐν τὸ σοφόν in B32 and B41 has engendered some disagreement. For instance, according to Robinson, ἐν τὸ σοφόν in B41 is equivalent to that in B32 and must be taken as referring to 'some transcendental, divine principle of wisdom'.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Hussey 2006:104ff.

²⁵⁰ Leshner 1983: 160.

²⁵¹ Cf. Leshner 2006: 233: 'Not surprisingly the Zeus-like power that sets the limits for all natural processes and transformations is said to be supremely wise [...] while wisdom (presumably in us) consists in understanding how it operates'.

²⁵² Robinson 1987: 107.

Or, according to Kahn the σοφόν of B108 and B41 admits both ‘human and cosmic readings’.²⁵³ Similarly to Kahn, I agree that these texts contain a deliberate ambiguity and converge into a unitary conception in which divine and human boundaries are blurred.²⁵⁴

Accordingly, B32 may, among other readings, also be regarded as the apex of Heraclitus’ attempt to narrow the distance between the human and the divine domains: it is not only the notion of deity that through paradoxes and antitheses is mysteriously brought to designate some form of higher wisdom, but also that of wisdom that is elevated from the human sphere to the divine one. Is this convergence of the divine and the human spheres a further manifestation of opposites united?

ἄθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοὶ ἄθάνατοι, ζῶντες τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον, τὸν
δὲ ἐκείνων βίον τεθνεῶτες. B62

That Heraclitus conceived of mortals and immortals as another manifestation of the unity of opposites emerges clearly from this doubly chiasmic dictum. Indeed, there is a certain allure to the idea that Heraclitus might have conceived of wisdom as that place in which humans reached their own unity-in-opposites.

In conclusion, Heraclitus encouraged his fellowmen, against the polymathic knowledge of poets, to pursue an entirely new epistemological horizon. Endowed as they are with the common faculty of λόγος, humans are naturally predisposed towards an understanding of the cosmos’ latent structure, and as such they must reach for it. Not least, because in the attainment of wisdom lies humans’ chance to approach the divine. Indeed, in striving to gain a novel insight into the workings of the universe, Heraclitus might well have seen himself as theologising, and as doing it better than those who came before him.

²⁵³ Kahn 1979: 171.

²⁵⁴ For a range of perspectives on human and divine knowledge cf. Kahn 1979: 171; Curd 1991; Dilcher 1995: 148-57 (a curious existential perspective); Leshner 2006: 232ff.

CHAPTER 3

Cosmic Justice and the Metaphysics of Opposites: Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides

In his companion to *Eumenides*, Mitchell-Boyask writes: ‘It is important to keep in mind that the Greek word for justice, *dikê*, involves not just the redressing of injuries but also the natural order. It is a term that, in Aeschylus especially, has cosmic implications.’²⁵⁵ But what does it mean exactly for justice to have cosmic implications and whence has Aeschylus derived this notion? The purpose of this chapter is to lay the grounds for my study of cosmic justice in the *Oresteia*.

In the introduction I focused on the retaliatory nature of *dikê*. The idea of retributive justice, as the Chorus in *Choephoroi* say, is an ancient one (τριγέρων μῦθος, 314) and one that was certainly familiar to the preceding poetic corpus. There, I argued that Aeschylus inherited from the tradition what I defined as a ‘bifurcated’ conception of divine justice. In particular, I focused on the notion of retributive justice in Homer, Hesiod, Solon and the *Theognidea* as well as the question of Zeus’ relationship to a fixed order of superior necessity. I maintained that the paradoxical coexistence in the *Oresteia* of two antithetical poetic attitudes towards divine justice – one projecting benevolence onto the gods, one projecting tyrannical force – may be interpreted as a further dramatic development of paradoxes and dilemmas already raised by the poets of the archaic period.

However, there is something innovative about the way in which Aeschylus weaves the idea of retributive justice into the fabric of the trilogy. The confinement of this ‘basic pattern’ – as Gagarin calls it – of ‘action followed by reciprocal reaction’,²⁵⁶ within the boundaries of the family allows the idea of retributive justice not only to be presented in an intensified form,²⁵⁷ but also to acquire an unprecedented contour: as pointed out by

²⁵⁵ 2009: 106. Deforge 1986 adds very little to this topic, cf. Comber 1988.

²⁵⁶ 1976: 60.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Vickers 1973: 347.

Garvie, what is new is the way in which Aeschylus uses it ‘to connect the successive tragic events in a seemingly endless chain of crime and vengeance’.²⁵⁸ A chain that in its inexorable recurrence nearly comes across as a self-regulating mechanism in which a crime is always the direct result of a similar crime and is therefore its punishment as well as its perpetuation.

Now, whence has Aeschylus derived this notion of justice? Why is it portrayed with those exact contours and not others? Why did Aeschylus elect a notion of justice resembling a self-regulating mechanism for his tragic purposes? This set of questions leads the present inquiry. It is my contention that the innovative conception of justice developed within the philosophical speculations of the period has important analogues in the dialectical structure of the *Oresteia*. But what was so innovative about *dikê* in Presocratic thought? The purpose of this chapter is precisely to provide an exposition of the broadened significance acquired by *dikê* in the writing of some of Aeschylus’ near-contemporary thinkers.

3.1 *Dikê in the archaic period*

Thanks to his survey of *dikê*-related words in the archaic period,²⁵⁹ Gagarin was able to point out the genuine contribution of Presocratic speculation for the expansion of *dikê*’s semantic scope. Whereas one can find only few non-legal uses of *dikê*-words in the archaic period, Gagarin maintains that *dikê* as law in its broadest sense is expanded into a universal force by the Presocratics.²⁶⁰ Havelock’s study of *The Greek Concept of Justice* also reaches similar conclusions: namely that the application of the term is – thanks to early philosophical speculations – ‘extended operationally to cover the behaviour of the external world’.²⁶¹

In the Homeric poems, *dikê*-words rarely transcend a fundamentally behavioural and judicial meaning: its use is particular and situational and it signifies for the most part a

²⁵⁸ 1986: 125.

²⁵⁹ See in particular 1973: 81-94; 1974: 186-97.

²⁶⁰ 1974: 187.

²⁶¹ 1978: 271.

principle of correctness in settling disputes.²⁶² Although in some passages *dikê* includes a sense of general righteousness (e.g. *Il.* 16. 388),²⁶³ ‘justice’ as an abstract normative principle does not appear.²⁶⁴ It might be helpful to recall a few key-examples. The description of the city at peace on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18.490ff represents perhaps the most powerful poetic representation of this archaic conception of *dikê*. Most poignantly, Homer includes among the blessings of an ordered communal life (such as weddings) a description of the legal proceedings conducted by the city’s judicial institutions in the case of homicide. It is a solemn scene: the dispute takes place before a gathering of elders who, sitting on polished stones in a sacred circle, strive to give ‘the most righteous judgment’ (δίκην ἰθύντατα, 18.508).²⁶⁵ *Dikê* is also given a similar meaning in the context of Homer’s ironic description of a property dispute in the *Hymn to Hermes*. In the quarrel between Hermes and Apollo over Apollo’s cattle, following Apollo’s suggestion each party pleads his case before Zeus (δὸς δὲ δίκην καὶ δέξο παρὰ Ζηνὶ Κρονίωνι, 312). In both *Iliad* 18 and *HyHerm*, *dikê* carries a technical and judicial meaning: it is used to settle legal disputes among both men and gods and plays a fundamental role in the maintenance of social order and peace. *Dikê* as conservation of existing mores is best described as a form of public negotiation that replaces physical conflict.

With Hesiod and Solon, we undoubtedly witness the increased importance of *dikê* as a theme: *dikê*-words occur primarily in connection with concepts of social well-being, righteous acquisition of wealth, and prosperity (ὄλβος, χρήματα, κέρδος, πλοῦτος κτλ.), and although the semantic scope of the term remains for the most part attached to the socio-political sphere,²⁶⁶ the term ‘as compared to Homer, mirrors an increased level

²⁶² Gagarin 1974. Although his articles represent still key studies of *dikê* in the Archaic period, I do not believe that what Gagarin identifies as two separate senses of *dikê*, the legalistic one and the behavioural one, can be regarded as strictly separate. Gagarin 1973: 82-6 argues that the legalistic sense of *dikê* is confined to the *Iliad* while its behavioural sense to the *Odyssey*. However, both Dickie 1978 and Cairns 1993: 152-6 (see in particular n. 21 at p. 153) have persuasively demonstrated the rigidity of such distinction to be unwarranted.

²⁶³ Dickie 1978; Cairns 1993: 152-6; Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 149.

²⁶⁴ Havelock 1978: 13-4.

²⁶⁵ A much debated scene: disputes still remain over the exact nature of the legal issue at stake, the role played by the ἵστωρ, the γέροντες, and the talents displayed. Cf. Edwards 1991: 213ff. Relying on Edwards’ commentary (p. 218), I here assume that μετὰ τοῖσι refers to the elders.

²⁶⁶ Solmsen 1949: 107-123; Pearson 1962: 46; Gagarin 1973; 1974.

of abstraction and the rise of an internal moral compass'.²⁶⁷ However, even when it is brought about by Zeus' will, such as when Hesiod says that a whole community can suffer as a consequence of one man's evil deeds (*W&D*, 238-47),²⁶⁸ *dikê* operates in an economic context with political implications.²⁶⁹ And while it is undoubtedly true that with Hesiod the concept of *dikê* is first isolated as a specific topic (it is first 'brought into the realm of discourse'),²⁷⁰ it is also true that the author seemed more preoccupied with what *dikê* did rather than with what *dikê* was. In this sense Havelock is accurate in describing Hesiod as 'proto-conceptual'.²⁷¹

Within the context of Solon's political and legal measures, *dikê* is conceived as that which stops the excess of citizens and creates equilibrium in Athens (4W²; 13W²).²⁷² It is difficult to assess whether and at what point *dikê* becomes a sort of immanent socio-economic principle of balance,²⁷³ or whether, by describing *dikê* as such, Solon's departure from Hesiod would be exaggerated.²⁷⁴ It is indeed true that Solon's linguistic coherence in speaking about *dikê* – she is often introduced through gnomic aorists (4.16; 13.8) – and his emphasis on the unavoidable fixity of her role in preserving political order²⁷⁵ represent a shift from the Hesiodic model. It is probably best to assume that various attitudes towards *dikê*, all revolving around the poet's socio-political concern with his city, coexist within the Solonian corpus. However, it must be also remarked that Solon's faith in the consistency of *dikê*'s intervention denotes a vigorous certainty that is quite distinct from the hopeful attitude expressed instead by Hesiod (*Op.* 217ff.). Just as I will argue is the case for Aeschylus, some of the new

²⁶⁷ Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 149.

²⁶⁸ See Int. II: 18.

²⁶⁹ Gagarin 1974: 192.

²⁷⁰ Havelock 1978: 249.

²⁷¹ 1978: 232.

²⁷² Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 138.

²⁷³ Jaeger 1966: 89-3; Vlastos 1946; 1947. For a radically different perspective: Wolf 1972 (1953): 146ff. and Lloyd-Jones 1983: 44ff. who stress the theological character of *dikê* in both Hesiod and Solon.

²⁷⁴ Balot 2001: 86ff who follows to a certain extent Gagarin 1974; Havelock 1978: 256-62, according to whom Solon is merely the didactical organizer of ideas of justice already scattered in the Hesiodic poems.

²⁷⁵ Notice the frequency of the adverb πάντως ('assuredly', 'at any rate', 4.16; 13.28, 31, 42, 55)

layers of meaning acquired by *dikê* in Solon are best understood in the light of the Presocratic developments of the notion of cosmic justice to which we shall now turn.

3.2 *Dikê as a metaphor of cosmic order*

The development of the notion of *dikê* into a cosmic force is a subtle and fascinating process. Evidence is of course scant, but we are lucky enough to possess a few pivotal fragments that, when closely examined, may help us shed light on the essential steps which must have led to this intellectual achievement. Let's examine first two fragments which are rarely brought together:

ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστι τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι
κατὰ τὸ χρεών· διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις
τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν [...]. (Anaximander DKA9,
B1)²⁷⁶

ἐξ ἀνέμων δὲ θάλασσα ταράσσεται· ἦν δέ τις αὐτὴν
μὴ κινῆ, πάντων ἐστὶ δικαιοσύνη. (Solon 12W.²)

The 'seductive ease' – as Vlastos has it – with which the early Greek notion of justice is applied to contexts that transcended its original meaning is here particularly evident.²⁷⁷ Both fragments in question unmistakably apply the language of *dikê* to spheres of meaning well beyond the most immediate legal connotations of the term. Borrowing the poetic and legalistic language of *dikê*, Anaximander and Solon seem here to have turned *dikê* into some 'law of measure' imposing restrictions in nature not to be overstepped.

²⁷⁶ 'and out of those things whence is the coming-to-be of existing things, into these things again their destruction takes place according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of time.' For this translation, here provided for the sake of clarity, I borrowed Kirk's felicitous 'coming-to-be' for γένεσις (K.R.S. 2007: 108).

²⁷⁷ 'The early Greek notion of justice lends itself with seductive ease to applications far beyond the bounds of politics and morals', Vlastos 1947: 156.

The metaphors introduced by the two fragments stand to each other in a relationship of inversion. Whereas Anaximander forged through the notion of *dikē* a complex metaphor to account for the phenomenon of physical change in the natural world, Solon borrowed a naturalistic image in order to apply it to a political situation.²⁷⁸ In this much debated distich, the sea is said to be the most ‘just’ of all other elements when it is undisturbed by the winds, in that, when calm, it is not itself a source of disruption for anything else. The trope of the sea-storm as an allegory for socio-political turmoil had antecedents (Alcae. 208; Archil. 105) and finds perhaps an important point of comparison with another Solonian fragment: 9W². Here, the force of snow and hail coming from a single cloud (ἐκ νεφέλης) is compared to the power of the tyrant (i.e. μόναρχος, ‘the single man in power’). As pointed out by Noussia-Fantuzzi, the use of the preposition ἐκ in 12W.² (ἐξ ἀνέμων) for provenance instead of the more commonly used ὑπό for the agent points to a parallel between the two fragments.²⁷⁹

The parallel would then suggest the equivalence between ἐξ ἀνέμων and ἀνδρῶν δ’ ἐκ μεγάλων on the one hand, and between θάλασσα and the πόλις on the other. As convincingly argued by Mülke θάλασσα is a best understood as a *comparandum* for πόλις (9. 3) rather than the subsequent δῆμος (9. 4) because the implication of the comparison are less likely to offend the class to which Solon belonged.²⁸⁰ In fact calling ‘juster’ the masses when not disturbed by the arrogance of the nobles would have created a disparity of judgment highly insulting for the aristocratic class. If however the sea corresponds, as I think it does, more generally to the πόλις in its entirety, its state of calmness can be understood as the harmonious socio-political equilibrium deriving from a righteous administration – Noussia-Fantuzzi compares it to the flourishing peace deriving from δίκας [...] ἰθείας in *Op.* 225-9.²⁸¹

What is interesting about these verses is that, even as a political metaphor, they betray a way of thinking about nature already charged with a notion of balance and reciprocity.

²⁷⁸ Even though Plutarch cites the verses after the inadequate introduction: ἐν δὲ τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἀπλοῦς ἐστι λίαν καὶ ἀρχαῖος. Cf. Gerber 1999: 127. That the image is meant to be taken as a political metaphor has been convincingly argued by Gentili 1975: 159-62.

²⁷⁹ 2010: 319.

²⁸⁰ 2002: 228. Cf. Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 320.

²⁸¹ 2010: 320.

The calmness of the sea stands out as a paradigm of justice and the suggestion that its tumultuous state should be conceived as a reaction against exterior disturbance conveys the idea of an element endowed with a self-spontaneous energy ready to work for the restoration of its ‘natural state’. Such a notion of an intrinsically harmonious universe, self regulated by a cosmic law of nature, is probably one of the most distinctive features of archaic philosophical speculations. Indeed, they provided Solon with the conceptual basis for deeming ‘just’ the state of a natural element – perhaps – it is hard to say – they would have even provided Solon with a metaphorical model against which to measure his own political ideas. Next I shall examine the development of the notion of cosmic justice and its specific application in the thought of three Presocratic philosophers: Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides.

In that which has been defined as ‘the oldest and most controversial text in pre-Socratic philosophy’ (quoted above),²⁸² Anaximander conveys a crucial point of his cosmology and he does so through what is a noticeably magniloquent phrasing, a stylistic feature which did not fail to catch Theophrastus’ attention who judged the sentence as being expressed ‘in rather poetical terms’ (ποιητικωτέροις οὕτως ὀνόμασιν αὐτὰ λέγων). Indeed, as shown by Kahn, all expressions such as κατὰ τὸ χρεών, διδόναι δίκην καὶ τίσιν and τάξις τοῦ χρόνου, can be found in archaic poetry and seem to have represented a stirring contrast with the otherwise plain prose style of the philosopher.²⁸³

While the extent of the fragment has been generally agreed on,²⁸⁴ its ultimate meaning is still the object of high controversy. This should be no surprise considering the nature of this sentence effectively captured by Barnes’ three adjectives: ‘short, dark, and attractive’.²⁸⁵ It is therefore worth stating at the outset of this section that the scarcity of the material precludes the very possibility of finding a definitive answer about how ‘Anaximander meant’ his account to be taken. Instead, I focus on the importance of this

²⁸² Vlastos 1947: 168.

²⁸³ 1960: 168-78, although Kahn also argues that the expression διδόναι δίκην can only be found with the acceptance of ‘rendering judgments’ rather than ‘pay penalty’.

²⁸⁴ For the most detailed analysis see Kahn 1960: 166-183; for a comparative table of the sources see K.R.S. 2007: 106-8, for a further discussion of the extent see p. 118, which summarizes Kirk 1955: 22-38.

²⁸⁵ Barnes 2002: 28.

fragment for the development of the notion of cosmic justice: how it borrowed the language of *dikê* to forge a complex metaphor and how the power of such a metaphor may have to a certain extent shaped subsequent ways of thinking about the cosmos.

The legalistic ‘origin’ of Anaximander’s phrasing has been thoroughly studied by Sassi, who after having examined a series of juridical texts reached the conclusion that B1’s formulation is based on a series of borrowings from legislative texts.²⁸⁶ This inference may seem at first to contradict what Theophrastus himself thought of Anaximander’s expression when he described it as ‘rather poetical’. In support of Sassi’s procedure I want to recall Most’s explanation of Theophrastus’s aesthetic judgment:

So too, Anaximander’s and Anaximenes’ fondness for using striking and unexpected comparisons and similes in order to explain various natural phenomena is a philosophical adaptation of a love for explanatory analogies whose origin is probably to be found in the celebrated epic similes, so frequent in Homer, which explain what the audience does not know by a vividly worked out comparison to what it does know.²⁸⁷

The poeticism of the fragment lies in its conforming to a preceding epic tradition of bold similes and analogies rather than in its specific lexicon.

The legalistic comparison which Anaximander worked out in B1 is indeed particularly vivid in that each of its elements — except τίσιν διδόναι — can be perceived as retaining a technical colouring.²⁸⁸ Whereas the verbs τίνειν and τίνεσθαι and their compounds ἀποτίνειν and ἀποτίνεσθαι are very frequent,²⁸⁹ the abstract τίσις — which can be found in various Homeric passages with the slightly vaguer connotation of ‘punishment’ and ‘vengeance’ — is more appropriate for elevated literary contexts and marks a stylistic shift from the original juridical model. The poeticism of τίσις connects the legalistic expression to the preceding κατὰ τὸ χρεών, which ‘retained a marked

²⁸⁶ 2006: 3-26. For more on Greek law and the Presocratics cf. Gagarin 1986; 2002.

²⁸⁷ 2006: 351.

²⁸⁸ ‘Now the words δίκη and τίσις are both known to old epic language, but neither appears there with the verb διδόναι in the sense required here’, Kahn 1960: 169. Cf. Sassi 2006b: 10-2.

²⁸⁹ In particular they often recur to indicate the due payment in retribution for a given offence, see Sassi 2006b: 11-2 for a list of examples.

poetical colouring’,²⁹⁰ and the iteration of the preposition κατά establishes a link between the themes of existential necessity and that of the timely payment of retribution. However, one must turn to the philosophical content of the fragment in order to establish whether Anaximander thought of *dikê* as anything more than a metaphorical settlement of penalty among the elements and in particular whether he thought of it in its broadest sense as a universal law.

To begin with, a note about the context: the immediately preceding words ἐξ ὧν [...] εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι, although much disputed, have been generally accepted to be a rather faithful paraphrase of Anaximander’s original idea. Kahn, after an elaborate discussion, concludes that ‘Anaximander’s original word has perhaps been replaced here by the canonical φθορά; but the idea has scarcely been distorted’.²⁹¹ If this is the case, then B1 has the main purpose of explaining the birth (γένεσις) and death (φθορά) of τὰ ὄντα which we can provisionally translate, following Graham, as the ‘existing objects’.²⁹² The explanatory nature of B1 is grammatically confirmed by the conjunction γάρ.

The nature of τὰ ὄντα has been difficult to define and there is still very little agreement concerning either the process by means of which the δίκην διδόναι is supposed to take place, or the relationship of this process of justice with other aspects of Anaximander’s cosmology. That τὰ ὄντα should qualify as ‘the opposites’ is a widely accepted assumption.²⁹³ This assumption rests on the fact that the production of something that could be described as ‘opposites’ – be it contrasting masses, qualities, or elements – was an essential part of Anaximander’s cosmology.²⁹⁴ Yet, it is also common to most scholarly interpretation that Simplicius (and most likely Theophrastus) did not intend to create in this passage any sharp distinction between ‘elements’ and ‘existing things’. In fact, it is not supposed that Anaximander had any word

²⁹⁰ K.R.S. 2007: 118.

²⁹¹ Kahn 1960: 174. Cf. Kirk 1955: 33 and Barnes 2002: 32-3.

²⁹² 2010: 67.

²⁹³ ‘We can think of nothing but the “opposites” mentioned in our sources’, Heidel 1912: 234.

²⁹⁴ Kahn dedicates an entire chapter to this topic in 1960: 119-166; cf. Algra 1999: 57; K.R.S. 2007: 119-20, 128-30.

corresponding to στοιχεῖον, whereas it is supposed that he might have used equivalent words of τὰ ὄντα such as the corresponding πάντα/πάντα χρήματα.²⁹⁵

Also, scholars mostly agree that Anaximander had probably in mind, as a general empirical picture, meteorological phenomena such as the alternation of seasons and the variations which the world undergoes at each given time.²⁹⁶ One possible meaning of τὰ ὄντα (most likely a faithful paraphrase of the original) – which is that of ‘existing things’ and of ‘the whole of reality’ – supports this cautionary position. If then Anaximander was not referring to anything like ‘elements’ or ‘opposing qualities’ for themselves, but to ‘existing things’, he presented a picture of physical reality as a whole animated by movement, change and conflict.²⁹⁷ Moreover, if he did not conceive this conflict in terms of detachable contrasting qualities but in terms of phenomenal alterations, he may have envisaged a world in which existing things themselves were characterised by an intrinsic belligerent nature. Now, whether this conflict is animated by an immanent, inner-worldly principle, or by the intervention of an external metaphysical entity, remains an object of controversy.

Any interpretation of Anaximander B1 needs eventually to explain its content in relation to the notion of the Boundless, ‘perhaps’ – as Finkelberg described it – ‘the most obscure notion in Greek philosophy’.²⁹⁸ There are three main tendencies: first, one that excludes any connection at all between the Boundless and the process of justice among existing things; second, one that conceives the Boundless as having control over the process of justice but that excludes that it may exercise such control through direct intervention; third, one that depicts the Boundless as continuously and actively involved

²⁹⁵ Thus for instance Kirk 1955: 340-1 and Kahn 1960: 174-5 alike recommend caution about taking Anaximander’s opposites to mean exactly the abstract qualitative categories of Hot-Cold, Dry-Wet and so on, used by the Peripatetics (*cf.* Engmann 1991: 4 and McKirahan 1994). It could be that Anaximander referred to substances possessing contrasting qualities, but that he may not have formally described them as ‘opposites’.

²⁹⁶ E.g. McKirahan 1994: 72. For a study of the possible influence of folk meteorology on Anaximander see Shelley, with whom I disagree concerning the idea that he ‘may not have used a legal metaphor but [...] expressed himself literally, 2000: 17.

²⁹⁷ Although some, such as Classen 1977: 98 denied that Anaximander could have had a theory of change at all.

²⁹⁸ 1993: 229.

in the process of justice. Although very popular in the past,²⁹⁹ the idea that the very coming-into-being of τὰ ὄντα represents itself an injustice against the Boundless, to be atoned by reabsorption into it, has been, to the best of my knowledge, entirely abandoned. This has been mainly due to the restoration of ἀλλήλοισι in the second clause, which can hardly mean anything other than that τὰ ὄντα render justice and reparation ‘to one another’. But what does this process entail?

A rather popular suggestion is that the ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ of the second part are somewhat related to the ‘birth’ and ‘destruction’ of the first part. This assumption can be sensed as underlying Vlastos’ question ‘how can things “render justice and reparation *to one another*” in a process which destroys their very existence?’ and it has been spelled out by various scholars ever since.³⁰⁰ Although the interpretation that the ‘justice’ and ‘injustice’ of the second clause must be, in one way or the other, related to the ‘birth’ and ‘destruction’ of the first clause, has found little opposition, there is still controversy concerning whether the birth and destruction (especially the destruction) of τὰ ὄντα took place in the Boundless or in τὰ ὄντα themselves.

One view is that both that into which destruction takes place and that which perishes are τὰ ὄντα. This is the view of Heidel, Kirk, Kahn, and Barnes among others, and is generally matched by an overall interpretation of B1 that reads it as an expression of a law of justice that presents nature as a self-regulating and self-sustaining system.³⁰¹ Kahn is probably the strongest advocate of the argument in favour of τὰ ὄντα’s independence from the Boundless. By taking all of the elements ἐξ ὧν, εἰς ταῦτα, αὐτά, and ἀλλήλοισι, as referring to the ‘opposing principles’, he interprets the first clause as stating the necessary return of mortal elements back into the opposite powers from which they are generated and the second clause as explaining this necessity as a legitimate compensation for the damage done at birth. Moreover, he excludes any

²⁹⁹ Diels 1923: 69; Mondolfo 1937: 14-30.

³⁰⁰ Vlastos 1947: 170. Kahn 1960: 177 claims that ‘the γένεσις and φθορά of the first member must somehow correspond to the δίκη and ἀδικία of the second’; Engmann 1991: 1 claims that ‘the preceding clause in Simplicius indicates that the process of redress is one of perishing or passing away’; according to McKirahan 1994: 43 ‘comings-to-be and destructions are acts of injustice that one thing commits against another.

³⁰¹ Heidel 1912: 233ff; Kirk 1955:32ff; Kahn 1960: 167ff; Barnes 2002: 28ff.

connection between B1 and the idea of the generation from and destruction into the Boundless, for which, he claims ‘there is no place in the text of Anaximander’s fragment’.³⁰²

Similarly, Kirk thinks that Theophrastus, in applying the whole sentence ἐξ ὧν [...] ταῦτα γίνεσθαι together with B1 to the birth and destruction of the previously mentioned ‘heavens and worlds’ from and into the Boundless, ‘mistook the proper application of Anaximander’s dictum’.³⁰³ In this way, Kirk excludes the idea that the Boundless should be thought of as interpenetrating the differentiated world and he suggests that it should be understood as the ultimate source of *dikê* between opposites. According to Kirk, justice is maintained by the sheer enclosing of the world by the Boundless, which, by this measure, would prevent the world from expounding, for ‘if Anaximander thought of the Boundless as divine’ (as Aristotle seems to imply in *Phys.* III 4, 203b7 with the expression τὸ θεῖον) ‘he automatically gave it control, without determining precisely how this control was to take effect’.³⁰⁴

Kirk also specifies what kind of justice is at stake. After drawing a distinction between *Dikê* as a personification who regulates the behaviour of man to man, but also of man to gods, and mutual *dikê* as an established reciprocal relation operating among members of the same social group, Kirk claims that only the latter – namely mutual *dikê* – is the sort of justice that operates among Anaximander’s τὰ ὄντα.³⁰⁵ In this way B1 describes ‘the constant interchange between opposed substances’ in which the prevalence of one substance at the expense of its contrary is ‘injustice’, whereas the infliction of punishment is that reaction leading to the wrong-doer being deprived of part of its original substance. This is then given to the former victim in addition to what was its original portion. Thus, the former victim is now itself led to a condition of surfeit (κόρος), committing in turn injustice against the former aggressor. Anaximander B1

³⁰² 1960: 182-5.

³⁰³ K.R.S. 2007: 119; Kirk 1955: 37; Cf. McDiarmid 1953:98. Both are heavily criticised by Finkelberg, 1993: 247.

³⁰⁴ 1955: 35.

³⁰⁵ Even though the idea that justice and retribution must apply to more or less equal partners, which besides Heidel is also shared by Cherniss and Vlastos, has been defined by Kirk as an ‘over-simplification’, 1955: 33.

needs then to be understood as a legalistic and anthropomorphic metaphor explaining both the continuity and stability of natural change.³⁰⁶

Contrary to the idea that τὰ ὄντα perish into one another, Vlastos, who – following Cherniss³⁰⁷ – thinks that ἐξ ὧν must refer to the Boundless and that justice must occur by reabsorption into it, makes explicitly clear that the Boundless ‘governs the world’, but that it does not do so by ‘direct action’. Rather, the Boundless governs the world by ‘encompassing’ and ‘safeguarding’ the balance between the opposites that, according to Vlastos, consists in the ‘original equality of the opposites with one another’.³⁰⁸ According to this interpretation, the damages that τὰ ὄντα inflict on each other are still not paid to the Boundless, but accounts are settled by means of reabsorption into the Boundless, which is a ‘state of dynamic equilibrium’.³⁰⁹ This view has been variously rejected.

Freudenthal opposes the notion of a self-regulative and immanent natural order on the basis that it ‘leaves the Boundless with a remarkably undistinguished function’.³¹⁰ He maintains that only the static equilibrium can be self-regulative, whereas dynamic equilibrium can only be maintained through external intervention. This must be preserved by the Boundless, the role of which can be reduced to the ‘minimal directive action’ to ‘swing the opposites to and fro’.³¹¹ Engmann instead, by arguing in favour of an ‘ongoing material interaction between the world and the infinite’,³¹² opposes altogether the idea of a perishing world. In Engmann’s view, Kahn’s equation of justice and injustice with birth and destruction is not convincing: whereas ‘payment of justice’ corresponds to perishing into the infinite, the act of ‘committing injustice’ relates to the

³⁰⁶ K.R.S. 2007: 119-20.

³⁰⁷ Vlastos declares his affiliation in 1947: 170 n. 135.

³⁰⁸ 1947: 173.

³⁰⁹ 1947: 172.

³¹⁰ 1986: 200.

³¹¹ 1982: 208. A position stating that ‘in Anaximander as well as in Aristotelian philosophy of nature, natural order has to be sustained and upheld by external factors’ is thoroughly opposed to Algra’s exposition of the beginning of Greek cosmology: ‘the Milesians indeed appear to have assumed that matter had an intrinsic principle of change’. In Algra’s account, the obvious shortcomings of this sort of spontaneous Milesian hylozoism are precisely what, according to Aristotle, led the subsequent thinker to discover ‘the moving cause’, 1999: 54.

³¹² 1991: 2.

behaviour of existing things *after* they have come into being out of the Boundless. Genesis itself is not connected to injustice, but rather injustice consists in the change of elements into one another. However, Engmann claims: ‘while the elements change into one another, they do not come from or perish into one another’, whereby she sets herself in strong opposition to Kahn.³¹³

Finkelberg, although critical of Engmann, whose interpretation he thinks ‘disregards – and is hardly compatible with ἀλλήλοις’³¹⁴ – follows a similar line of thought in suggesting that whereas the chain-like rendering of justice refers to the reciprocal action of τὰ ὄντα against each other, this does not necessarily imply their destruction but only their transformation. Thus the idea of destruction contained in the sentence preceding B1 must be taken as referring to the destruction of the world into the Boundless as a consequence of a series of penalties paid by things.³¹⁵ In this interpretation, ἐξ ὧν is plural because ‘it formulates the general principle that in the *physikoi* the *arche* of the generated things is also their *teleute*’, whereby Finkelberg implies that the plural pronoun refers to the accounts just reported.³¹⁶

Finally, Vernant, approaching the fragment from a different angle, pursued further the study of Anaximander’s cosmology by focusing on its relationship to political thought. According to Vernant too, ‘the great law that rules the universe is immanent in *physis*’, but this law is granted by the Boundless through its mediating function of a *meson*. Thus, by enveloping, governing and dominating all things, the *apeiron* is ‘sovereign in

³¹³ Engmann 1991: 12-21 believes that genesis and perishing should not be taken as purely primordial and eschatological, but rather as ongoing processes which took place when, over a period of time, one opposite forfeited its gains by resolving them back into the Boundless.

³¹⁴ 1993: 250.

³¹⁵ Finkelberg 1993: 247-51.

³¹⁶ The inconclusive nature of this debate is reflected by the plurality of interpretations that ἐξ ὧν has received. According to Kahn, being plural, the pronoun cannot be taken as referring to τὸ ἄπειρον. Cherniss and Vlastos take the plural ἐξ ὧν as revelatory of the fact that the Boundless, ‘the matrix from which all things arise and to which they all return’ (Vlastos 1947:170), is explicitly thought as a plurality, in which the opposites are thoroughly mixed in an homogenous blend. This is an argument in turn criticized by Kirk 1955:35, McDiarmid 1953:141 and Gottschalk 1965: 44 n. 33 on the grounds of the collective sense that the neuter plural can have in Greek. Engmann, on her part, thinks that ‘it is indifferent whether the singular or the plural is selected’, 1991: 8-9; given the broader context of the quotation in which the main focus is the Boundless, she thinks that ἐξ ὧν should be taken as referring to it as well.

the manner of a common law that imposes the same *dikê* on each individual'. In other words, according to Vernant, the immanent balance of the forces and the interchangeability of position on which Anaximander's universe is founded, are made possible by the role he assigned to the Boundless: that of mediator among different elements.³¹⁷

The second part of the B1 is also controversial. Interestingly, just as each interpretation of the role played by the Boundless in the process of justice described in B1 bears differently on the way we read the first words of the report (ἐξ ὧν), likewise they have a different impact on the way we interpret the last words of the fragment. The sentence κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν lends itself to two valid interpretations. On a mere grammatical level the genitive τοῦ χρόνου could be read as either a subjective genitive, and thus the sentence may be translated 'according to the assessment of Time' (in which Time would act, in a personified way, as the judge imposing his order), or as an objective genitive, thus meaning the equivalent of the English 'in due time'.

Unsurprisingly, the first view is generally defended by those who have argued in favour of a break of sense between B1 and the preceding summary by Simplicius, namely, by those who have argued against a direct involvement of the Boundless in the process of justice among the τὰ ὄντα and in favour of the notion of a self-regulative and immanent natural order.³¹⁸ Indeed, by deriving the subject from the genitive, these scholars can supply some sort of agent by whom the system would be regulated: 'What kind of assessment does Time make? [...] Time must presumably control the time-limit for payment'.³¹⁹ Both Kirk and Jaeger³²⁰ have cited in support of their argument the striking parallel of a fragment of Solon:

ἐγὼ δὲ τῶν μὲν οὐνεκα ξυνήγαγον
δῆμον, τί τούτων πρὶν τυχεῖν ἐπαυσάμην;
συμμαρτυροίη ταῦτ' ἄν ἐν δίκῃ χρόνου

³¹⁷ Vernant 2006b. Cf. McKirahan, who presents Anaximander as the 'first uniformitarian', 1994: 41-47.

³¹⁸ Jaeger 1947: 35-6; Kahn, 1960: 167; 183-196; Kirk 1955: 34 and then in K.R.S. 2007: 120-1.

³¹⁹ K.R.S. 2007: 120.

³²⁰ Jaeger 1947: 35; 207.

μήτηρ μεγίστη δαιμόνων Ὀλυμπίων
 ἄριστα, Γῆ μέλαινα, τῆς ἐγώ ποτε
 ὄρους ἀνεῖλον πολλαχῇ πεπηγότας·
 πρόσθεν δὲ δουλεύουσα, νῦν ἐλευθέρα. (36. 1-7)

In this carefully constructed fragment,³²¹ in which, according to Vlastos, Solon uses the image of the land enslaved by ward-stones to refer to the subjection of the peasants oppressed by agricultural debts,³²² black Earth is envisaged as a potential witness in the court of time. The ‘verdict of time’ has probably here the double significance of the ‘lapse of time’ in which Earth has become free,³²³ and the ‘inevitability of punishment’, often stressed elsewhere by Solon.³²⁴

Curiously, even with regard to Solon 36W², scholars have been divided on whether ‘time’ should be taken as a divine personification or not.³²⁵ According to those scholars who argue in favour of τοῦ χρόνου as a subjective genitive in Anaximander, the Solonian idea of ‘Time’s trial’ is similar to the Anaximandrian idea of the retribution that happens ‘according to the assessment of Time’.³²⁶ The inevitability of justice is spontaneously associated with the idea of a control exercised within a time-limit which, according to the poetic imaginary, is set by the personified figure of Time itself. As pointed out by Kirk, this could mean either one or both of these two options: ‘that Time on each occasion will make an assessment of the period for repayment’, and/or that ‘Time has made a general assessment once and for all, to the effect that *sooner or later* in time the compensation must be paid’.³²⁷

Against this position and in favour of an interpretation of τοῦ χρόνου as an objective

³²¹ Cf. Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 455-85; for various structural and stylistic analyses see Blaise 1995; but also van Groningen 1958: 137; García Novo 1979-1980: 201; Magurano 1992; Maharam 1993: 451-62; Fernández Delgado 1999.

³²² 1946: 73.

³²³ K.R.S. 2007:121.

³²⁴ Vlastos 1946; K.R.S. 2007: 121; Kirk 1955: 36-7.

³²⁵ For scholars who think Chronos is here a divine personification, besides Kirk and Jaeger, cf. Ziegler 1963: 647-53; for those who think otherwise see Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 466; Rhodes 1993: 175 (‘when time delivers judgment’); Gagarin 1974: 192 n. 40 (in the court of time’); see also 1986: 72-5; Vlastos 1946: 79 (‘judgment of time’).

³²⁶ See also Noussia-Fantuzzi 2010: 466.

³²⁷ 1955: 36.

genitive in both authors Noussia-Fantuzzi has recently written that ‘in the frame of the materialistic “naturalization” which *dikê* undergoes in Anaximander [...] and since in Solon *dikê* cannot be a personification (in light of its syntactical function), it seems more plausible that “time” is likewise not a divine personification’.³²⁸ As for Anaximander more specifically, the interpretation of τοῦ χρόνου as an objective genitive is generally argued by those who conceive of a direct intervention of the Boundless in the process of justice among existing things.³²⁹ This is only natural: for the interpretation of time as a personified entity would imply a redundancy of controlling agents. In particular, Sassi’s adherence to this second trend of arguments is supported by a thorough and suggestive philological investigation. Through her usual survey of parallels with legal texts, Sassi maintains that Anaximander’s κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν, must certainly be interpreted as an objective genitive,³³⁰ and that ‘after all, the *apeiron* suffices [...] in his function as a warrantor of the cosmic decree’.³³¹

Although it is hard to determine whether Anaximander already conceived of *dikê* as something more than a metaphor and as a universal law specifically, he certainly stretched the metaphor a long way to explain natural processes. No doubt, his account of the genesis and the functioning of the cosmos differ from poetic works such as Hesiod’s *Theogony* in that it adopts a reductive and naturalistic approach.³³² The basic explanatory factors of the universe are no longer conceived in terms of a variety of more or less anthropomorphic gods, and Anaximander’s conception of *dikê* and the Boundless testified for an increased level of philosophical abstraction. Hence, albeit very little could be established about the specificities of Anaximander’s speculations, we can safely look upon this thinker as ‘the earliest expression for the Greek view of the natural world as a cosmos organized by law’.³³³

³²⁸ 2010: 466.

³²⁹ Cf. Sinnige, who claims that Anaximander’s Boundless is a successor-concept to the ancient mythical notion of Time (Χρόνος), construed as an ‘omni-potent and active Ruler, embracing the universe’ 1971: 4; and Freudenthal 1986: 210.

³³⁰ 2006: 14-5.

³³¹ Sassi 2006b: 14-6.

³³² Cf. Algra 1999: 48.

³³³ Kahn 1960: 8.

3.3 *Dikê beyond the metaphor: the notion of cosmic justice*

Whilst doubts may remain on whether Anaximander conceived of *dikê* as anything more than a metaphorical settlement of penalty among the elements and more specifically whether he regarded *dikê* as a cosmic power, Heraclitus unquestionably did. Δίκη is for Heraclitus yet another way to address that universal principle which he claims governs the whole of reality; in his fragments, δίκη stands together with λόγος (B1-2; B50) and θεός (B67) as a byword for the cosmic law of ‘the unity in opposites’.³³⁴

Of the four fragments (B23; B28; B80; B94) in which the word in question actually features, B80 is generally interpreted as a methodical amendment of Anaximander’s dictum,³³⁵ and will hence be considered first:

εἰδέναι χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἔόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔρην, καὶ γινόμενα
πάντα κατ’ ἔρην καὶ χρεών.

It is necessary to know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things happen according to strife and necessity.³³⁶

This fragment is particularly poignant in that it conveys a conception of cosmic justice which goes well beyond that of Anaximander: δίκη is not merely conceived in its opposition to ἀδικία as retribution for wrongdoing, but as the total sum of both penalty and crime; it is the cosmic all-inclusive pattern followed by change in the order of the world.³³⁷ This philosophical idea is expressed through a careful disposition of the key-words and the way they are made to resonate with other fragments.³³⁸

³³⁴ Cf. Ch. 2.3. For a similar idea: Gagarin 1974: 195.

³³⁵ Kahn 1979: 207; K.R.S. 2007: 194.

³³⁶ My translation.

³³⁷ Cf. Vlastos 1970: 419ff, Kahn 1979: 206-7.

³³⁸ For the importance of style in the development of Heraclitus’ philosophical discourse cf. Ch. 2.1: esp. n. 178; 180.

The powerful identification of ‘justice’ and ‘strife’ created by the juxtaposition of δίκη and ἔρις is reinforced on a grammatical level by their interchangeable function as subject and predicate. The assimilation of the two notions, clearly the keynote of the fragment, stands out as the ‘revelation’ splitting the sentence into two halves, each of which repeats the same concept in inverted terms: ‘war is common’ and ‘everything happens according to strife’. In the latter clause the idea of the centrality of conflict is restated, but the perspective adopted in the former clause is reversed; whereas emphasis is first placed on the commonality of conflict, the focus is subsequently shifted towards the idea that everything happens according to conflicting patterns.

Each of these three segments resonates with various other fragments, thereby acquiring and slowly unfolding a broader significance. Both notions of πόλεμος and that which is ξυνός echo with a series of fragments such as B53 in which Heraclitus says that war is father and king of all (πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς) and B2, B113, B114, in which he insists on the importance of relying on that which is common.³³⁹ In the same way, the phrase γινόμενα πάντα κατ’ ἔριν at the end of the fragment is probably a deliberate allusion to γινόμενων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον in the Proem (B1). These echoes serve the purpose of placing B80 within the philosopher’s broader discourse. Most prominently, the notion of warfare and conflict emerge, through this web of intratextual references, as intimately connected with the two fundamental notions of ‘unity in opposites’ and the ‘common *logos*’.³⁴⁰ Moreover, as perceptively pointed out by Kahn, the word γινόμενα can also mean ‘come into being’ and might be interpreted here as introducing a connection between the notion of strife and that of birth. This lurking suggestion is then made explicit in the B53 where πόλεμος is called the father of all.³⁴¹

In short, the assimilation of *dikê* with strife is announced in the context of a fragment in which strife itself is in turn indirectly associated with *logos* and the unity of opposites: the common principle of Heraclitus’ universe. Thereby, in what may be an explicit rebuke to Anaximander’s notion of *dikê* as righteous penalty, Heraclitus depicts

³³⁹ Cf. Ch. 2.1.

³⁴⁰ ‘Warfare has become a figure for opposition in general’, Kahn 1979: 206.

³⁴¹ 1979: 207.

‘justice’ as a universal principle followed by the whole of reality, a principle of strife and conflicting antitheses (γινόμενα πάντα κατ’ἔριν), to which paternity of everything is attributed (πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι). While developing this philosophical notion in his own original way, Heraclitus was possibly playing with the etymology of δίκη, most likely connected with the verb δείκνυμι and the Sanskrit root for ‘indication’ and ‘direction’.³⁴² Hence, *Dikê* represents here the ‘right direction’ followed by things in their conflicting nature and becomes an expression of what Lloyd defined a ‘self-regulating cosmological relationship, i.e. an idea of cosmological order’.³⁴³

A similar conception of ‘justice’ may be implied in another fragment, in which Heraclitus arguably claims *dikê* to be knowable only through an appreciation of conflict:

Δίκης ὄνομα οὐκ ἂν ᾔδεσαν εἰ ταῦτα μὴ ᾔν (B23)

Were these things not, of *dikê* the name they would not know.³⁴⁴

The main difficulty of interpretation with B23 is represented by the pronoun ταῦτα. There have been three main suggestions concerning what ‘these things’ may be: ‘laws’, ‘wrongdoing or injustice’, and ‘the opposites’.³⁴⁵ As for the first hypothesis, it must be admitted that the suggestion of ‘laws’ has a certain appeal. The idea of νόμοι is of course prominent in B114, in which it is used as a term of comparison for ‘that which is common’ (i.e. the *logos*) and where it is described as the human counterpart to the ‘divine law’ (θεῖος νόμος). What is more, the possible legal overtone of the term *dikê* understood as ‘legal retribution’ may also point in this direction.

³⁴² Beeks 2010: 335. Chantraine 1968: 284; Palmer 1950: 149ff; Kirk 1954: 127. Jaeger rejects the attempt to derive δίκη from δικάειν (‘to throw’) in Jaeger 1967 (1939): 442 n. 16.

³⁴³ Lloyd 1966: 213.

³⁴⁴ My translation.

³⁴⁵ See Marcovich 2001: 229 for a concise summary of positions and Kirk 1954: 124ff. for their full discussion.

However, although νόμοι may well be the meaning assigned to the pronoun by Clement in the context of his quotation, I am not persuaded that ‘laws’ would have been the referent of ταῦτα in the Heraclitean original. The presence of the key concept δίκη suggests in fact that ταῦτα must refer to something even more fundamental than ‘laws’ in Heraclitus’ thought. The two suggestions of Diels and Kranz in DK, τὰντία and τᾶδिका respectively, meet this requirement, although an emendation of the text is probably unnecessary.³⁴⁶ As emerges clearly from B80, *dikê* in Heraclitus does not have any moral meaning (i.e. it is not the same thing as δικαιοσύνη) but is rather a byword for ‘the cosmic pattern followed by change in the order of the world’. Whilst it is impossible to establish whether to assign *dikê* in B23 to the same cosmic scale, I think its notion must retain the same connection with the idea of conflict. Therefore the understanding of ταῦτα as referring to something like τᾶδिका is in my opinion the most balanced option. To begin with, that the word to which the pronoun refers was really something like τὰ ἀδικήματα or τᾶδिका can be inferred, as Marcovich points out, from the testimony of Chrysippus.³⁴⁷ Moreover, whereas Diels’ τὰντία, by linking *dikê* to the notion of ‘conflicting opposites’ gives indeed a very abstract reading of B23, Kranz’s τᾶδिका allows the fragment to retain a wider gamut of significance.

Within the legal metaphor τᾶδिका can be understood as acts of injustice and infringement of the law,³⁴⁸ with δίκη as their consequent punishment. At the same time, τᾶδिका may also be understood as ‘acts of injustice’ among existing things in general and δίκη as the principle of balance which governs them. In keeping with B80, B23 would thus be claiming that δίκη can be known only insofar as there is strife. Two additional points in favour of reading something like τᾶδिका as the referent of the pronoun are that in this way B23 would represent another example of the fundamental connexion of apparently opposite things³⁴⁹ and, what is more, it would restate the importance of such opposition in language. This is shown by the word ὄνομα. On a cognitive level, the concept of δίκη could not exist without its linguistic opposite. In

³⁴⁶ See Kirk 1954: 125; 129.

³⁴⁷ Marcovich 2001: 229.

³⁴⁸ Kahn in 1979: 185.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Kirk 1954: 129.

this sense B23 could be interpreted as stating on an epistemological level (*dikê* can be known only in the light of strife) what B80 states on an ontological level (*dikê* is strife).

In relation to Anaximander's worldview and *dikê* as a key notion within it, Heraclitus seems hence to have developed quite a different picture. *Dikê* is no longer a legalistic metaphor to describe the re-establishment of order among elements cyclically at war with each other, but it is the very ontological principle at the heart of a universe shaped by constant change and conflict. Like λόγος, θεός, and πόλεμος, δίκη is yet another name (ὄνομα, B23) by means of which Heraclitus calls that essential cosmic force which governs reality through antitheses and oppositions. However, besides these major elements of divergence from the Anaximandrian conception, some elements of continuity can also be found. In the last fragment we shall examine, Heraclitus plays with a notion of justice much more in keeping with that developed by his predecessor:

ἥλιος οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή, Ἑρινύες μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι
ἐξευρήσουσιν. (B94)

The sun will not overstep his measures. Otherwise, the Erinyes, vicars of Justice, will find him out.

Just as Solon in his political metaphor uses the imagery of a calm sea which is 'justest' when not stirred by the winds, Heraclitus describes the sun's abiding by his natural measures as an imposition of Justice. Following Jaeger, one could say that 'here *Dikê* serves as an embodiment of the inviolable order of nature'.³⁵⁰ As an expression of 'the way things are', *Dikê* guarantees 'normality', i.e., the regular course of events. Moreover, the choice of mentioning the Erinyes adds a strong poetic colouring to the fragment. Their presence carries unmistakable connotations: as primitive forces of vengeance against transgressions they may be taken in the context of this fragment as the personified equivalent of the philosophical notion of κατὰ τὸ χρεών featuring in both Anaximander B1 and Heraclitus B80.³⁵¹ To quote Jaeger once more: 'the Erinyes

³⁵⁰ 1947: 116.

³⁵¹ The last word of Heraclitus' B80, χρεώμενα, is corrupt. Most editors (with a few exceptions, e.g. Kahn 1979) print Diels' χρεών. Philological considerations aside, it seems safe

avenge every violation of what we should call the natural laws of life’,³⁵² and, through association with them, the notion of ‘justice’ gains in this fragment the specific connotation of ‘what prevents things from transgressing their natural measure or given allotment’. In this sense, just as the Erinyes’ function often overlaps or is interchangeable with that of the *Moirai*, we could say that δίκη acquires here a meaning that is comparable to that of μοῖρα: i.e. the given allotment of things.³⁵³

3.4 *Dikê, necessity, and the opposites in Parmenides’ poem*

In Parmenides’ poem about truth, Being, and mortal opinions, *Dikê* plays indeed a cosmic role, but her familiar universal function is exploited within the space of innovative thought. An important role is assigned to her in each of the three parts into which the poem is traditionally divided: not only does she feature in the Proem, where the most dense stock of allusions to the traditional corpus of poetic phraseology and religious imagery is concentrated, but she also plays an important role in the two remaining sections. *Dikê*’s traditional role is bent to aid Parmenides’ abstract logic and metaphysical arguments in the central philosophical part of the poem, and she is bestowed an important role in the final section dedicated to cosmological speculations. Closely associated with the idea of compulsion, allotment, and necessity, *dikê* is above all in this poem an important divine power; so much so that Aëtius would have subsequently identified her with the creator of the cosmos in the following manner:

Παρμενίδης καὶ Δημόκριτος πάντα κατ’ ἀνάγκην· τὴν αὐτὴν δὲ εἶναι
εἰμαρμένην καὶ δίκην καὶ πρόνοιαν καὶ κοσμοποιόν. (A32DK)

Parmenides and Democritus [held that] all things are by necessity and that fate,
justice, providence and the creator of the cosmos are the same.³⁵⁴

to assume that the fragment expressed in one way or another the notion of ‘necessary ordinance’ presently under discussion.

³⁵² 1947: 229, n. 31.

³⁵³ In Aeschylus in particular personified *Moirai* ‘is closely tied to retribution’, Raeburn and Thomas 2011: xxxviii.

³⁵⁴ Coxon 2009: 146. Given the difficulty of this text, translations (by Coxon unless otherwise stated) are provided.

While treating with due caution the Stocising terminology of the last part of this testimonial, there is no reason not to read Aëtius' words as a revealing testimony of the prominence of certain themes in Parmenides' poem. The idea that everything is κατ' ἀνάγκην, just as in Anaximander and Heraclitus important processes were described as happening κατὰ τὸ χρεών, seems very much in keeping with the commonly shared philosophical impression of a cosmos organised around an intrinsic necessity. Likewise, the assimilation (τὴν αὐτήν) of εἵμαρμένη ('the received portion' from the verb μείρομαι from which derives also μοῖρα) with δίκη is equally telling and points out what was indeed a prominent feature of Parmenides' poem. As will shortly be shown, δίκη pervasively operates in the world of Parmenides as an inviolable force of compulsion.

Of the three overt mentions of the word (1.14; 1.28; 8.14), the first one is to be found early in the Proem:

ἔνθα πύλαι νυκτός τε καὶ ἡματός εἰσι κελεύθων,
καί σφας ὑπέρθυρον ἀμφὶς ἔχει καὶ λάινος οὐδός,
αὐταὶ δ' αἰθέριαι πλῆνται μεγάλοισι θυρέτροις·
τῶν δὲ Δίκη³⁵⁵ πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς
(B1.11-14)

There stand the gates between the journeys of night and day, enclosed at top and bottom by a lintel and threshold of stone, and themselves fitting closely to a great architrave in the aether. The keys, which allow to open first one gate then the other, retributive Justice holds.³⁵⁶

In the much-debated prologue to his poem, Parmenides tells the story of a journey. Although the overall significance of this journey as well as some specific points of interpretation remain controversial,³⁵⁷ the principal purpose of these lines seems to me

³⁵⁵ Δίκη Coxon.

³⁵⁶ The capitalization of 'Justice' is mine.

³⁵⁷ Some of the main points of dispute are whether the journey should be taken as an epistemological allegory or a mystical experience (for a review positions on this topic cf. Palmer 2009: 52ff), whether it should be taken as an upwards or downwards journey (cf. Pellikaan-Engel 1974: 104-9 and Owens 1979: 25, n.1, 11, 12.), and what the precise meaning of the symbolism

undisputedly clear: with his Proem Parmenides lays claim to knowledge of a truth unattainable to those unwilling to diverge from the ordinary route of mortals.³⁵⁸ In his capacity of a ‘knowing man’ (εἰδότα φῶτα, 1.3), and with the aid of immortal charioteers, Parmenides is led to travel a road which indeed ‘lies far from the steps of humans’ (ἄπ’ ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν, 1. 27); escorted in a chariot drawn by swift mares, he journeys towards the gates of Night and Day. Beyond these impressive barriers, Parmenides is awaited by an anonymous goddess who will instruct him on the two subjects of truth and human opinions.³⁵⁹ *Dikē* makes her first appearance in the poem as the gatekeeper of these doors.

Parmenides’ poetic qualities have often been deplored,³⁶⁰ yet this passage is nonetheless skilfully constructed: the painstaking description of the πύλαι allows for a pause in the narrative and emphasizes the awesomeness of the hindrance they represent,³⁶¹ whereas the depiction of *Dikē* as the key-holder is all contained in a single forceful verse:

τῶν δὲ Δίκη πολύποινος ἔχει κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς (1. 14)

‘Of those’ – and now the previous description is elegantly compressed in a single pronoun – ‘much-avenging Justice holds the keys of interchange’.³⁶² Why is *Dikē* the gatekeeper of the doors of Night and Day? The passage must be placed in the context of the tradition with which Parmenides skilfully interacts.

The Homeric and Hesiodic passages which form the background to Parmenides’ Proem have been easily identified. Many scholars have studied the significant elements of intertextuality and other parallels between the Proem and its hexametric models, while

of light and dark is (cf. Vlastos 1993: 159 and Bowra 1937: 102 for two different takes on this issue). For a variety of interpretations: Cornford 1939: 30; Schwabl 1963; Deichgräber 1958; Mansfeld 1964; Reinhardt 1966; Burkert 1969; Fränkel 1970 (1930); 1973; Furley 1973; Pellikaan-Engel 1974; Owens 1979; Feyerabend 1984; Gallop 1984; Sassi 1988; Conche 1996; Kingsley 1999; Steele 2002; Slaveva-Griffin 2003; Miller 2006, Sedley 2006: 113; Mourelatos 2008: 16-25; Coxon 2009: 269ff; Palmer 2009; 2012.

³⁵⁸ Cf. Most 2006: 354; K.R.S. 2007: 244; Graham 2010: 235.

³⁵⁹ On the identity of the goddess there have been a number of different suggestions: cf. review in Palmer 2009: 58, n. 27.

³⁶⁰ Cf. K.R.S. 2007: 241.

³⁶¹ For more about ancient doors and locks, cf. Diels 2003; Coxon 2009: 277.

³⁶² My translation.

others have focused on the Proem's echo in subsequent philosophical works.³⁶³ As pointed out by Coxon,³⁶⁴ in one of the passages that inspired Parmenides' description of the gateway, the *Iliad*'s description of the gates of Tartarus (5. 749-51; 8.393-5),³⁶⁵ the doors of heaven are controlled by the *Horae*, one of whom according to Hesiod (*Theog.* 901-2) was *Dikê*. For the purpose of this analysis, it should also be underscored how Hesiod has made *Dikê* sister to the *Moirai* (*Theog.* 904). Parmenides appropriates this mythical genealogical connection in important ways and invests it in his poem with a deep philosophical significance. Most importantly, however, through his overt allusions to Hesiod's depiction of the underworld (*Theog.* 740-57),³⁶⁶ in which Night and Day are depicted as strictly alternating, Parmenides appears to be seeking to establish a connection with the mythological imaginary of alternating opposites. The Hesiodic passage, with its specific mythopoeic force, 'makes all the more remarkable the keen sense of the logic of opposites that it expresses'.³⁶⁷ By employing the similar imaginary of the gates of Night and Day, Parmenides seems indeed to anticipate in archetypical poetic terms what he subsequently expresses in logico-metaphysical terms as the mutually exclusive ways of inquiry of Being and Not-Being (2B), and in cosmological terms as the indissoluble combination of light and darkness (9B).³⁶⁸

Whereas the imagery of the gates resonates most prominently with the Hesiodic passage, the characterization of *Dikê* resonates with the philosophical notion of cosmic justice explored previously in this chapter. Emphatically compressed in a single verse at the end of the gates passage, the carefully arranged description of *Dikê* involves two striking choices of vocabulary: first, she is characterised as much-avenging (δίκη πολύποινος); second she is said to hold the keys of interchange (ἀμοιβούς). The term ἀμοιβούς recalls of course Hesiod's ἀμειβόμεναι (*Theog.* 749), but the notion of

³⁶³ Morrison 1955: 59-60; Dolin 1962; Schwabl 1963; Burkert 1969: 8-13; Furley 1973: 3-4; Pellikaan-Engel 1974; Tulli 2000; Miller 2006: 7-9; Coxon 2009: 9ff; Palmer 2009: 54-61.

³⁶⁴ 2009: 9ff; 277.

³⁶⁵ But see also *Theog.* 740-57.

³⁶⁶ Hesiod structures his descriptions through anaphoric ἔνθα (729; 734; 736; 758, 767, 775, 807) which Parmenides clearly picks up in 1. 11.

³⁶⁷ Miller 2006: 8. My present analysis is greatly indebted to his shrewd contribution, although I disagree that Anaximander's 'justice' should be understood *in the* light of a 'moral necessity that governs the cosmos', 2006: 9.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Leshner: 'Since Night and Day are subsequently identified as the basis for all distinctions drawn by mortals (8.53-9; 9.1-4), this feature of the Proem appears to anticipate Parmenides' account of "what is" as a single undifferentiated unity', 2006: 237.

interchange, used by Hesiod to describe the alternating actions of Day and Night as they ‘exchange places’, is here applied to the description of the keys held by *Dikē*. Thereby, Justice is here depicted as that entity which presides over the fundamental succession of Day and Night and the mutual exclusiveness of the opposites they embody. She is no longer simply one of the *Horae* who keeps guard over the doors: she alone administers the very interchange itself.

The adjective πολύποινος – a very Aeschylean type of adjective indeed – ³⁶⁹ also reinforces the association with Anaximander and Heraclitus. With its legal undertone and its emphasis on the idea of requital – a rather isolated idea that has *per se* no further resonance in the Proem – Parmenides diverges from the Hesiodic model in important ways. The theme of a peaceful ‘greeting’ and the sharing of an abode is replaced in Parmenides with the theme of crime and punishment. The characterization of *Dikē* as ‘much-avenging’ underlines the harshness of a justice involved in the interplay of opposites. Thus πολύποινος fits together with the concept of ἀμοιβούς to evoke the notion of a universal *dikē* involved by strict necessity in the cyclical patterns of cosmic alterations and fundamental oppositions.

Without lingering on the status of and problematic relationship between the different parts of Parmenides’ poem, ³⁷⁰ it must be observed how this portion of the Proem is clearly echoed at various points of the ‘cosmological’ section (8.50ff). ³⁷¹ The fundamental complementarity and interplay between day and night, light and darkness, is deeply rooted in the structure of third part of the poem and represents a constant

³⁶⁹ Although Aeschylus does not use this compound specifically, adjectives ending with – ποῖνος are characteristic of Aeschylus, cf. Coxon 2009: 277.

³⁷⁰ On the epistemological status of Parmenides’ cosmogony, three main trends of interpretation can be discerned: the theory is not Parmenides’ but a systemised composite of contemporary accounts; the *doxa* presents mortal opinions as they might be at best and it has therefore a certain degree of plausibility or even accuracy; Parmenides is supplying a completely false cosmology. I personally lean towards the second type of explanation (cf. Leshner 2006: 241 for the useful distinction between ‘true trust’ and ‘likelihood’ and an interpretation of Parmenides’ theory of knowledge as a ‘pioneering attempt to distinguish a priori from empirical knowledge’), and together I believe that the first and third type of interpretation ‘can now be recognized as responses to a [...] problem that arises only due to basic misunderstanding of Parmenides metaphysics’, Palmer 2009: 163. For a variety of interpretations: Cornford 1933: 97-111; Chalmers 1960: 5-22; Owen 1970 (1960): 84-102; Long 1963: 90-107; Guthrie 1965: 52; Tarrant 1983: 74ff; Cherubin 2005: 1-23; Leshner 2006: 240ff; Sedley 2006: 123ff; K.R.S. 2007: 254ff; Mourelatos 2008: 194-221; Palmer 2009: 106-136; 159-175.

³⁷¹ Leshner 2006: 237.

thread in its embroidery.³⁷² Not only does it keep recurring in a variety of forms at various junctures of the Goddess' narrative (8.56-9; 9; 12.1-2; 14),³⁷³ but it carries with it the same wider network of associations: it is linked with the idea of complementary opposites (ἀντία, 8.55; in particular: sun/moon 10.2-4; female/male 12. 5; 18), *dikê*, and necessity.

Regarding the ideas of *dikê* and necessity, fragments 10 and 12 can be singled out for special attention. In terms of subject matter, both fragments deal with the structure of the universe (the διάκοσμος promised by the Goddess at 8.60): its layout of heavens, orbits, and rings. Also, in both fragments features a cosmic divine-like entity: in one necessity, who led and chained (ἄγουσ' ἐπέδησεν ἀνάγκη, 10.6) heaven to control the stars; in the other a female divinity who, from her privileged central position, is said to governs all things (ἐν δὲ μέσῳ τούτων δαίμων, ἥ πάντα κυβερνᾷ, 12. 3). Now, whether this goddess should be identified with *Dikê* in the Proem, as Aëtius firmly maintained (A37DK), or with a personification of aether,³⁷⁴ it is clear in any case that by characterizing her as a goddess who πάντα κυβερνᾷ Parmenides intends to place his δαίμων firmly within the Ionian tradition of supreme cosmic principles. As recalled in the previous chapter, both Anaximander and Heraclitus used the same verb to convey the idea of an all-controlling principle (Heraclitus: κυβερνᾶται³⁷⁵ πάντα διὰ πάντων, B41; Anaximander: περιέχειν ἅπαντα καὶ πάντα κυβερνᾶν, A15+B3).³⁷⁶

While linking his δαίμων back to the Ionian tradition, Parmenides sensibly alters the nautical metaphor so as to meet the requirements of his cosmology: if in Anaximander the action of steering is paired with that of enfolding (περιέχειν) and in Heraclitus with that of movement,³⁷⁷ in Parmenides 12.3 the goddess is said to exercise her all-governing influence from a central static position: ἐν δὲ μέσῳ τούτων δαίμων. Situated in 'the middle' of a complex of rings of fire and night, she is the source of birth and union between the male and female (12.4-6). From within the heart of a complex

³⁷² So Leshner speaks of a 'combined light-night based cosmology', 2006: 240.

³⁷³ For '[...] all things described in the cosmology are supposed somehow to consist of these two principles, light and night', Palmer 2009: 170.

³⁷⁴ Coxon 2009: 371

³⁷⁵ For this textual choice cf. Ch. 2.4: n. 233.

³⁷⁶ Cf. Ch. 2.4.

³⁷⁷ For an interpretation of the preposition διὰ in a locative sense see Ch. 2.4.

cosmic structure, which depends on the varying mixture of basic opposites, the δαίμων is the cause of union between opposite sexes. Life is hence presented as the instantiation of that very principle of interplay of opposites which characterise the nature (φύσις, 10. 1) of the whole universe and the importance of which the Goddess stresses at the outset of her cosmological account (8.54-5).³⁷⁸

Given the similar subject matter of fragment 10 and 12 – the origin of celestial objects and the structure of the cosmos – it is only natural to perceive a strong association between the two divine entities therein referred to: ἀνάγκη and the δαίμων.³⁷⁹ What is more, Parmenides’ choice of light and night as cosmological principles suggests a link between this part of the poem and the Proem, where δίκη πολύποινος stands guard over the gates of Day and Night. It should hence be no surprise if Aëtius understood these divine figures to somewhat overlap in function:

τῶν δὲ συμμιγῶν τὴν μεσαιτάτην ἀπάσας † τε καὶ † πάσης κινήσεως καὶ γενέσεως ὑπάρχειν, ἦντινα (335, 15) καὶ δαίμονα κυβερνήτιν καὶ κληδοῦχον ἐπονομάζει δίκην τε καὶ ἀνάγκην. (*Dox.* 335, 10-16)

The one at the centre is the cause of motion and generation of all the [rings] that contain mixtures. This is what (335, 15) he gives the names “goddess”, “she who steers”, “keeper of the keys”, “justice”, and “necessity”.

Whereas it is hard to establish once and for all whether this is also how Parmenides intended the relation among these figures to be, Aëtius’ testimony captures nonetheless something of great interest.³⁸⁰ Parmenides conceives of a deity who, situated in the middle of the universe, appears to be the cause of cosmogonic mixture,³⁸¹ and whose portrayal seems to overlap to a certain degree with that of divine retribution and necessity.³⁸² This complex system of associations, by means of which the Eleatic poet joins together notions of order, punishment, and compulsion, generates the picture of a

³⁷⁸ ‘The διάκοσμος which mortals posit is a dualism of reified contraries’, Mourelatos 2008: 221; on the concept of φύσις in Parmenides see also Ibid.: 62-3.

³⁷⁹ For more speculation on the relation between the *daimon* and Necessity cf. Tarrant 1983: 73.

³⁸⁰ For an interesting attempt to reconcile Aëtius’ report with Parmenides’ fragments cf. Finkelberg 1986: 303-17.

³⁸¹ K.R.S. 2007: 259. Mourelatos speaks of a ‘cosmic efficient cause’, 2008: 26.

³⁸² Mourelatos goes as far as to speak of a ‘polymorph deity’ and suggests that we are dealing with different ‘hypostases of one and the same deity’, 2008: 26.

strictly organised universe. This manifold principle of universal order, we may as well regard as Parmenides' version of cosmic *dikê*.

The function exploited by *dikê* at a cosmic level reflects her role at an epistemological and ontological level. This can be observed from the two remaining overt mentions of the word (1.28; 8.14):

ὦ κοῦρ' ἄθανάτησι συνήορος ἡνιόχοισιν
ἵπποις θ', αἶ σε φέρουσιν, ἰκάνων ἡμέτερον δῶ
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὐ τί σε μοῖρα κακὴ προὔπεμπε νέεσθαι
τήνδ' ὁδόν, ἧ γὰρ ἅπ' ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν,
ἀλλὰ θέμις τε δίκη τε· (1.25-8)

Welcome, O youth, arriving at our dwelling as consort of immortal charioteers and mares which carry you; no ill fate sent you forth to travel on this way, which is far removed indeed from the step of men, but right and justice.

τοῦ εἵνεκεν οὔτε γενέσθαι
οὔτε ὄλλυσθαι ἀνῆκε δίκη χαλάσασα πέδησιν
ἀλλ' ἔχει, ἧ δὲ κρίσις περὶ τούτων ἐν τῷδ' ἐστίν,
ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν. (8. 13-16)

Therefore justice did not loosen it in her fetters and move it either to come to be or to be perishing but holds it fast, and the decision regarding these things depends on that of the issue, *is or is not*.

In her greeting of Parmenides, the Goddess is careful to specify that indeed no ill μοῖρα sent him to learn her lesson, but right and justice. The association between justice and fate (a specific form of compulsion) lurks here in the words of the Goddess who chooses in her speech μοῖρα κακὴ as an antonym for the duo θέμις/δίκη. The choice of vocabulary is remarkably strong, considering that Parmenides is there for learning purposes. Indeed, the language of compulsion recurs throughout the Goddesses' discourse who, as a point of fact, continues her speech by emphasising its importance thus: χρεὸν δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι, 'you must be informed of everything' (1.28). The language of necessity is echoed in the context of the Goddess' enunciation of the logical

requirements involved in the understanding of Being and Not-Being: in her description of the second way that ‘is not and that it must needs not be’ (ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὥς χρεὼν ἔστι μὴ εἶναι, 2.5), in her argument in favour of the necessity to ‘assert and think that Being is’ (χρὴ τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ’ ἐὼν ἔμμεναι, 6.1). Finally, in her argument that Being is ungenerated and imperishable (second fragment quoted above), the idea of restraint and compulsion is evoked through the imagery of fetters. Most significantly, in what has been appropriately defined as an ‘extended judicial metaphor’,³⁸³ she who ‘did not loosen’ Being ‘and move it either to come into being or perish’ is δίκη. Legal language is also extended to another of Being’s signposts, namely that of completeness, in which the Goddess says that ‘it is not lawful’, θέμις, (the term paired with δίκη in the Proem) ‘that Being should be incomplete’ (οὐνεκεν οὐκ ἀτελεύτητον το ἐὼν θέμις εἶναι, 8.32).

Δίκη is thus embedded in the language of compulsion: just as Necessity is said to have led and chained (ἄγουσ’ ἐπέδησεν ἀνάγκη, 10.6) the heavens in the cosmological section of the poem, δίκη is said not to have loosened her fetters (οὔτε ὄλλυσθαι ἀνῆκε δίκη χαλάσασα πέδησιν) around Being.³⁸⁴ Justice holds fast Being (ἀλλ’ ἔχει, 8. 14-16) as Necessity holds the heavens; justice and necessity are involved in the goddess’ true account on Being (8. 16-17), as they are also in her ‘deceptively plausible’³⁸⁵ representation of the cosmos.

Parmenides’ poem – a milestone in the development of Greek philosophy – plays an important role in the consolidation of the notion of a universe governed by an intrinsic law of nature. He too, in his own poetical terms, conceived of ‘cosmic justice’. He shares Anaximander and Heraclitus’ conviction that the whole of reality can be explained in terms of basic principles and that such principles are as inexorable as they might be unapparent.³⁸⁶ Whereas Anaximander described the process of perishing and coming-to-be of the elements in terms of a cosmic reciprocity he called *dikê*, and Heraclitus described conflict itself as *dikê*, Parmenides developed further the poetic

³⁸³ Coxon 2009: 320.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Mourelatos 2008: 26. For an extensive documentation of the close association between ἀνάγκη and bonds and fetters cf. Schrekenberg 1964.

³⁸⁵ K.R.S. 2007: 254.

³⁸⁶ λεῖσσε δ’ ὅμως ἀπεόντα νόφ παρεόντα βεβαίως, ‘Gaze on even absent things with your mind as present and do so steadily’. 4.1

notion of *Dikê* (in Hesiod one of the *Horae*) as the gatekeeper of the gates of interchange between Day and Night.

Yet her role extends beyond the limits of her divine personification. Just as in Anaximander and Heraclitus, *dikê* in Parmenides is embedded in a complex web of associations: in particular it is closely linked with the notions of necessity and fundamental oppositions. Recurring with its intricate entourage of poetic imagery in each of the three parts of the poem, *dikê* in Parmenides lies at the core of an interconnected system: she is a logical compulsion for rational thinking, a metaphysical constraint by which Being is kept unmoving, and a cosmological entity operating as a restriction on nature and presiding over births and unions. As such her nature is multifaceted: it is simultaneously epistemological,³⁸⁷ ontological and cosmological.

The Presocratics broadened the semantic scope of *dikê* beyond that of a ‘legal metaphor’. As a cornerstone of archaic Greek philosophical thought, *dikê* rests fundamentally upon the relation between conflict and harmony among the opposites, time, and necessity. By the time Aeschylus inherits it, *dikê* has no straightforward meaning, and in its broadest sense has come to signify the inner structure of the cosmos.

³⁸⁷ For more on the role of light and darkness in Parmenides’ theory of knowledge see Vlastos 1993: 153-63; and Lesher 2006: 239.

PART 2

The Role of Zeus and Dikê in the Oresteia: between a Metaphysics of Harmony and a Metaphysics of Conflict

CHAPTER 4

Zeus Whoever He Is

4.1 *Zeus and Justice in the parodos of the Oresteia*

The remainder of this thesis concentrates on the intertwining questions of Zeus and divine justice in the *Oresteia*, questions whose problematic nature is underlined from the very beginning of the trilogy. In the heart of the first play's *parodos*, with a description which bears a hypnotic visual force, the Chorus of Argive Elders describe the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Or, to be more precise, they describe the events leading up to it (109-38): the decision-making process, both rational and emotional, that Agamemnon has to undergo in order to bring himself to become 'the sacrificer of his daughter' (184-227); and the sequence of actions and gestures by means of which the sacrificial victim is prepared (228-47). The slaughtering itself we are left to imagine on our own: we are not allowed to see it through the eyes of the Chorus' memory, nor are we allowed to hear it as a direct statement of fact in the Chorus' words, their song recoiling in revulsion (248).

This is the second break in the narrative of the *parodos*; the Chorus had already interrupted the sequence of their story with the so called 'Hymn to Zeus' (160-83), which takes place after the disquieting interpretation given by Calchas of the omen with its implications of 'another sacrifice' (150). Iphigenia's sacrifice itself, a troubling memory in the Argive Elders' heart, is an event they recall with pain (165-66; 179-80). It is a vision shrouded in reticence. Yet what they express in the limited space of these two pauses, in which the narrative is suspended and the Chorus turn their thoughts away from the sacrifice in search of some form of comfort,³⁸⁸ are a series of theological ideas

³⁸⁸ I follow here the majority of editors (I read *που* as enclitic as opposed to *ποῦ* interrogative and accept Turnebus' *βίαιος* for *βιαιῶς* at 182). However, the Chorus' attitude in this passage is much disputed (see Int. II.1: n. 50). On this specific issue see Pope 1974, (criticised by Conacher 1976 and Winnington-Ingram 1983: 158) and Cohen 1986: 133-4 who emphasises the immorality and injustice of a law that punishes the innocent as well as the guilty. A clearer

of the most powerful kind: ideas which not only bear on the interpretation of the immediate context, but which cast their light on the trilogy as a whole. Indeed, in both instances the first word the Elders utter is key to what they say immediately afterwards as well as being, separately or in their association, among the most studied subjects of the *Oresteia*: Ζεύς and Δίκη (160; 250).

A closer reading of the text reveals the tight bond between the figure of Zeus and the notion of justice. Let us begin by recalling the words of the ‘Hymn’:

Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ’ ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ’ αὖ-
τῳ φίλον κεκλημένῳ,
τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω·
οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι
πάντ’ ἐπισταθώμενος
πλὴν Διός, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος
χρὴ βαλεῖν ἐτητύμως.

[...]

Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων
τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν,

τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδῶ-
σαντα, τὸν “πάθει μάθος”
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν.
στάζει δ’ ἀνθ’ ὕπνου πρὸ καρδίας
μνησιπήμων πόνος· καὶ παρ’ ἄ-
κοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν.
δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων. (160-83)

picture of where I stand on this and others issues relating to the ‘Hymn’ will emerge from the present chapter.

One of the most controversial aspects of these three much debated strophes lies in their relevance to the dramatic context.³⁸⁹ The ‘Hymn’ is of course a self-contained composition: it has a tripartite structure and follows an internal dramatic movement which produces a sense of completeness. Yet the ‘Hymn’ remains a constituent part of the *parodos*, despite its veneer of ‘monumental γνώμη’.³⁹⁰ Embedded in the Elders’ narrative of the events before the war, its significance ought to be assessed with reference to what the Greeks experience while gathered at Aulis. Hence, when the collective mouth of the Chorus gives voice to various utterances of ‘anxiety’, ‘suffering’, and ‘remembered pain’ (ἄλθος; πάθει; μνησιπήμων πόνος) these refer first and foremost to those experiences and the Elders’ response to them.³⁹¹

Both in metre and content the ‘Hymn’ is construed as an abrupt intermission. While the *parodos* is dominated from 192 by syncopated iambics, the metre associated with the leitmotif of retaliatory justice,³⁹² as soon as their thought turns to Zeus the Chorus switch to solemn trochees. Trochees, it has been shown, especially in the form of lecythia, recur throughout the trilogy at those junctures in which the Chorus seek ‘an ultimate significance’ ‘behind the events’ that are ‘being realized in the drama’.³⁹³ The metrical relationship between the ‘Hymn’ and the *parodos* suggests therefore that in

³⁸⁹ There is a considerable scholarly baggage loaded on this question. See Bollack 1981: 201-48 for a useful clearinghouse of opinions. See Smith 1980 and Schenker 1994 for examples of important contributions with which I cannot fully agree.

³⁹⁰ Fraenkel 1962: 114 n. 2.

³⁹¹ This point is controversial, for the Elders do not define the exact source of their disquiet. In general I agree with those who believe that the Elders’ anxiety refer to their own feelings (Raeburn and Thomas, 2011: 85; Schenker 1994: 5; Smith 1980: 16 Paley 1879 *ad loc.* Gagarin 1976: 140, and Hammond 1965: 45). This view is opposed by Fraenkel 1962: *ad* 165: ‘the content of thought would be too slight and the limitation to the Chorus too narrow for the requirements of a passage carrying such religious weight’. Contrary to this position, I agree with Knox in believing that even if the Aeschylean Choruses can be profitably treated as ‘the unwitting medium of a superior knowledge’ even the most evocative utterance retains always an ‘immediate dramatic relevance’, 1979: 28. With regard to ἄλθος it has been suggested that the Elders’ anxiety may be connected to their concern with the expedition (Gagarin 1976: 139-50), the memory of the sacrifice (Raeburn and Thomas, 2011: 85; Neitzel 1978: 408-9; Smith 1980: 16) the punishment that awaits Agamemnon in the future (Denniston and Page 1957 *ad loc.*). I follow Schenker 1994: 5 in believing that no explanation should be chosen at the exclusion of the others. With regard to the πάθει μάθος I do not agree with the view (Schenker 1994: 6; Smith 1980: 21-7) that holds Paris and the Trojans as the main referent of the dictum.

³⁹² Cf. Int. II.2.

³⁹³ Raeburn and Thomas, 2011: 252. For the use of *gnomai* as a response to anxiety in the choruses of the *Agamemnon* see also Schenker 1994: 3; 1991: 69-71 and Sienkewicz 1980: 133-42.

160-83 the Elders look for a divine meaning behind the horror they witnessed. How to make sense of Iphigenia's slaughter? What justice is a justice that entails this amount of suffering? To a certain extent the whole *parodos* could be understood as a dramatic meditation on divine justice.

The question is sombre and leads the Elders straight into the middle of a reflection on the very nature of Zeus himself (160). Their religious attitude can be described as both tentative and reverent: the nature of the supreme god is mysterious and nothing compares to Zeus except Zeus himself, yet the Elders feel that he still remains the one to address 'if one is truly to cast away the vain burden of anxiety' (165-6). Perhaps only in the third stanza, as elegantly put by Raeburn and Thomas: 'the Chorus explains the theology underpinning its turn to Zeus'.³⁹⁴ Zeus is the source of 'good sense' and of the law 'learning through suffering' (176-8).

Although in citing the dictum *πάθει μάθος* the Elders probably have in mind a series of specific applications – the *πάθος* of Iphigenia, that of the Greeks during the war, and that of all the others characters who suffer in the trilogy – the word *βροτοί* (176) makes it plain that the principle is laid down with a universal application. Indeed, at the end of *Eumenides* the words of the placated Erinyes suggest that some form of lesson has been drawn from suffering: unity in friendship and unanimity in enmity (*κοινοφιλεῖ διανοίᾳ | καὶ στυγεῖν μιᾷ φρενί*) is the cure given to mortals (*ἐν βροτοῖς ἄκος*, 985-7) against the horror of intrafamilial retaliation. Eventually, the Athenians 'seated close to the virgin daughter of Zeus' (998-9) can be greeted as having learnt to be 'wise in due time' (1000).

However, here in the 'Hymn' the gods are still regarded as the dispensers of a wisdom that entails suffering and that is foisted on mortals even against the recipient's will: *παρ' ἄκοντα*ς ἦλθε *σωφρονεῖν* (180-1). This is an idea that Socrates' moral intellectualism would have certainly abhorred and that one is inclined to understand here as the primary referent of the subsequent *χάρις βίαιος* (182). Indeed, the 'grace' of *σωφρονεῖν* comes as a 'violence' if those on whom it is bestowed are 'unwilling',

³⁹⁴ Raeburn and Thomas, 2011: 87.

and this way the tension inherent in the oxymoron *χάρις βίαιος* can be seen as reinforcing and completing the preceding line.³⁹⁵ In fact, the whole strophe (176-83) expresses a complex paradox: the divine *χάρις* of *μάθος* and *σωφρονεῖν* is counterbalanced by the dark elements of *πάθος*, *πόνος* (180) and divine *βία*.

Most poignantly, the same tension is picked up at the end of the *parodos*. When after their description of the sacrifice the Elders feel the urge to turn again to the divine sphere, the words they utter sound like an echo of their earlier meditation. The Chorus revert to the theme of *πάθει μάθος* but its function is now strikingly ascribed to justice:

Δίκαια δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει· (250)

The intratextuality between the two passages has a double effect: while restating the link between the figure of Zeus and that of Justice, it also underscores a dramatic shift from initial tentative hope to utter hopelessness that any good will follow at all. For indeed, upon looking at what the Chorus say when they refuse to carry on with their account of Iphigenia's sacrifice, one must always bear in mind the emotional context of their words: words uttered in place of a horror which the Elders, with their 'childlike strength' and 'immature marrow' (74-8), struggle to articulate.

Besides the evident verbal echo of the *πάθει μάθος*, another element reinforces the connection between Justice and Zeus: the scales-imagery. This image, introduced by the verb *ἐπιρρέπειν* and reemployed later in the trilogy again in conjunction with Justice (*ῥοπα Δίκας*, *Cho.* 61), securely links the latter with Zeus, who in several Homeric passages exercise his power through scales. Most famously, Zeus uses a golden scale (*χρύσεια τάλαντα*) of life and death in the *Iliad* to measure the destiny of mortals

³⁹⁵ Hence, Smith's interpretation (who follows Page *ad. loc.*) according to which *χάρις βίαιος* is taken to refer only to Paris and Troy (1980: 27) is untenable. By divorcing the theme of *χάρις βίαιος* from the preceding *πάθει μάθος* (72), Smith's interpretation leads to a very abrupt disruption of the natural progression of the Chorus' thoughts. I am more inclined to follow Sommerstein 2008: 30 and Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 94 and read the whole passage as presumably referring to both the Trojans and the Greeks (Agamemnon in particular). Since the ode is close to its end it seems more plausible that the focus should widen so as to enclose most of the themes touched on rather than restricts.

(8.69-72; 22.209-19), but the idea is also repeated less vividly in several other passages of the poem (16.658; 19.224). Moreover, Zeus and the scales-imagery are associated in the *Hom. Hymn Herm.* (322-4) and twice again in other plays of Aeschylus: first at *Pers.* 345-6, in which a less specific ‘god’ (δαίμων τις) is said ‘to have tipped the scales with unequal weight of fortune’ (τάλαντα βρίσας οὐκ ἰσορρόπῳ τύχῃ)³⁹⁶ and then at *Suppl.* 402-5, in which Zeus is called ἑτερορρεπής (403, ‘he who makes the scale lean now on one side now on another’, i.e. ‘impartial’).³⁹⁷

However, Aeschylus exploits the Homeric tradition to engender dramatic tension. After their beseeching appeal to Zeus, the Chorus’ song reverts to wishful thinking about the future:

τὸ μέλλον δ’ ἐπει γένοιτ’
ἂν κλύοις· πρὸ χαίρετω·
ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν· (251-3)

This change in attitude is underlined by the accumulation of optatives and the alarming equivalence that the Elders establish between πρὸ χαίρειν and προστένειν. This antithesis introduces a disquieting note in the Chorus’ assessment of divine justice. Δίκη will indeed ensure that for those who suffer now there will be learning but to greet the future in advance corresponds, in the light of this justice, to lamenting it in advance.³⁹⁸ After all, what good outcome can the sacrifice of an innocent victim produce?

³⁹⁶ Commentators are not agreed on either the nature of the δαίμων or on what he had weighted. See Broadhead 1960 and Garvie 2009 *ad loc.*

³⁹⁷ Cf. Johansen and Whittle 1980: 320. Ironically, the scales-imagery and the verb ῥέπειν (1393) recur even within the framework of a poetic contest in *Ar. Frogs* 1382ff, in which the reluctant Dionysus (1368-9), prompted by Aeschylus (1365), uses the scales to express his ‘measurement’ of the poetic value of the latter’s and Euripides’ verses. More on Zeus’ scales in Aeschylus can be found in Seaford 2010: 184-6 and 2013: 21-2.

³⁹⁸ This interpretation matches Fraenkel 1962: 142; Conacher 1987: 15; and Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 95 but others approaches have been attempted: Page, for instance, waters down the antithesis by reading πρὸ χαίρετω with its meaning ‘beforehand, dismiss it from your thoughts’, in Denniston and Page 1960: 92). I think the two verbs stand rather in a relation of antithesis.

These final lines of the *parodos* have a retrospective effect; several preceding passages of the ode reverberate under their revealing light. The paradox of a *πρὸ χαίρειν* that is simultaneously a *προστένειν* recalls the *χάρις βίαιος* of the ‘Hymn to Zeus’: that ‘violent grace’ by means of which the Chorus defined there the intervention of gods in human affairs. If the sentence *Δίκη δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει*, as Fraenkel wrote, ‘impresses on us once again the fundamental theme of the Hymn to Zeus’, the idea of a future that is to be greeted (*πρὸ χαίρειν*) as well as lamented (*προστένειν*) also impresses on us another fundamental notion, namely, the paradoxical nature of the norm *πάθει μάθος*. By the end of the *parodos*, one is eventually left with the ultimate impression that the tension inherent in the Chorus’ conception of divine justice remains unresolved.

This system of stark antitheses, of conflicting gnomic utterances, and disturbing consequences, is the framework within which the human and the divine sphere intersect in this trilogy. The paradoxical essence contained in the notions of *πάθει μάθος*, *χάρις βίαιος*, and in the idea of a simultaneously desirable and lamentable future, conveys the tension inherent in the Elders’ attempt to make sense of divine will in the face of the sacrifice. This tension, which in the ‘Hymn to Zeus’ becomes simply tauter, is nonetheless expressed during the whole *parodos* through the refrain *αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τό δ’ εὔ νικάτω* (121; 138; 159). ‘Thus the uncommon attitude of the hymn is rooted in the peculiar conditions of this chorus-song as a whole’.³⁹⁹ Moreover, the theme of *χάρις βίαιος* introduces what could be regarded as a leitmotif of the play: when the Coryphaeus comments on Clytemnestra’s news about the sack of Troy with his *χάρις γὰρ οὐκ ἄτιμος εἴργασται πόνων* (354), or when the Herald says that *χάρις τιμήσεται | Διὸς τόδ’ ἐκπράξασα* (581), the ‘Hymn to Zeus’ will inevitably echo in their words.

The *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* is, no doubt, a powerfully poetic beginning for a drama, but it is also a powerfully philosophical beginning. As expressed by Kitto, ‘it lays down, as firmly as can be, the intellectual foundation of the whole trilogy’,⁴⁰⁰ and

³⁹⁹ Fraenkel 1962: 113.

⁴⁰⁰ 1961: 65

as Peradotto says ‘just how important this passage is can be assessed in some measure by the fact that in most cases a critic’s interpretation [...] turns out to be a capsule-version of his total view of Aeschylean moral and religious thought’.⁴⁰¹ Indeed, the question it sets, with the Elders’ ambiguous meditation on divine nature in connection to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, has a long intellectual history reaching far into the heart of continental philosophy and modern literature. The parable of the Grand Inquisitor told by Ivan to Alyosha in Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov* may be a sufficient reminder of the legacy of the kind of dilemma set here by Aeschylus.

Neither entirely devoid of hope nor exclusively emboldened by faith, the Elders face the dilemma of evil posited by the death of an innocent victim with a tentative religious attitude. Via the juxtaposition of the ‘Hymn to Zeus’ – a coherent composition which is lucid and powerful in structure – and the Elders’ account of the events at Aulis – a narrative that is dense, detailed and moving – Aeschylus sets a series of problems the remainder of the trilogy will develop.⁴⁰² Among those are indeed present the issues of justice and the nature of the divine, as well as the question of human understanding of these problems and of their own place in relation to them. This is how the *Oresteia* begins.

4.2 The role of Zeus in the Oresteia: a brief note on the history of interpretation

The elusive nature of Zeus and his confusing role in the *Oresteia* have engendered lively debates. Generation after generation of scholars have recognised and attempted to account for what appears to be a bifurcation in Aeschylus’ conception of the supreme god. Indeed, a strong polarization between his benevolent and his tyrannical features runs through the whole Aeschylean corpus as well as being encapsulated in the development of the *Oresteia*. Compressed within short and incisive expressions such as

⁴⁰¹ 1960: 237; Cf. Fraenkel: ‘is a corner-stone not only of this play but of the whole trilogy’, 1962:114.

⁴⁰² Although not necessarily ‘develop a solution’, Peradotto 1969a: 237.

the oxymoronic χάρις βίαιος, this tension is also reproduced within the larger framework of each individual play and the trilogy as a whole.

Indeed, it is towards a Zeus of partial reassurance – the Zeus of ‘supreme remedy’ (πᾶν μῆχαρ) addressed in the *Suppliants*⁴⁰³ – that the Chorus of Argive Elders turn in order to cast away from their mind the ‘burden of anxiety’ (ἄχθος, *Ag.* 165). Yet, later in the play the Chorus seem to turn to the same god in a completely different spirit:

ἰὼ ἰή, διαὶ Διὸς
παναιτίου πανεργέτα·
τί γὰρ βροτοῖς ἄνευ Διὸς τελεῖται;
τί τῶνδ’ οὐ θεόκραντόν ἐστιν; (*Ag.* 1485-8)

The thought of Zeus, who was in the ‘Hymn’ the foundation for self-assurance and comfort, is now very much associated with ‘grievous wrath’ (βαρύμηνις, 1482) and suffering (ἰὼ ἰὼ βασιλεῦ βασιλεῦ, | πῶς σε δακρύσω; 1489-90). If ‘nothing is accomplished for mortals without Zeus’ and if Zeus is the ‘Cause-of-all’, then Agamemnon’s death is the result of Zeus’ will too. When the Argive Elders, near the end of the first play, turn to Zeus imbued with terror, they cry of his divine capacity of force and tyranny. Indeed, the Zeus of the *Agamemnon* is a dispenser of violence as well as a dispenser of grace.

The cosmos emerging from the dramatic development of the trilogy seems to provide a metaphysical grounding for the ambivalent utterances of human characters with regard to the divine sphere. In his chapter ‘Zeus and the Erinyes’, Winnington-Ingram traces Zeus’ ambiguous relationship with these powers of vengeance, and indeed he provides an eloquent and compelling account of the transformation which this relationship undergoes in the *Oresteia*. It is precisely in the relationship between the supernal and infernal worlds that Winnington-Ingram sees ‘the basic metaphysical problem of the trilogy’.⁴⁰⁴ The terms of this problem can be briefly illustrated as following: whereas the first two plays are characterised by a convergence of divine powers – where the Erinyes

⁴⁰³ 524-6; 590-1; 594.

⁴⁰⁴ 1983: 127 n. 118.

are seen as the very executioners of Zeus' will and justice (*Ag.* 40-62; *Cho.* 382-5) – later in *Eumenides* the same powers are represented as divergent (385-6) and Zeus is even said to be repelled by their company (365-6).

However, whereas such an account represents an accurate depiction of Zeus' dynamic relationship with the Erinyes, the difference in Zeus' role between the first two plays and *Eumenides* is perhaps not as clear-cut as Winnington-Ingram's study may lead us to think. Indeed, Zeus is often associated in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* with the dark powers of vengeance and within several passages, as Lebeck put it, 'prayers to the infernal gods alternate with appeals to Zeus'.⁴⁰⁵ Besides the Erinyes, Zeus is associated with other dark powers: Night (*Ag.* 355), Wrath (702), *Moirai* (*Cho.* 306), Earth (399), the Curses of the dead (406). Yet, the context of these passages is chiefly one of revenge and appeals to Zeus' authority underline the characters' wish to claim justice for their action as well as their wish to make such action more effective. The tone is certainly different when Zeus' name is uttered for alternative reasons. Several passages from the *Agamemnon* establish a positive association of Zeus with wealth and abundance (503-15; 970; 1014-16),⁴⁰⁶ Zeus is also invoked in 'his capacity as protector of household possessions',⁴⁰⁷ during Clytemnestra's speech to Cassandra (1035-8). The same ambivalence is also present in *Eumenides*, in which Zeus' positive aspects are constantly invoked by Apollo and Athena (91-3; 717-8; 797, 850; 973-5) as opposed to the negative aspects underlined by the Erinyes: first promoter of the disrespectful and tyrannical behaviour of the younger gods (162; 229-30), father of a thief (149) and prisoner of his own father (640-3).

Hence, no doubt, there seems to be a bifurcation in Zeus' portrayal in the *Oresteia*. Indeed, depending on the context, he may be regarded as benevolent god or as tyrannical ruler: in this trilogy he is both a god of light (e.g. *Ag.* 508-9), 'Zeus the Most High' (ὑψιστος Ζεύς, *Eum.* 28) 'father of the Olympians' (Ζεὺς Ὀλυμπίων πατήρ, 618), and also a god of shadow, who can be addressed on occasion as 'Zeus of the Underworld' (τοῦ κατα χθονὸς | Διός, *Ag.* 1386-7). Now, thanks to Golden's and

⁴⁰⁵ Lebeck 1971: 96.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. *W&D* 379, 483, where Zeus is associated with successful crops.

⁴⁰⁷ Sommerstein 2008: 121.

Kitto's effective protest against Lloyd-Jones' and Page's anti-intellectualist stance, their accusation of primitive anthromorphism has been put to rest. Therefore, it is over fifty years that the ambiguity of Aeschylus' portrayal of Zeus in the *Oresteia* has been recognised as the product of careful dramatic design rather than inconsistency of thought.⁴⁰⁸

Although several theories have been developed to account for such ambiguity, it is possible to identify two main interpretative trends. On the one hand the tendency to conceive of Zeus as being subjected to change and development,⁴⁰⁹ on the other hand the tendency to preserve the contradictory aspects of Zeus' behaviour.⁴¹⁰ Hence, if the 'evolutionary theory' could be taken as an attempt to reconcile the antithetical aspects of the supreme god, some scholars have argued instead in favour of an irreconcilable bifurcation in Aeschylus' overall conception of Zeus. Next I shall discuss these theories and their bearing on the text of the *Oresteia*.

When applied to the *Oresteia*, the evolutionary approach relies on the two following assumptions: first, the Zeus of the fifth-century poets differs from an eternal and unchanging god by being within time, i.e. having a birth, a youth, etc.;⁴¹¹ second, the Aeschylean trilogy follows a progressive pattern along which Zeus and the Erinyes change their character. If before Sommerstein, the evolutionary theory had been attacked – most notably by Lloyd-Jones and Golden – on the grounds that its exponents failed to cite any convincing evidence in support of it,⁴¹² after Sommerstein, I believe,

⁴⁰⁸ For the most compelling refutations of their view cf. Golden 1961: 20-6; Kitto 1966: 33-115, and Grube 1970: 43-51.

⁴⁰⁹ Sommerstein 2010a: 202. Since Dissen 1824 (cf. Dodds 2001: 42), believers in the development theory have been as numerous as their opponents: adopted by Wilamowitz, Nilsson, Festugière and Dodds, it was rejected by Schmid, Farnell and Reinhardt (cf. Lloyd-Jones for a summary for the early stage of this debate in 1956: 56-7). To these names should be added: in favour of a change in the Zeus of the *Prometheus*, Smyth 1969 (1924): 120-1, Thomson 1932, Solmsen 1949: 164, de Romilly 1958: 106 and Fitton-Brown 1959: 52-60; and in favour of a change in the Zeus of the *Oresteia*, Murray 1962 (1940): 108. While this debate was re-enacted by Golden 1962, Kitto 1966: 59-64 and Grube 1970 (esp: 43-51), the evolutionary theory finds nowadays its most representative exponent in Sommerstein 2010a: 202 (1989: 22-3).

⁴¹⁰ Golden 1962: 24.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Dodds in an unpublished article quoted by Lloyd-Jones 1956: 57; Sommerstein 2010a: 202.

⁴¹² Lloyd-Jones 1956: 57; Golden 1962: 22.

the situation has not improved much. The text of the *Oresteia* contains very little evidence in support of the notion of a progressive divinity. On the contrary, the evidence that it does contain rather contradicts the hypothesis of an evolution of Zeus and the Erinyes.

Let us focus first on the question of the Erinyes' transformation. That the closing part of *Eumenides* is marked by a change in attitude of the Erinyes towards the city of Athens and the people of Attica is of course beyond dispute. The first sign of such a change is represented by that verse with which they break from their raging song (ἐμὲ παθεῖν τάδε | φεῦ, 869-70) into calmer speech (892). During the stichomythia which follows, the Erinyes ask Athena three questions through which they seek clarification of the kind of honours she is promising to grant them if they accept the abode she offers (*Eum.* 894,896,898). Their interest lies in the honour (τιμή) and the might (σθένος) they will acquire and in the duration (χρόνος) of this privilege. Only through the lure of reverence and power does Athena manage to charm away their anger (900) and indeed, once their attitude has changed, the goddess goes as far as to call them εὐφρονες (992).

But a change in attitude is not the same thing as a change in role and certainly not the sort of 'transformation' on which the notion of an evolving divinity can be founded. Indeed, the Erinyes change their attitude towards the Olympians as the Olympians change their attitude towards them; they respond with threats as long as they are threatened, they respond with kindness as they are treated kindly. As long as Apollo speaks in the language of victory and defeat (721-2) they claim justice for themselves and threaten to unleash plague on the Athenian land (719-20; 782-7); by removing the prospect of dishonour (οὐκ ἔστ' ἄτιμοι, 824) Athena obtains in turn from the Erinyes reverence (892) and collaboration (916).

Yet the fearful nature of the Erinyes remains unaltered and this notion is particularly insisted upon. When at 992 they are called 'kindly minded' this appellation must be considered from within the context of a strict promise of mutual respect, stylistically underlined by the polyptoton εὐφρονας εὐφρονες. The duplication and juxtaposition of the same adjective to describe the disposition of both parties communicates Athena's

emphasis on the importance of reciprocity: only through mutual benevolence between the Erinyes and the Athenian citizens may the city be kept on the ‘straight road of justice’ (ὀρθοδίκαιον, 994). Moreover, the profit which Athena foresees for the citizens of Athens comes literally ‘from these fearsome faces’ (990), their very appearance revealing how the Erinyes preserve their original essence.

Indeed, as pointed out in Sommerstein’s commentary, the idea of deriving benefit from the goddesses’ fearful faces ‘is only superficially a paradox’.⁴¹³ If earlier in the play, the terror-inspiring Erinyes sing that ‘fear sits high in the souls as its overseer’ (517-21), after they agree to stay in Attica as honoured benefactors, fear remains, as emphasised by Athena herself, indispensable for the new government (690-1). As pointed out by Cohen: ‘there is a new order, that is not to be denied, but its character is the question’.⁴¹⁴ Undoubtedly, reverence but also fear underlies the new social order, and it is perhaps the Erinyes’ very participation into the new government which bestows on the institution of the Areopagus such an awe-inspiring function.⁴¹⁵ Hence the text offers little evidence to support the idea of a progression in the Erinyes’ character. Conversely, even after their attitude has changed, the text contains strong signals pointing to the continuity of the Erinyes’ most defining feature. The social order is transformed and the role of the Erinyes adapts to the new order, but from this it does not necessarily follow that the Erinyes themselves transmute: their new identity is never announced.⁴¹⁶

With regard to Zeus, the evidence to support the evolutionary theory is even scantier. Sommerstein argues that Zeus’ tyrannical behaviour in both *P.V.* and *Ag.* (168-75), is explained by the fact that he is young. Zeus’ lesson would come with the understanding that the inexorable working of the law ‘he who does shall suffer’ threatens to lead to the destruction of a morally innocent person (Orestes) and to the royal house under the god’s patronage (the house of Atreus).⁴¹⁷ Yet this is problematic for two reasons. As already objected by Lloyd-Jones ‘No one can deny that the Zeus of Aeschylus’s age

⁴¹³ 1989: 271.

⁴¹⁴ 1986: 139.

⁴¹⁵ ‘The fearful power they embody is now to be turned to the social benefit of Athens and her citizens, but it is not completely eradicated’, Podlecki 1989: 49. Cf. Leão 2010.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Mitchell-Boyask 2009: 94.

⁴¹⁷ 2010a: 203.

was within time; but one may question whether it follows from this that his character develop'.⁴¹⁸ Not once is any reference to the evolving character of Zeus made throughout the trilogy. Where does the text say that Zeus has learnt something? Had there been such transformation in the figure of Zeus, one would expect to find some reference to it. What is more, as already discussed earlier, the tyrannical aspects of Zeus are not the only aspects projected by the characters of this trilogy onto the god; on the contrary, they coexist with projections of divine benevolence which come closer to those expressed in the *Suppliants*. The hermeneutics behind Sommerstein's parallel with Zeus' characteristics in the Promethean trilogy is therefore in itself questionable.

Sommerstein also finds a case in support of his theory in those passages in *Eumenides* which imply the notion that the gods have duties towards mortals. On the contrary, this represents, once again, an element of continuity with the preceding plays. Gods are addressed as responsible towards humans during the various characters' invocations (e.g. *Ag.* 993-4) and in the *parodos* Zeus is even said to have laid down 'for mortals' the law of 'learning through suffering'. Finally, one passage seriously invalidates Sommerstein's idea that the responsibility that Zeus shows towards Orestes in the last play should be interpreted as a sign of evolution:

[...], Παλλάδος καὶ Λοξίου
ἔκατι καὶ τοῦ πάντα κραίνοντος τρίτου
Σωτήρος. ὅς πατρῷον αἰδεσθεὶς μόρον
σφάζει με (758-60)

The verb αἰδεσθεὶς suggests the noteworthy implication that Zeus felt αἰδώς for the mortal fate of Agamemnon (πατρῷον μόρον) and implies that already at the time of the events recounted in the first play of the trilogy Zeus was capable of feeling a sense of responsibility towards mortals. It is remarkable that in his words of gratitude toward the gods Orestes connects Zeus' αἰδώς for his father's death with his own acquittal (σφάζει με): a connection which shows Orestes' retrospective projection of a sense of responsibility towards mortals onto the supreme god. Therefore, the theme of divine responsibility should not be divorced from the context in which it appears: as it can be

⁴¹⁸ 1956: 57.

often found in prayers or in expressions of gratitude paid by humans to the gods, it should be taken to reveal, if anything, the human need to feel that their suffering may be of concern to the divine sphere. Certainly, never during the *Oresteia* do these expressions contain a human reading of divine behaviour as something that evolves during time, as the example of Orestes' speech shows all too well.

No notion of an evolving Zeus can be found in the words uttered by the other divinities either. Not once do the Erinyes lament what the evolutionists interpret as a change of allegiance on Zeus' part. Considering that during the first two plays they worked as Zeus' agents, had they found a change in Zeus' behaviour one would expect them to comment on it. In their protests against Zeus' attitude (e.g. 365-6; 622-43) not once do they complain about a change in the nature of Zeus: on the contrary, they seem to attack what they regard to be a potentially inherent immorality in the government of the younger gods (727-33; 778-822). Finally, Apollo's evoking of the Ixion episode (717-8) should settle this dispute for good: although Sommerstein points out the incongruity of the argument – indeed those who remember Ixion's attempt at seducing Hera after Zeus' purification might as well reply 'with a disconcerting "yes"'⁴¹⁹ to Apollo's question – the passage nonetheless disproves the idea of an evolving Zeus. Apparently, he had precedents for granting purification to murderers: no 'divine progression' lies beneath his oracle in favour of Orestes' discharge.

Still, Sommerstein's question 'Is there any alternative to supposing that there has been a change in Zeus?' deserves to be answered.⁴²⁰ Are we supposed to regard the strong polarization between Zeus' luminous aspects and Zeus' darker side as an irreconcilable bifurcation in the nature of the supreme god? How is it possible to reconcile the notion of that chthonian Zeus⁴²¹ to whom Clytemnestra dedicates the third stroke inflicted on

⁴¹⁹ 1989 *ad* 717-18. See also 2008: 413; 445.

⁴²⁰ 2010a: 202.

⁴²¹ Some scholars take it as a periphrasis for Hades (Medda 2011: 342; Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 214; Sommerstein 2008: 169) with reference to *Suppl.* 156-7. Although this option cannot be entirely dismissed, I believe it undermines the continual association of Zeus and the Erinyes since the beginning of the trilogy. In addition, during the whole of the *Agamemnon* the noun Ἄϊδης is exclusively employed as a synonym for death (667; 1115; 1235; 1291; 1528). The only occurrence in which the noun is used to refer to the god Hades is in *Eum.* 273. Cf. West's note about Zeus Chthonios in *W&D* (465): 'The passage illustrates the ambivalence of Zeus Chthonios

Agamemnon (1386) with the notion of a Zeus of the thunderbolt to whom Athena refers later in the trilogy (*Eum.* 826-29)? In so far as the supernal world and the nether world were to be taken as antithetical areas of the world, the ambivalence of Zeus in the trilogy is, no doubt, problematic. My contention is that it would be inaccurate to assume that the ordinances emanating from the Olympian and the chthonic powers are irreconcilable and mutually exclusive.⁴²² Much more intriguing is the hypothesis of Zeus as the unity of opposites.

perfectly: he can be conceived as an extension of Zeus, or as a chthonic counterpart of Zeus', 1978: 276.

⁴²² Cf. Winnington- Ingram 1983: 164: 'The two world cannot be kept apart [...]. Certainly Aeschylus could not tolerate a bifurcated Zeus or a bifurcated world'.

CHAPTER 5

Zeus as the Ultimate Principle behind Reality

Although adumbrated in the works of other scholars,⁴²³ the interpretation of the Aeschylean Zeus as an impersonal and universal force embracing reality's contradictions finds in Golden and Seaford its most devoted advocates.⁴²⁴ The cornerstone of this approach consists in a criticism of the widespread assumption that the Aeschylean Zeus of the *Oresteia* should retain the same anthropomorphic characteristics as the Homeric god. By attempting to dismantle the anthropomorphic interpretation, these scholars aim to free the Aeschylean Zeus from the imputation of primitivism and contradictory behaviour and to argue in favour of a sophisticated and advanced conception of deity.⁴²⁵

My overall interpretation of Zeus in the *Oresteia* can be seen as an attempt to lend further support to this thesis. Thus far, I have underscored some of the hermeneutic problems attached to the figure of Zeus in the trilogy. First, I confronted the question from a textual perspective: I showed how Aeschylus framed and thematized the problem of divine nature from the outset of the first play. Second, I reviewed some of the positions adopted by modern scholars on the subject. In particular, I argued against what I called the 'evolutionary theory'. Next I will join the debate by discussing the nature of Zeus and his role in the *Oresteia* in the light of my earlier analysis of the Presocratic material.

In the present section I try to show how the theological and metaphysical dimensions of this trilogy can be profitably studied in connection with the philosophical ideas

⁴²³ Cf. Kitto 1966: 70-1: 'Aeschylus was contemplating our world as it is, with its problems and apparent contradictions, sometimes finding their solutions, sometimes not, but always in the faith that there is an ultimate unity which [...] we might as well call Zeus'; and Rosenmeyer 1982: 277, 279: 'Aeschylus' most powerful symbol for the matrix of forces within which the dramatic agent is placed is that of Zeus. [...] Zeus is all there is, and he is therefore the norm against which all should be measured'.

⁴²⁴ Golden 1961; Seaford 2003; 2010; 2012; 2013.

⁴²⁵ Golden 1961: 165; Seaford 2010: 181ff.

contained in some of the fragments. These ideas will be integrated with the basic assumption – which I illustrated in the introduction – that the Aeschylean texts should be read as containing two interlocking theological discourses. I identified an explicit dimension, represented by those passages in which discourse about the gods becomes self-aware and self-reflective, and an implicit dimension, in which the context and dramatic development cooperate to counteract and problematize such discourse. Different and contrasting lights are simultaneously shed on the figure of Zeus and the nature of divine justice when these two dimensions are considered together. However, in treating them separately, I wish to show how the philosophical ideas explored above have different effects on different levels of the text.

5.1 *Epistemological prudence*

From the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* to that of *Choephoroi*, from the outbursts of individual human characters to the divine dispute between the Olympians and the Erinyes in *Eumenides*, the nature and role of the divine emerges as a primary concern of this trilogy. More often than not, the divine sphere is what characters instantaneously turn to in moments of distress or when in search of legitimacy. God's nature and motives are always explored in conjunction with the characters' deeply felt need for causal explanation or their urgency to claim justice for their actions. However, as that frame of reference which humans most immediately and spontaneously rely on for a deeper level of meaning, the divine world is mostly approached with caution, perplexity and, awe – in short, a questioning attitude that is as startling as it is revealing. Always flashing in intermittent epiphanies of significance, the divine is presented as the unavoidable – yet unreliable – destination for human understanding.

It has been said that the Presocratics shared a common concern with language and with the human ability to grasp through language a deeper level of significance. Xenophanes' fragments denote a deep preoccupation with 'pious utterance' and focus on how to develop a suitable discourse about the divine. Heraclitus invests language itself with the ability to encapsulate and reproduce reality's perpetual contradictions and describes god itself through a series of oxymora (i.e. language's unity of opposites). Parmenides

presents his poem as a divine revelation and, after having equated thought, language, and Being, presents his ways of inquiry first and foremost as linguistic and logical alternatives. It seems that in each of these philosophical investigations there is a point where, almost inevitably, epistemology and theology meet.

Against the backdrop of Presocratic philosophy, it is possible to cast light on the epistemological aspects of theological discourse in the *Oresteia*. Human reflections on the divine contain a multidimensional concern with knowledge: a preoccupation with how to develop a discourse about divinity intersects with the issue of whether any knowledge about the divine is available to humans in the first place; the question of human knowledge is in turn linked to the question of the gods' role in directing man towards its acquisition.

As in Xenophanes' longest fragment the philosopher sets out to reject traditional myths in order to be able to 'always hold the gods in high esteem' (Θεῶν <δὲ> προμηθείην αἰὲν ἔχειν ἁγαθόν, 1.24), the Elders' preoccupation with pious utterance (ὁ δ' οὐκ εὔσεβής, 372) in the first *stasimon* of the *Agamemnon* reflects a similar attitude.⁴²⁶ The antagonistic attitude towards the masters of the past, which Xenophanes declines in the form of a moral criticism and Heraclitus in the form of an intellectual criticism (i.e. lack of 'insight', B40),⁴²⁷ is picked up by the Aeschylean Chorus who voice it according to their own personal concerns. God's commitment to justice is not to be doubted and the Chorus oppose their blind faith in 'the blow struck by Zeus' (Διὸς πλαγάν, 369) to the scepticism of those who say that 'the gods did not deign to concern themselves with mortals' (οὐκ [...] θεοὺς βροτῶν ἄξιόϋσθαι μέλειν, 369-70).

Moreover, as shown above, Xenophanes creates, in the same fragment (1.15-6), a remarkable link between piety in speech and moral action. The characters of the *Oresteia* are often preoccupied with finding the right words with which to address the gods. Proper speech seems often the non-renounceable prerequisite for requesting divine intervention and the potential for righteous action. If Electra's desire for the right

⁴²⁶ Cf. Ch. 1 and Int. II respectively. See also Rösler 1970: 11, for the similarity between Xenophanes' and Aeschylus' emphasis on εὔσεβεια.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Ch. 2.

word in *Cho.* 87ff has already been recalled,⁴²⁸ many other characters express a similarly cautious attitude with regard to the language they use. The initial prayer of the watchman, who in the prologue opens his speech with an invocation to the gods (θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ), contains an alternating pattern of hope and despair culminating in reticence. Initially he bids the gods to free him from fatigue and suffering (1) while fear prevents him from sleeping (14); subsequently the initial joy produced at the sight of the beacon (22) leaves room for anxieties which he dares not express in the open (36-40).⁴²⁹

If Electra's desire for the right word in her prayer at Agamemnon's tomb echoes the Elders' desire to please Zeus in the 'Hymn' (εἰ τόδ' αὖ-|τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ, | τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω, 160-2), the Elders' preoccupation with the power of language to affect reality and promote divine intervention is picked up during the first *stasimon*. Their anxiety to hear 'something shrouded in murk' (τί μοι μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές, 460), echoing the burden (ἄχθος, 165) of the Hymn and the atmosphere of the prologue, is voiced within a context of deep preoccupation with utterance that reminds us of the reticence of the watchman. First the Chorus give warning against the danger of angry words (βαρεῖα δ' ἄστῶν φάτις σὺν κότῳ, | δημοκράντου δ' ἄρᾶς τίνει χρέος, 456-7), then they claim that to be excessively praised is also dangerous, for it leads to a 'thunderbolt being launched from the eyes of Zeus' (βάλλεται γὰρ ὅσ|σοις Διόθεν κεραυνός, 469-70).

As in Heraclitus, words are perceived as a powerful means of communication: when carefully chosen they are capable of affecting reality; when carefully interpreted they can be revelatory of deeper levels of significance.⁴³⁰ So Orestes is preoccupied with hitting on the apt word (τί νιν προσειπὼν ἄν τύχοιμ' ἄν εὐστομῶν; *Cho.* 997)

⁴²⁸ Ch. 1.2. Cf. Goldhill 1984a: 110.

⁴²⁹ For an incisive characterization of the watchman cf. Rutherford 2012: 296-7.

⁴³⁰ For striking example of this attitude cf. the second *stasimon* of the *Agamemnon* (681-781) where the Chorus, by connecting the name of Helen (Ἑλένη) to the destructions she caused (ἑλέναυς, ἑλάνδρος, ἑλέπολις, 688-9), express their belief in the existence of a profound link between the etymon of Helen's name and her destiny as a destroyer of ships, men, and cities. This is a powerful poetic idea: for its relevance in Heraclitus cf. Ch. 2.4. In relation to this Aeschylean passage see: Calogero 2012: 206; 1967: 75; Fraenkel 1962: 329; Kirk 1954: 119; Peradotto 1969b: 5ff.; Goldhill 1984a: 59ff.; D.S. 2001: 153; Medda 2011: 284. For the importance of this subject in tragedy see also Wilamowitz 1895: 18-9, and for the importance of names in mythical thinking see Cassirer 1953-7, II, 40ff.

when describing the robe⁴³¹ in which Agamemnon was killed in the eyes of Zeus (‘who has been watching over all these events’, ὁ πάντ’ ἐποπτεύων τάδε, 985), for choosing the right description for it (999-1000) will reveal something about the man who used it (1001ff.) and support Orestes in his claim for justice (987ff.) The link between right words and righteous actions is also underlined in Clytemnestra’s oath after the murder, which she swears by the three divine figures of Dikê, Atê, and Erinys (*Ag.* 1431-3). Finally, the Chorus of Slave Women open their appeal to Zeus at *Cho.* 855ff. with a rather lengthy self-aware reflection on their speech:

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, τί λέγω; πόθεν ἄρξωμαι
τάδ’ ἐπευχομένη καπιθεάζουσ’,
ὕπὸ δ’ εὐνοίας
πῶς ἴσον εἰποῦσ’ ἀνύσωμαι;

Most importantly however, the voices of some characters disclose an interest in ‘right phrasing’ that transcends the moral sphere. In grappling with the question of the divine, they often express a hesitation extending well beyond a concern with the intervention of the gods. More often than not, the uncertainty voiced regards rather these characters’ ability to be able to understand, from their own limited human perspective, the very essence of divine nature and thought. The imagery of a famous passage from another Aeschylean tragedy illustrates particularly well this sentiment:

εἴθ’ εἴη <’κ> Διὸς εἶς παναλη-
θῶς. Διὸς ἥμερος οὐκ
εὐθήρατος ἐτύχθη·
δαυλοὶ γὰρ πραπίδων
δάσκιόι τε τείνου-
σιν πόροι κατιδεῖν ἄφραστοι.
(*Suppl.* 86-7; 93-95)⁴³²

⁴³¹ A vexed passage, cf. Garvie 1986: 326-7. Following Sommerstein’s edition I take νιν to refer to the robe.

⁴³² Text as in Johansen and Whittle 1980: Vol. I 84.

Within the dramatic climax of the ode, (ἐ)κ Διός — where Διός is also emphatically repeated in the next colon — has the function of narrowing down the focus from the θεοὶ γενέται (77) of the preceding antistrophe.⁴³³ However, as the Chorus refer to Zeus as their ultimate resort, they simultaneously envisage his mind as something inscrutable. The image evoked is that of groves and thickets which afford hiding alcoves for a beast: the ever-elusive desire of the god runs in the convoluted pathways of his mind like a prey ‘hard to catch’ (οὐκ εὐθήρατος). The choice of vocabulary is significant: the word ἵμερος is probably chosen to convey the super-rational quality of the god’s motives and although much more could be said on the relationship between Zeus’ ἵμερος⁴³⁴ and his πραπίδες,⁴³⁵ the evocative power of this imagery can be appreciated as it stands. The human desire for divine benevolence and ultimate reassurance (εἴθ’ εἴη <’κ> Διὸς εἴ παναληθῶς) is frustrated by the nature of divine desire itself: an uncatchable and irrational animal prowling in a dark maze of overgrown paths.

The following antistrophe develops the image in a new direction:

πίπτει δ’ ἀσφαλὲς οὐδ’ ἐπὶ νό-
 τωι, κορυφαῖ Διὸς εἰ
 κρανθῇι πράγμα τέλειον·
 πάντῃ τοι φλεγέθει
 κἄν σκότῳ μελαίνοι
 ξὺν τύχῃ μερόπεσσι λαοῖς.
 (91-92; 88-90)

What was a divine desire (ἵμερος) in the strophe finds concretization in the antistrophe as an accomplished fact (πράγμα τέλειον) that ‘falls unstumbling’ (πίπτει δ’ ἀσφαλὲς) and finally makes direct contact with human beings, here defined by the epic phrase μερόπεσσι λαοῖς.⁴³⁶ Interestingly, although both the zoological metaphor and the atmosphere of darkness⁴³⁷ are picked up from the previous strophe, their poetic force

⁴³³ Johansen and Whittle 1980: Vol. II 81. Cf. Papadopoulou 2011: 39ff.

⁴³⁴ Cf. *Cho.* 299, where ἵμεροι is used to describe Orestes’ ‘motives’, cf. Garvie 1986: 120.

⁴³⁵ Johansen and Whittle 1980: Vol. II 83.

⁴³⁶ μερόπεσσι βροτοῖσιν (*Il.* 2.285) μερόπων ἀνθρώπων (*W&D* 109).

⁴³⁷ Notice a possible etymological interplay between σκότῳ and δάσκειοι.

carries out a reversed function. While the image of an animal⁴³⁸ is re-evoked through the description of the *πρᾶγμα* originating from Zeus' nod as 'landing on its feet and not on its back', a landscape of darkness, similar to that of the woodland, is re-created with the main purpose of bringing out the ubiquitous blaze of such a *πρᾶγμα*. In this way strophe and antistrophe share a similar atmosphere but only in order to describe two sides of the same coin: when human kind attempts to make sense of divine desire they are bound to grope in the dark of Zeus' mind;⁴³⁹ when divine deed befalls a man, human secrecy is ineffectual and no darkness can save man from the blackness of his fortune (*μελαίναι ξὺν τύχαι*).

The concluding references to mankind as well as to the all-pervasiveness of Zeus' power are then picked up and further developed as the ode continues:

*ιάπτει δ' ἐλπίδων
 ἄφ' ὑψιπύργων πανώλεις βροτούς,
 βίαν δ' οὔτιν' ἐξοπλίζει·
 πᾶν ἄπονον δαιμόνιον·
 ἥμενος δὲν φρόνημά πως
 αὐτόθεν ἐξέπραξεν ἔμ-
 πας ἐδράνων ἄφ' ἄγνων.*
 (96-103)

Here, the contrast between the divine and human conditions is brought to an extreme: the greatness of Zeus' power is juxtaposed to the misery of humankind, a juxtaposition that is marked in style as well as in content. The correspondence between the initial verbs *πίπτει* and *ιάπτει* underpins a transition from the more passive action of 'falling' to the more active one of 'throwing', and thereby the violence of god's intervention is announced from the start. Moreover, the wretchedness of humankind is finally spelled out (*πανώλεις βροτούς*) together with the height of their 'towering hopes' (*ἐλπίδων ἄφ' ὑψιπύργων*) which are in turn contrasted with the effortlessness of divine action (*βίαν δ' οὔτιν' ἐξοπλίζει· | πᾶν ἄπονον δαιμόνιον*). The last sentence enlarges

⁴³⁸ Which at 91-2 overlaps with that of a wrestler, cf. Johansen and Whittle 1980: Vol. II *ad loc.*

⁴³⁹ Also compared to an inscrutable abyss at 1057-9.

the notion of the ‘unarmed’ god who equips no violence in realising his purpose while remaining seated. This imagery reminds us of our analysis of the ‘Hymn’: there too a ‘violent grace’ emanates from the gods who – just like here – are evoked as they ‘sit on the august bench of command’ (δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος | σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων, *Ag.* 182-3).⁴⁴⁰

Thus Aeschylus shares with Xenophanes (B18; B34) and Heraclitus (B78; B79; B82-3; B86)⁴⁴¹ the theme of the limitations of human knowledge, which cannot compare to divine knowledge and whose full insight into divine design is precluded. In their reflections surrounding the divine sphere, some Aeschylean choruses adopt the same sort of epistemological prudence that, in the wake of the Presocratics, develops in various directions throughout the fifth century. From Protagoras’ bold claim of agnosticism to Plato’s reverent acknowledgment of the difficulties that occur when one tries to understand the nature of the divine,⁴⁴² in one way or the other each of these authors can be seen as drawing on the Presocratics for the terms of the issue.⁴⁴³ For it is only with the rational theology of the Presocratics that the question of divine nature is linked with the broader question of human knowledge and its shortcomings. It is only through their speculation and their demythologising attitude that the non-perceptibility of the divine is perceived as a fundamental cognitive puzzle. Two fragments in particular can be recalled as special *memoranda*:

καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὐτις ἀνὴρ ἴδεν οὐδὲ τις ἔσται
εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων·
εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών,
αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε. δόκος δ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.
(Xenophanes B34.1-4)⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ For the striking similarities between this passage and Xenophanes’ B25 *Cf.* § 3.

⁴⁴¹ Regarding B86 *cf.* n. 453.

⁴⁴² περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναι, οὐθ’ ὥς εἰσὶν οὐθ’ ὥς οὐκ εἰσὶν οὐθ’ ὅποιοί τινες ἰδέαν· πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ κωλύοντα εἰδέναι ἢ τ’ ἀδηλότης καὶ βραχύς ὢν ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (Protagoras B4). τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὗρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντα ἀδύνατον λέγειν (*Tim.* 28c-29).

⁴⁴³ Herodotus’ observation that until Homer’s and Hesiod’s descriptions of divine features the Greeks did not know who the gods were and what they looked like (*Hist.* 2. 53) may be read along the same lines. The point is that the gods cannot be directly seen.

⁴⁴⁴ B34 was cited in Ch. 1.1 for other reasons. Often discussed in conjunction with B35, B36, B18, and B38, its bold epistemological claims have inspired lively debates. *Cf.* Sassi 2013:

οὐκ ἔστιν πελάσασθαι ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἐφικτόν
 ἡμετέροις ἢ χερσὶ λαβεῖν, ἥπέρ τε μεγίστη
 πειθοῦς ἀνθρώποισιν ἀμαξιτὸς εἰς φρένα πίπτει.

(Empedocles B133)

Both Xenophanes' and Empedocles' fragments deny the possibility of obtaining cognitive clarity about the gods, for they belong to that realm of things that escapes the direct grasp of our senses.⁴⁴⁵ Since it is impossible to bring the gods within the reach of our vision and touch – primary roads, according to Empedocles, of persuasion 'entering the mind' (εἰς φρένα) of man – no unerring belief about them can be attained. Particularly noteworthy is the juxtaposition – indeed one that is reemployed in reversed terms by many subsequent thinkers – that Xenophanes establishes between the clarity/certainty (τὸ σαφές) which no man can attain through his limited experience and the opinion (δόκος) allotted to all. In presenting the divine sphere and the rest of reality as different yet complementary objects of knowledge (ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων),⁴⁴⁶ the fragment places discourse about the gods within the restricted horizon of human cognitive limitations: the gods, as well as the ultimate causes of natural phenomena, do not reveal themselves and cannot therefore be fully grasped even in their τέλος. For being able to talk about what is brought to pass does not equate to knowing its ultimate causes,⁴⁴⁷ just as in the Aeschylean ode the πράγμα τέλειον of the god does not equate to knowing his original ἥμερος.

294ff; Graham 2010: 126-7; 132-3; K.R.S. 2007: 179-80; Barnes 2002: 138-43 and especially Leshner's extensive discussion of what he identifies as six different modern trends of interpretation of Xenophanes' epistemology, 1992: 149-86. For a discussion of this fragment in relation to Aeschylus see Rösler 1970: 19ff.

⁴⁴⁵ On the use of ἴδεν as a perceptual verb in Xenophanes B34 see Fränkel 1974: 123 (criticised by Leshner in 1992: 157); for the role of vision more in general in Xenophanes see Sassi 2013: 295ff. Without any need to exaggerate the 'perceptual orientation' (Leshner 1992: 162) of the verbs of knowledge in the fragment, one must recognise the importance laid by Xenophanes on sense perception as something necessary for reliable knowledge. I am inclined to follow an interpretation of B34 as a claim primarily regarding the 'natural limitations imposed on human knowledge by the small circle of human experience', Leshner 1992: 166, but see also Heitsch 1983: 174; Ioli 2003; Sassi 2009: 212.

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. Ch. 1.1.

⁴⁴⁷ τετελεσμένον εἰπὼν has been variously translated as 'saying what is true' (Guthrie 1981), 'saying something that is the case' (Barnes 2002), 'to speak of what has been brought to pass' (Leshner 1992), 'saying the complete truth' (K.R.S. 2007). If τετελεσμένον means literally something that has been brought to fulfilment (i.e. it is therefore undisputable), Xenophanes'

It is important, however, to draw a distinction between the two notions of the *unknowable* and the *hidden*.⁴⁴⁸ Xenophanes' cognitive cautiousness, which in B34 has led some to interpret his attitude as one of harsh scepticism,⁴⁴⁹ clearly does not prevent him from speculating about the nature of god as if it were indeed something knowable (B23-6). Beautifully encapsulated in Heraclitus' saying φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ (B123),⁴⁵⁰ the idea that the ultimate constitution of things 'loves to hide' is probably the single most emphasised tenet in Presocratic epistemologies. The cryptic constitution of nature makes the process of knowing – as powerfully expressed in Parmenides' allegorical Proem – a difficult journey. However, it is precisely with Heraclitus and Parmenides that the focus of philosophical interest in knowledge is overtly shifted away from what is available to sense perception⁴⁵¹ and redirected toward a theoretical understanding of the hidden nature of things.⁴⁵²

Within this framework it follows that divine nature, as one of the imperceptible constituents of the cosmos, is approached through the same attitude and set of epistemological premises as reality in general:

line of thought might be here that being able to talk about what happens does not mean having full knowledge about it (i.e. to know the causes behind phenomena?)

⁴⁴⁸ Cf Broadie 2006: 213: 'Xenophanes had spoken as if there *is* a plain truth about the gods, only mortals cannot rise to clear knowledge of it; for Heraclitus, that is because no truth is plain'.

⁴⁴⁹ Kirk 1954: 231; but see also other scholars mentioned in Leshner 1992: 161.

⁴⁵⁰ On the difficulty of determining the exact meaning of φύσις in B123 cf. Kirk 1954: 227ff. I follow Kirk (p. 228) in understanding φύσις in its broadest sense as 'the way a thing is made' i.e. its 'essence' or 'nature'.

⁴⁵¹ Regarding Heraclitus, caution is needed. By 'away from sense perception' I do not mean that Heraclitus deemed the realm of the senses as utterly unreliable or useless for the acquisition of knowledge (cf. B55; B107), but that he insisted on the importance of recognizing the unitary function of the hidden λόγος. For a good evaluation of Heraclitus' 'rationalism' cf. Curd 2002: 120-4.

⁴⁵² This is where the meeting point of epistemology and theology becomes most vibrant. It is difficult to determine whether these thinkers applied to god the set of epistemological problems they encountered in their natural inquiry or, vice-versa, whether they projected onto the hidden nature of things their reverential attitude towards the divine. Whilst god is regarded as one of the fundamental hidden constituents of the cosmos, so is every hidden component of the cosmos perceived as divine. What really emerges from this intricate philosophical panorama is that the question of god's nature is turned in this period into a central epistemological dilemma.

τῶν μὲν θείων τὰ πολλὰ ἀπιστίῃ διαφυγγάνει μὴ γινώσκεσθαι
(Heraclitus B86) ⁴⁵³

ἐὰν μὴ ἔλπεται ἀνέλπιστον οὐκ ἐξευρήσει, ἀνεξερεύνητον ἐὼν
καὶ ἄπορον. (Heraclitus B18)

Just as the φύσις of things loves to hide, so ἁρμονίῃ ἀφανής is better than one φανερή (B54), and the λόγος ξυνός escapes those who think as though they had a ‘private understanding’ (ἰδίαν φρόνησιν, B2), so the divine sphere spurns the understanding of those who approach it in disbelief (ἀπιστίῃ). Together with B18, B86 seem to imply that with ‘confidence’ a part of what is hidden can be discovered.⁴⁵⁴ As various other Heraclitean fragments suggest (B67; B32; B41), God’s nature, especially when considered in association with the λόγος and the hidden harmony of the cosmos, can be at least partially apprehended.⁴⁵⁵

5.2 Light in darkness: following the beacon

The same landscape of light and darkness that in the *Suppliants*’ ode was evoked to describe Zeus’ mind becomes the fundamental symbolic setting of the *Oresteia*. The trilogy opens with a watchman stargazing from a roof. He has come to know – he tells us (*Ag.* 4-7) – the stars and the way time and the succession of seasons can be marked through them.⁴⁵⁶ However the nocturnal sky does not contain the signal he is after and the man keeps alert for a different type of gleam and different type of message (λαμπάδος τὸ ξύμβολον, 8). He prays the gods for it. He prays to them for ‘a happy release from misery, by the appearance in the darkness of the fire that brings good news’ (20-1). At the end of the trilogy the people of the city are said to have learnt some

⁴⁵³ Although the τῶν μὲν θείων τὰ πολλὰ are most likely Plutarch’s words (DK 1964, Ramnoux 1968, Marcovich 2001), like Fränkel 1975 and D.S. 2001 (see esp. p. 165) I believe the subject of the verb can be understood as belonging to the ‘divine sphere’ in its broadest sense.

⁴⁵⁴ Kirk 1954: 231.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Ch. 2.3. For the association of the four Heraclitean concepts of λόγος, φύσις, ἀνέλπιστον, to which I add ἁρμονίῃ ἀφανής, cf. Marcovich 2001: 43.

⁴⁵⁶ For a curious discussion of this passage and Aeschylus’ astronomical knowledge cf. Pfundstein 2003: 400ff.

form of lesson (996-1000) and a great procession of ‘torches devoured by fire’ (*Eum.* 1041-2) leads them together with the ‘childless children of Night’ (1034) into the city. Like many of his near-contemporary thinkers, Aeschylus links his theological discourse with questions of human knowledge, its origin and drive, its potential and limitation.

A powerful visual externalization of the many polarities inherent in the fabric of the play,⁴⁵⁷ the polarity between light and darkness – which recalls its usage in Parmenides’ Proem and Pindar⁴⁵⁸ – can be regarded among other things as a metaphor for knowledge and ignorance. Although projected on a larger scale, the extent of the chiaroscuro remains the same as in the *Suppliants*’ ode: still a general darkness only temporarily lit by soft luminescence. This imagery reflects the alternating attitudes of the characters of the plays: more pessimistic when fixated on god’s inscrutable mystery, more hopeful when oriented towards dim manifestations of significance. It also reflects the stark antithesis between early Greek poetic and philosophical attitudes towards the same issue.

We have already encountered, in some of the passages previously analysed, several instances in which the point of view of certain characters is turned away from the specificity of their circumstances and is redirected instead towards a contemplation of the human condition as a whole. The characters’ repeated and despairing lack of understanding and control over the events at hand often prompts them to voice their discomfort through laments which have a universal applicability. Such are Cassandra’s last words before she enters the palace to face her death:

ἰὼ βρότεια πράγματα· εὐτυχοῦντα μὲν
σκιᾷ τις ἂν πρέψειεν· εἰ δὲ δυστυχῇ,
βολαῖς ὑγρώσων σπόγγος ὤλεσεν γραφήν. (*Ag.* 1327-9)

This beautiful trope, which likens human affairs to the instability of shadows and drawings, echoes a long poetic tradition. The most immediate association is probably with Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 in which humans are deemed as ‘ephemeral beings’ and are

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. Ch. 10.

⁴⁵⁸ Bowra 1937: 99ff.

compared to ‘the dream of a shadow’ (σκιᾶς ὄναρ ἄνθρωπος, 8.96).⁴⁵⁹ The key word ἐπάμερος (8.95) reoccurs in its various forms (ἐπήμερος, ἐφήμερος, ἐφημέριος) in several poetic passages from the archaic period to connote a specific attitude towards the human condition. A centripetal term around which revolve highly nuanced reflections on humankind and its place in the universe, the Archaic Greek notion of human ‘ephemerality’ conveys both existential and cognitive meanings.⁴⁶⁰

This is particularly evident when passages such as Cassandra’s speech or Pindar’s *Pythian* 8 are read in conjunction with passages such as *Odyssey* 18. 130-140, Pindar’s *Nemean* 6. 3-6, or Semonides 1W², where the term ἐφήμερος is deployed to convey the instability of human understanding (νοῦς). In each of these instances the emphasis laid on human ignorance and its limited perspective springs from a comparison with the divine sphere since like Semonides says: ‘humans know nothing (οὐδὲν εἰδότες) of how the god will bring each thing to an end (ἐκτελευτήσει θεός, 4-5)’. The step between short life and short-sightedness is a quick one to take: humans are not *ephemeroi* simply because they are short-lived, but also because the instability of their existence prevents them from gaining any worthwhile insight into the future.

This is why the theme of human ‘ephemerality’ often intersects – especially in early Greek elegy and iambus – with that of human ‘*amechanía*’: the impotence of humankind in the face of their destiny.⁴⁶¹ In so far as some tragic characters speak from within the framework of an order which their humanity cannot comprehend, they often speak as the perfect embodiment of the poetic attitude just delineated. The Argive Elders at *Ag.*1530ff are a clear case in point. Whilst made to helplessly watch the divine scheme of *Moira* and *Dikê* unfold (1535-6), they declare their lack of mental resources thus: ἀμηχανῶ φροντίδος στερηθεῖς | εὐπάλαμον μέριμναν | ὅπα τράπωμαι

⁴⁵⁹ For humans’ aleatory existence in Pindar cf. Romeyer-Dherby 1999: 5-13.

⁴⁶⁰ The meaning of the term ἐφήμερος is much debated. For two partially contrasting positions see Fränkel 1946 and Dickie 1976. On ἐφήμερος see also Babut 1971: 21, and Gerber 1984: 127. These various interpretations, with their emphasis on different semantic aspects of the term (‘short-lived’; ‘inconsistent’; ‘variable’; etc.) are not in my opinion mutually exclusive. They should be rather understood as proof of the subtle polysemy of a term charged with task of expressing a worldview made of multiple perspectives.

⁴⁶¹ Sassi 2009: 200.

(Ag. 1530-2).⁴⁶²

However, this is not the only voice we hear in the *Oresteia*: for this is the very same Chorus who earlier in the play turned to Zeus in the hope of saving their mind (φροντίδος) from the burden of impairing anguish (ἄλχος, 165). The context is similar: in both instances (207; 1526) the Elders are reminded of the sacrifice of Iphigenia and feel bewilderment in the face of divine justice. Yet their attitudes towards the possibility of gaining some form of understanding vary profoundly. In the *parodos*, the Elders react to the event they recall with a meditation on divine nature (160-66) and on Zeus' role in directing human understanding (174-8).

As a speculation on the nature of things, the inquisitive approach of early Greek philosophers may be regarded as the obvious counterpart to the pessimistic reflections of poets on human existence. Although various philosophers restate the gap between human and divine knowledge,⁴⁶³ many also lay emphasis on the human potential to improve on their cognitive condition and to broaden their understanding of nature through the correct deployment of the means they possess. So both Alcmaeon and Xenophanes juxtapose the human ability to conjecture, search, and form opinions (τεκμαίρεσθαι, Alcmaeon B1; ζητοῦντες, δόκος, Xenophanes B18, B34) with divine *sapheneia*. In particular in B18,⁴⁶⁴ Xenophanes seems to insist on some form of philosophical emancipation from god-imparted knowledge.

Others, such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Empedocles, opted – each in his own characteristic fashion – to present their philosophical enterprise as itself a way to narrow the gap between the human and divine spheres. In launching his enterprise of metaphysics, Parmenides depicts the Way of Truth applying a method of pure logic – his poem is an untraditional attempt to break free of any physical assumption which he chooses to present in the form of divine revelation. Within Heraclitus' configuration of unity and opposites, theology becomes a way to describe the immanent harmony of

⁴⁶² For an analysis of *amechanía* as a formative basis for Greek tragedy and the continuing effect of certain aspects of the Archaic attitude on tragedy's worldview cf. Segal 1963: 19-53.

⁴⁶³ e.g. Xenophanes 23-6; Heraclitus 78; 79; 82.

⁴⁶⁴ Οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν, ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον. The fragment is much debated. For a good summary and the interpretation I follow cf. Lesher 1992: 149-55.

nature, cosmology a way to overcome traditional conceptions of deity (B67). Hard to disentangle, the discourses about nature and about divinity converge in a single picture where the divine and the human are united by the grasp of a comprehensive principle.

Against this complex and diverse backdrop, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* stands as a powerful dramatic contribution to the debates of its time. Two intermingling voices resound in the complex fabric of the 'epistemological theology' of the trilogy: depending on the context, an initial mind-set of cognitive prudence might lead to either attitudes of utter scepticism or attitudes of hopeful openness. Claims of desperate epistemic pessimism – such as those uttered by the Elders at the end of the *parodos* of *Agamemnon* or those uttered by the Slave Women at the end of *Choephoroi*⁴⁶⁵ – coexist with claims of veiled optimism regarding the fact that some form of knowledge may eventually be attained. While the former can be traced back to the traditional poetic pessimism contained in verses such as those of Semonides 1W², the latter can be traced back to the Presocratics. It is in the synthesis of the two that Tragedy can be seen as contributing to the development of a discourse on god and knowledge in fundamental ways. From now on we shall leave darkness behind and follow the light of the beacon: we shall wholly and only focus on what can be gathered about Zeus in the *Oresteia*.

5.3 Zeus cause and effector of all

ὃν ἰή, διὰ Διὸς
παναιτίου πανεργέτα (Ag. 1485-6)

It is indeed revealing to consider the Zeus of Aeschylus in the light of the four core fragments of Xenophanes' constructive theology (B23-6).⁴⁶⁶ Not only because – through such comparison – he comes across as a sort of dramatic embodiment of the divine attributes which the philosopher confers on his god, but also because the set of questions raised during our analysis of the Xenophanean fragments can thereby be

⁴⁶⁵ τὸ μέλλον δ' ἐπεὶ γένοιτ' ἂν κλύοις· πρὸ χαιρέτω· | ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν· (Ag. 251-3, cf. Ch. 4.1 for a contextual analysis of this passage) ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει | μετακοιμισθὲν μένος ἄτης; (Cho. 1075-6).

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Ch. 1. 3.

transposed to the Aeschylean texts. In this section I discuss the question of henotheism in Aeschylus and the tension between corporeal and non-corporeal representations of the supreme god.

There is an undeniable emphasis on Zeus in the plays of Aeschylus. In the *Persians* and the *Seven*, in which there are no reflective passages regarding his nature, the references to Zeus are nonetheless overwhelmingly more numerous than those to the rest of the pantheon.⁴⁶⁷ When other gods are called upon, no one receives the epithets of supremacy bestowed on Zeus (βασιλεῦ, *Pers.* 532 ἄναξ, 762; πάτερ παντελής, *Seven* 116; παγκρατές, 255). In the *Suppliants*, ‘Zeus’ is the first word of the play. As protector of suppliants (1; 211; 347; 641; 814) and ancestor (γεννήτωρ, 206) of the Danaids through Io, Zeus has a prominent role in this tragedy. He is described as an impartial invigilator (360; 403), promoter of divine vengeance (646) all-powerful god (παγκρατές, 816) and absolute sovereign:

ἄναξ ἀνάκτων, μακάρων
μακάρτατε καὶ τελέων
τελειότατον κράτος, ὄλβιε Ζεῦ (*Suppl.* 524-6)

Similarly, in the *Oresteia*, Zeus has the most disparate functions⁴⁶⁸ and receives epithets such as παναίτιος (‘cause of all’) and πανεργέτης (‘all-effecting’, 1486). Indeed, one can say that Xenophanes’ B23 would be an apt description of Zeus as he is depicted in the Aeschylean corpus:

εἷς θεός, ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος,
οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοίος οὐδὲ νόημα.

But in what way would the Aeschylean Zeus be ‘not at all like mortals in body or in thought’? In other words, what do we know of Zeus’ mental and corporeal faculties? Most interestingly, in the *Suppliants* and the *Oresteia*, not only is Zeus the primary divine referent, but he is also the only god whose nature and purposes are openly

⁴⁶⁷ *Pers.* 740, 762, 827, 915; *Seven.* 8, 69, 116, 485, 512, 517, 520, 630.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. Ch. 4.2.

questioned through reflective passages of some length. As shown above, the *Suppliants* contains an important ode describing his extraordinary mental powers. The similarities between this Aeschylean passage and Xenophanes' B25-6 are indeed worthy of notice:

βίαν δ' οὔτιν' ἐξοπλίζει·
 πᾶν ἄπονον δαιμόνιον
 ἥμενος ὃν φρόνημά πως
 αὐτόθεν ἐξέπραξεν ἔμ-
 πας ἐδράνων ἅφ' ἄγνων. (*Suppl.* 98-103)

ἄλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει. (B25)

αἰεὶ δ' ἐν ταῦτῳ μίμνει κινούμενος οὐδέν
 οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαί μιν ἐπιπρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλλῃ. (B26)

The three fundamental points made in B25-6 echo powerfully in the stanza: the idea of effortlessness (πᾶν ἄπονον / ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο); the idea of immobility (ἥμενος / ἐν ταῦτῳ μίμνει); and the idea of telekinetic mental power (ὃν φρόνημά [...] ἐξέπραξεν / νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει).

In the light of my previous discussion of Xenophanes' fragments and the Homeric imagery of Zeus capable of shaking Olympus by a 'nod of his brow',⁴⁶⁹ it is possible to see how Aeschylus seems to have embraced Xenophanes' fundamental points of contrast with the tradition. Just like in Xenophanes, in Aeschylus too the sheer intellectuality of the god (φρόνημα) is contrasted with the anthropomorphic conception of the Homeric god and the horizon of what the god can reach is extended from mount Olympus to the whole of reality in which humans build their 'towering hopes' (*Suppl.* 97). In the *Oresteia* a similar conception of Zeus is at play. For instance, in *Eumenides* Apollo describes the all-pervasive action of his father as an effortless force:⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ *Il.* 1.525-30. *Cf.* Ch. 1.3. *Cf.* Seaford 2012: 252, although I disagree with his point that Xenophanes developed such a conception 'under the influence of monetisation'.

⁴⁷⁰ Literally: 'not panting at all'.

[...] τὰ δ' ἄλλα πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω
στρέφων τίθησιν οὐδὲν ἀσθμαίνων μένει. (650-1)

In the 'Hymn to Zeus' in the *Agamemnon*, in which the Argive Elders seem to repeat almost *verbatim* the words of the Danaids (δαϊμόνιον | [...] ἥμενος, *Suppl.* 99-100 / δαϊμόνων | [...] ἡμένων, *Ag.* 182-3), the imagery of a seated god is picked up. From the same position of immobility, Zeus is able to 'set mortals on the road to understanding'. His 'grace' is not 'violent' because it requires any effort on his part, but because it befalls men 'even against their will'. As in the ode of the *Suppliants*, Zeus requires no 'armed support': his ordinance subjects mortals from afar. It could almost be said that the law of 'learning by suffering' is as much a violent grace as it is a graceful violence.⁴⁷¹

But would it be appropriate to talk of some form of Aeschylean henotheism?⁴⁷² The conclusions reached in the chapter on Xenophanes are once again relevant and must be taken into account. At a purely explicit level of the text – that is, when merely looking at the words of choruses and characters outside their dramatic context – Aeschylus plays with the moralising attitude of some of his characters. We have already observed how through the choral voice of passages such as *Ag.* 369-72 and 750-62,⁴⁷³ the playwright interacts with and rivals the preceding 'impious' conceptions of the gods. At this level of the text, from within the hypothetical framework of a moralising programme,⁴⁷⁴ the emphasis on the divine – just like in Xenophanes – is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. When in the 'Hymn' the Chorus struggle to find any term of comparison for Zeus, their focus seem to be directed towards the nature of the god and its relation to human suffering. The outcome of individuating Zeus himself as the only possible term of comparison for Zeus (Ζεύς [...] πλὴν Διός, *Ag.* 160-5) has more to do with the difficulty they encounter while trying to develop an appropriate discourse about his unfathomable nature than with an emphasis on the god's singleness. Hence, just as in

⁴⁷¹ *Contra* Sommerstein 2010b: 168-9.

⁴⁷² *Cf.* Ch. 1.3.

⁴⁷³ *Cf.* Ch. Int. II.2.

⁴⁷⁴ I argue later that this is not the *Oresteia*'s ultimate representation of Zeus which is instead best understood as an amoral force.

the case of Xenophanes, the notion of an Aeschylean henotheism may be adopted provided that a certain caution is employed.

Those studies which interpret the emphasis on Zeus' supremacy as some sort of Aeschylean monotheism⁴⁷⁵ are in my opinion misinformed in both their premises and conclusions. To set the issue in these terms inevitably entails a moral evaluation of Zeus which is misconstrued – Aeschylus was no 'monotheistic thinker'.⁴⁷⁶ It is indeed true that at the outset of the *Agamemnon* the Chorus posits the question of divine justice in the face of the sacrifice of an innocent victim, but those who read the *Oresteia* as some form of theodicy mistake the point of view of human characters for that of the author.⁴⁷⁷ On the contrary, I believe that the various characters' attempts at making definite sense of god's justice are constantly frustrated, that the whole trilogy offers no absolute resolution to the problem of matricide⁴⁷⁸ and – most importantly – that Zeus is cumulatively portrayed as an amoral and almost impersonal force.

Just as the non-anthropomorphic god of Xenophanes, who shakes all things by his thought, nonetheless retains traces of corporeal representations (B23-4),⁴⁷⁹ so does the Aeschylean Zeus present a similar ambivalence. Indeed, mention is made throughout the *Oresteia* of Zeus' corporeal attributes: he 'perceives' the cries of the birds (*Ag.* 55-6), he has eyes or is asked to 'look down' (*Ag.* 469-70; *Cho.* 245), and Electra mentions his hand (*Cho.* 395). Also, his power and influence are still at times imagined as personal and physical actions: his fight with Cronus is described through a wrestling metaphor (*Ag.* 171-2), he is said to have bent his bow at Alexander (*Ag.* 364),⁴⁸⁰ he is said to make wine (*Ag.* 970) and at *Ag.* 1563-4, we are told that the law of $\pi\alpha\theta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\nu\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \xi\rho\xi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha$ will remain in force as long as Zeus remains firm on his throne. When references are made to his mythological past, an anthropomorphic patina is attached to the human emotions projected onto him (365; 717-8). However, as already argued by

⁴⁷⁵ Grube 1970: 47.

⁴⁷⁶ *Contra* Grube 1970: 47: 'At the same time, he [Aeschylus] is longing to believe in a just and ordered world. He is then faced with a problem which every monotheistic thinker has to face, how to reconcile omnipotence with benevolence or at least with justice'.

⁴⁷⁷ This is the typical approach of the Evolutionists (*cf.* Ch. 4.2)

⁴⁷⁸ *Cf.* Int. I.3 and Ch. 8.4.

⁴⁷⁹ *Cf.* Ch. 1.3.

⁴⁸⁰ *Cf.* *Ag.* 510 for another reference to the bow.

Golden,⁴⁸¹ most of these ‘actions’ and attributes can be read metaphorically, and – given the nature of the imageries – we are certainly entitled to register the eyes, the throne, the bow, and the hand, as anthropomorphic symbols only. Nothing whatever is stated about Zeus’ human form: nothing is stated about his mode of travel, his use of actual weapons, what he wears and, whether he appears to human sight.

The majority of references to Zeus simply portray him as an abstract force that accomplishes all the visible effects in the universe.⁴⁸² In the first two plays he seems to be regarded as the ultimate source of every punishment, he is honoured as the source of royal power, defender of the hearth, and protector of the rights of hospitality (*Ag.* 43, 704, 748). Thus he is considered responsible for the arrival of Helen at Troy (*Ag.* 748-9), the subsequent punishment of Alexander and the city (*Ag.* 59; 62; 355-71; 526; 582), and the reason behind the safe return of Agamemnon and the Herald (*Ag.* 508). In his capacity as source of punishment, sender of ruin, and defender of honour, he is invoked by Orestes and Electra against Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 19, 246, 382, 395, 409). In the trilogy, he is also the power by means of which humans might extricate themselves from danger (*Ag.* 677; *Cho.* 775), fortunes and misfortunes are traced back to Zeus (*Ag.* 367, 1036, 1424; *Cho.* 784-7), who is also responsible for the ripening of grapes and abundance of the earth (*Ag.* 970. 1014). He is also regarded as the power that prevents the dead from resurrecting (*Ag.* 1024; *Eum.* 647-50) and the ultimate source of oracles (*Ag.* 135; *Eum.* 616-21).⁴⁸³

Zeus ‘all-seeing’ (παντόπτας, *Eum.* 1045) is endowed in the *Oresteia* with a synoptic awareness closely resembling that of Xenophanes’ god in B24: some sort of invisible sensorial and mental ubiquity (‘whole he sees, whole he thinks, whole he hears’), which could hardly be available to normal organs. As the primary accomplishing force in the universe, he receives epithets such as τέλειος (‘the fulfiller’, *Ag.* 973), παγκρατής (‘almighty’, *Eum.* 918), παναίτιος, and πανεργέτης (‘cause and effector of all’, *Ag.* 1486). As a mysterious first cause of every effect his will escapes the grasp of human

⁴⁸¹ 1961: 161-2.

⁴⁸² Cf. Rosenmeyer 1982: 277: ‘Zeus is never a dramatic character, [...] he is a poetic way of talking about the context of human action’.

⁴⁸³ Cf. Ch. 4.2.

understanding. While in *Supplices* his mind is compared to a dark woodland or an inscrutable abyss (*Suppl.* 86-95; 1057-9), in the *Agamemnon* the Chorus abandon every attempt at defining his nature through the employment of terms of comparison other than Zeus himself:

Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ' αὖ-
τῳ φίλον κεκλημένω,
τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω (*Ag.* 160-3)

The Chorus refer to Zeus as 'Zeus' with the hesitation of those who are not too sure whether his traditional name is the best they can employ. As the dispenser and origin of a superior knowledge and wisdom – emphasised by the significant accumulation of *φρν related words in the Hymn (φροντίδος, 165; προφρόνως, 174; φρενῶν, 175; φρονεῖν, 176; σωφρονεῖν, 181) – Zeus can no longer be simply regarded as 'Zeus', nor can he, however, be satisfactorily addressed in any other way (πλὴν Διός, 165). It is impossible, in relation to this, not to think of the Heraclitean fragment:

ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα
(*Heraclitus* B32)

in which ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον – however we may want to understand this problematic subject⁴⁸⁴ – accepts and simultaneously refuses a nominal identity with the supreme god of traditional mythology.

The comparison can be expounded further. Just as the Heraclitean god is responsible for the stirring of everything through everything:

ἐν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτετι κυβερνᾶται πάντα διὰ πάντων
B41

so the Aeschylean Zeus 'disposes of all existing things'⁴⁸⁵ by turning them this way and that':

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Ch. 2.4.

[...] τὰ δ' ἄλλα πάντ' ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω
στρέφον τίθησιν (*Eum.* 650-1)

What is more, at a deeper level, the Zeus of the *Oresteia* lends himself to being read as the hidden principle behind a reality largely conceived in terms of opposites. The whole trilogy rests on a series of more or less explicit polarities: light/darkness, hope/despair, joy/grief, masculine/feminine. The process of initial collaboration, subsequent rift, and final reconciliation of Olympian and Chthonic forces underpins the development of human affairs. It represents, so to speak, the cosmic background of this trilogy's dramatic development.⁴⁸⁶ Being constantly invoked by both sides, Zeus is the unitary principle behind these cosmic antithetical powers. As promoter and guarantor of every justice he can emanate contrasting justices. A good example is the great *kommos* of *Choephoroi* where the justice of matricide and the justice of uxoricide are perceived in their collision by Orestes: Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκᾱ Δίκᾱ ('Violence will clash with violence, justice with justice', *Cho.* 461). A statement, this one, which is certainly suggestive to read in conjunction with Heraclitus' B80 in which the philosopher declares that 'it is necessary to know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things happen according to strife and necessity' (εἰδέναι χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἔόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεών).⁴⁸⁷ In the next chapters – in which the topics of justice and the unity of opposites is expanded – we shall see how this necessary strife is absorbed in the synthesis of opposites at the end of *Eumenides* and thereby made more bearable for the citizens of the new government.

The Zeus of the *Oresteia* is therefore beyond morality: an abstract principle behind reality, 'unapparent harmony' (ἁρμονίῃ ἀφανήῃ) as Heraclitus would call it, 'violent grace' as the Elders say. While for Heraclitus wisdom equates to knowing the ordinance which governs the whole of reality (B41), in the *Oresteia* Zeus is the supreme source of

⁴⁸⁵ τὰ δ' ἄλλα is in opposition to the preceding line in which Apollo declares that Zeus has created no charm against death.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. Chs. 4.2; 8.

⁴⁸⁷ Cf. Ch. 3.3. On this parallel I return in Ch. 7.4 where a full analysis of the *kommos* is provided.

knowledge and ultimate cause behind all human affairs and events in the world. As the Elders cry in despair:

τί γὰρ βροτοῖς ἄνευ Διὸς τελεῖται;
τί τῶνδ' οὐ θεόκραντόν ἐστιν; (Ag. 1487-8)⁴⁸⁸

Returning once again to the Hymn, it is now truly possible to appreciate the complexity and profundity of certain formulations. The Chorus call Zeus 'Zeus' only after having carefully weighed the whole of reality in the balance (πάντ' ἐπισταθμώμενος, 164). Nothing specific compares with the god because the god is everything in its totality. As declared in a fragment of the lost Aeschylean play the *Heliades*:

Ζεύς ἐστιν αἰθήρ, Ζεὺς δὲ γῆ, Ζεὺς δ' οὐρανός,
Ζεύς τοι τὰ πάντα χῶ τι τῶνδ' ὑπέρτερον (fr. 70)

In the idea that 'Zeus is the aether, Zeus is earth, Zeus is heaven, yes, Zeus is everything, and whatever there may be beyond that',⁴⁸⁹ one cannot fail to recognize a parallel with the Heraclitean god who is 'day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger':

ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμὼν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός. (B67, 1)

by means of which Heraclitus powerfully conveys the notion of a god-ultimate-unity – a divine gathering point where all pairs of opposites meet in harmonious tension.⁴⁹⁰ The Aeschylean Zeus, just like the Heraclitean θεός, is a divine principle of unity behind a contradictory reality. As such, humans can investigate his nature by measuring it against everything (πάντ' ἐπισταθμώμενος) and find no specific term of comparison in the balance except himself, or, alternatively, in the totality of things (Ζεύς τοι τὰ πάντα). Both the Heraclitean and Aeschylean gods must be primarily understood as divine principles that are immanent in reality, but that can and must be at the same time

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. the outset of Int. I. and Ch. 4.2.

⁴⁸⁹ Sommerstein 2009: 73.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. Ch. 2.3.

thought separately (κεχωρισμένον, B108; Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν [...] *Ag.* 160) as syntheses of the totality of things and ultimate principles containing the contradictory essence of reality.

The conclusion reached here may be put in relation with those reached by the Hungarian philologist and historian of religions Károly Kerényi in his illuminating essay on the notion of θεός in Ancient Greek thought.⁴⁹¹ As argued by this scholar, the Greek notion of θεός was only partially equivalent to that of 'god'. Essentially a predicate,⁴⁹² it seems that originally Greek speakers would not describe θεός as something, but rather something as θεός. This seminal sense of the word can be powerfully sensed in the fragment of Heraclitus we just recalled (B67, 1),⁴⁹³ in which a strong circularity between subject and predicates is potentially at play: i.e. we are inclined to read it as saying that ὁ θεός is the whole of reality as much as that the whole of reality is ὁ θεός. The same applies of course to Aeschylus fr. 70, where Zeus is the aether, earth, and heaven as much as their sum amounts to Zeus. In these cases the gap between θεός and τὸ θεῖον is probably not too wide: god is 'the divine' in its absolute manifestation. It could almost be said that, in this sense, θεός is something that 'occurs', it is an event and the sum of every event rather than their effector – an act and a state of things such as the aether, earth, and heaven, rather than an agent itself.

In the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon*, what looks like an invocation of Zeus is instead a meditation on the god's nature. In the 'Hymn' the Chorus do not say Ζεῦ in the vocative, but Ζεύς in the nominative. In this way the Elders choose not to place themselves in what Burkert called an 'I-Thou relation'. It is worth recalling this scholar's passage in full: 'The word *theos* does not lead into an I-Thou relation, it is declaratory of a third, objective power, even if it often arises from a state of confusion and overwhelming impressions.'⁴⁹⁴ Zeus in Aeschylus covers a similar function to that of a more abstract θεός, absolute divine and ultimate principle indispensable for speculation. Zeus, the god who, by setting 'man on the road to understanding' (*Ag.* 176-

⁴⁹¹ 2001: 205-14.

⁴⁹² Wilamowitz 1931: 17-18; Kirk 1954: 185; Burkert 1985: 271-2.

⁴⁹³ Kirk 1954: 185.

⁴⁹⁴ 1985: 272.

7), emanates a violent grace, is regarded as the supreme source of the only viable form of knowledge which can derive from a contradictory reality: the knowledge of the *πάθει μάθος*.

In conclusion to this chapter, it has been shown how, in the light of the comparison with some fragments of the Presocratics, the Aeschylean Zeus has abandoned the anthropomorphic characteristics of the traditional god of the pantheon. At an explicit level of the text, in the reflective theological passages of the *Oresteia* and the Aeschylean corpus, the characters of these tragedies openly declare their programmatic effort to represent the god in different terms from the tradition. Having cautiously introduced the term henotheism, we saw how, when scrutinised in connection with Xenophanes' theological fragments, the Zeus of Aeschylus shares many characteristics with those of Xenophanes' god: extraordinary mental powers and ubiquitous influence.

What should however be truly emphasised is how at a more subterranean level and through cumulative evidence, the Zeus of the *Oresteia* is slowly assimilated to an abstract force on which everything depends. In this sense it is no longer useful to conceive the issue in terms of the 'justice of the god', rather, it is more intriguing to conceive, in the light of a comparison with Heraclitus, of the 'god as justice'. Not anymore a god dispenser of *δίκη*, but a god cosmic *δίκη*: a retributive principle in the grace of which all the elements of the universe, among them humankind, are subjugated within a perpetual conflict. From the point of view of humans, this reality cannot be experienced in any other way except as *πάθος*. Precisely in this lies one of the most innovative contributions of tragedy to archaic Greek thought: the suggestion that human wisdom is experience of the alternating succession of contradictory events, its premises reside in man's necessity to contrive human answers in the face of divine impasses.

Paralleling certain lines of thought of the philosophical speculations which perceived their own epistemological efforts as a way to bridge the gap between the human and divine spheres, in the *Oresteia* the development of human knowledge is directly linked with the divine principle. This is because what governs the world is *itself* motive for knowledge. Just as in Heraclitus the *λόγος* is at the same time both a cognitive and

cosmic principle, so from the Aeschylean Zeus derives for man a type of wisdom that contains the divine essence of the 'violent grace': the πάθει μάθος — itself the ultimate reason behind human attempts at grasping the nature of the god. In this way, Aeschylus bestows on the experience of suffering the status of a profound form of knowledge: a meeting point between the human and the divine. In this way, Aeschylus bestows on tragedy the status of a literary genre capable of grasping and representing the essence of human nature as it is given in the contradictory multiplicity of the world.

CHAPTER 6

Time, Necessity, and the Inextricability of Justice and Injustice

The first two plays of the *Oresteia* dramatize a vicious cycle of blood-vengeance, in which a chain of vindictive and murderous acts culminates on matricide. This cycle is presented as an intricate knot of interrelated deeds, each somewhat determined by a previous act and begetting the next one, each determined by a multiplicity of causes both human and divine, and each accompanied by a complex apparatus of comments, attempted explanations and uncontrollable emotions. The central narrative-line, represented by the three family murders of Agamemnon's killing of Iphigenia, Clytemnestra's killing of Agamemnon and Orestes' killing of Clytemnestra, constantly intersects other narratives of vengeance: the punitive expedition of the Atreidae against Troy caused by Helen's elopement with Paris, Artemis' demand for Iphigenia's sacrifice as a requital for the killing of innocent lives, Apollo's curse on Cassandra for having cheated him, Aegisthus' killing of Agamemnon as revenge against Atreus for having served Thyestes his children's flesh.

In the *Oresteia* – especially in the first two plays – δίκη is not defined: it is acted.⁴⁹⁵ Like *theos* it has more the value of a predicate (with each character claiming his action to be an act of justice). As a personification, justice is not acted, but acts. Two of the most powerful impressions one may gain from this trilogy are that human beings are caught in an exorable web of actions each called 'justice', but also extendible to a view of the process in its entirety. The aim of this study is to explore what Mitchell-Boyask has broadly defined as the 'cosmic implications'⁴⁹⁶ of δίκη in the *Oresteia*, and to do so in the light of Presocratic ideas. Considering the deluge of secondary scholarship on the subject,⁴⁹⁷ this study has been conceived so as to emphasise and expand upon only a

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Havelock 1978: 295: 'Nowhere in the drama of Aeschylus can we yet find out "*what justice is*"'.

⁴⁹⁶ 2009: 106. Cf. the beginning of Ch. 3.

⁴⁹⁷ An exhaustive survey of the bibliography on the subject is beyond the scope of this study; for key-readings: Goldhill 1986: Ch. 2; McHardy 2008: Chs. 1; 2; 5; Mitchell-Boyask 2009: Ch. 5; and Sommerstein 2010a: Chs. 7.9; 13.3. For its religious dimension: Winnington-Ingram 1983: Ch. 8; Raeburn and Thomas 2011: Ch. 4.2; Parker 2011: xiiff.; Severino 2015.

few very specific δίκη-related themes. A brief explanatory premise regarding the approach hereby adopted is therefore required.

6.1 *Short premise*

It is astonishing how little in-depth study there has been of the relation between δίκη in the *Oresteia* and δίκη in archaic philosophical thought. Even Lloyd-Jones, who writes that ‘*dikê* means not only “justice” but the “order of the universe”’,⁴⁹⁸ and Kitto, who formulates δίκη in tragedy as a ‘proper order in the nature of things’ or as an act for the restoration of a balance broken by the ἀδικία of some act of violence,⁴⁹⁹ both do so in order to explain the Sophoclean conception of justice. Kitto in particular draws an analogy with Anaximander in order to explain δίκη in the *Electra* as *opposed* to δίκη in the *Oresteia*, but he spends little more than two pages on this analogy, in which he offers no discussion of Anaximander’s fragment itself but makes instead several generalizing assumptions about Aeschylus and Sophocles leading to artificial and ready-made distinctions between the two.

More recently, various efforts have been made to dismantle this type of categorizing and to nuance the premises which may lead to it. In particular, Vickers and Goldhill have openly rejected some of Kitto’s arguments in order to restore a less ‘metaphysical’ and more ‘humanistic’ understanding of the *Oresteia* and of Greek tragedy in general.⁵⁰⁰ However, as it is often the case with interpretative approaches which originate as a reaction against previous ones, the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction. The attempt to move away from a ‘metaphysical’ reading of Greek tragedy has engendered, at times, the production of extreme anti-types:

The first question to ask is whether the Greeks indeed had such a generally agreed concept of cosmic justice? There seems little evidence that they had. [...] For *dikê* both as a socially agreed and as a personal, therefore relative, concept of justice, I

⁴⁹⁸ 1971: 128.

⁴⁹⁹ 1961: 133-35.

⁵⁰⁰ Goldhill 1986: 33ff; Vickers 1973: 3-43.

find much evidence in Greek literature; for *dikê* as an effective agent of cosmic harmony I find none at all.⁵⁰¹

In his resolve to purge any cosmic dimension from Greek tragedy Vickers went as far as to deny the existence of any form of ‘cosmic justice’ from Greek thought as a whole. This, of course, is in our eyes an untenable view. Studies such as those already mentioned in chapter 3.3 have shown the relevance and aptness of this notion for the interpretation of Presocratic philosophies, in which *δίκη* expresses an idea of cosmological *order*.

Finally, even those who have recognised the importance of Greek archaic philosophical thought for the interpretation of Greek tragedy have barely given any attention to the possible connection between retributive justice in the *Oresteia* and retributive justice in Presocratic philosophy. Of course, authors like Goldhill and Seaford have underlined the connections between the widest sense of *δίκη* as a world order and the behaviour of individuals, and how such connections may be emphasised in various ways by taking account of the Presocratic philosophers.⁵⁰² However, their remarks fall within the specific context of their discussion of matters of rhetorical manipulation (Goldhill) or chronotope and monetisation (Seaford) and do not focus specifically on the significance of these connections or how they affect our perception of the *Oresteia*’s theological discourse. In this way, the treatment of ‘cosmic justice’ as a theme of the *Oresteia* remains predominantly relegated to those studies which have argued in favour of a benign or providential vision, a sort of Aeschylean theodicy and monotheism. The hypothesis that Aeschylus may have used the notion of cosmic retribution as it had been conceived by some Presocratic thinkers in order to problematize the terms of the relationship between the human and the divine spheres has hitherto never been advanced.

To be concise we can say that here we predominantly focus on *δίκη* beyond the moral sphere. As paradoxical as this may sound in connection to the *Oresteia*, such approach is in line with the conclusions reached in our study on Zeus, which can be recapitulated

⁵⁰¹ Vickers 1973: 25-9.

⁵⁰² Goldhill 1986: 36ff; Seaford 2012; 2013.

as following: Zeus is what characters constantly turn to when looking for an ultimate causal explanation; through the cumulative evidence of varied utterances and complex choral meditations, the nature of the god emerges as something fundamentally elusive and contradictory; yet despite – or rather because of – this, he remains the supreme source of human understanding and wisdom. Almost a ‘way’ to describe the incongruous pattern of self-defeating actions, Zeus’ role in the trilogy as a whole is best understood as an amoral force embracing reality’s contradictions.

Now, the name of Zeus is employed in two revealing puns. By linking the name of the god to the causal preposition ‘because of’ (Δι-ός/δι-αί, *Ag.* 1485) and to that of his daughter Justice (Δι-ός/Δί-κα, *Cho.* 948-9), Aeschylus creates a web of significance: everything happens ‘because of Zeus’; everything that happens is, in the widest sense of the term, ‘justice’. The connection between Zeus and δίκη in the first two plays of the trilogy is firmly set. The point is not only that ‘Δίκη really is Zeus’ daughter because she does his work’,⁵⁰³ but also that every act of Zeus is an act of δίκη and, vice-versa, that every act of δίκη is an emanation of Zeus’ power. Thus as already recalled,⁵⁰⁴ in *Ag.* 250 Δίκη takes the place of Zeus as the enforcer of the law of ‘learning though suffering’.

Similarly, at the end of the second *stasimon* (681-781), the initial question regarding Helen’s name τίς ποτ’ ὠνόμαζεν ἧδ’ ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐτητύμως [...] γλῶσσαν ἐν τύχῃ νέμων; seems to find an answer in the divine figure of Δίκη who, just like her father ‘the accomplisher’, πᾶν δ’ ἐπὶ τέρμα νομῶ (781). In their function of ultimate causal explanations of every event, the roles of Zeus and Δίκη is often interchangeable. If then, as previously said, it is no longer a question of assessing the ‘justice of the god’, but rather of assessing the ‘god as justice’, the terms of this ‘justice’ must be considered ontologically rather than ethically. In other words, the following chapters evaluate the workings of δίκη as a metaphysical principle rather than as a moral concept.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ Garvie 1986: 310.

⁵⁰⁴ Ch. 4.1.

⁵⁰⁵ In so doing it is not my intention to deny the ‘ethical’ dimension of the *Oresteia tout court*: its sophistication has already been extensively explored (e.g. Peradotto 1969a: 237-63; Nussbaum 1986; 1985: 233-67; Lawrence 2013). However, the question of δίκη cannot be

The notion of δίκη as a metaphysical principle and cosmic power was slowly developed at the time of the first philosophical speculations. In chapter 5, I traced the steps of these developments. Beyond the subtleties and specificities of each individual treatment, it can be said that the cosmic justice of these philosophers has three fundamental characteristics. First, the idea of cosmic regularity is naturally preceded by the implied premise of inherent cosmic limitations. In Anaximander, this idea stands out by contrast with the notion of the ἄπειρον and its limitless embrace (περιέχειν ἅπαντα, A15+B3): whereas the boundless nature⁵⁰⁶ of this ultimate principle prevents it to come into conflict with the elements it contains, τὰ ὄντα instead, by usurping their reciprocal boundaries, constantly commit injustice to each other.⁵⁰⁷ In Heraclitus' B94, δίκη represents a cosmic imposition on the sun: an inviolable order of nature due to which the sun is compelled to abide by his natural measures.⁵⁰⁸ This is the aspect of δίκη which takes over in Parmenides' poem, where the idea of 'justice' is constantly associated to notions of constraint and restriction on nature.⁵⁰⁹ Second, when δίκη is not equated to the notion of constraint *per se* than it is, as we have already recalled, that process of retribution among elements alternatively injured and injuring. In this case, whether designating each specific act or the overall process, δίκη operates according to strict rules of time and necessity. Thus cosmic δίκη is the following things all together: the imposition of limits, the penalty paid for transgressing such limits, and the overall mechanism which regulates such transgression into a cyclical process. Third, such conception(s) exist within a universe largely conceived in terms of opposites.

My study of justice in the *Oresteia* follows a tripartite structure. In the present chapter I show how the notion of an inherent limitations in the nature of the universe is

regarded as an ethical concept *only* and its centrality in the *Oresteia* cannot be fully appreciated unless other dimensions of the text are also taken into account.

⁵⁰⁶ The exact meaning of Anaximander's ἄπειρον is still object of controversy. Scholars argue whether it derives from the noun πείραρ, πέρας, meaning literally the one without πείρατα, or rather from the verbal root represented in verbs such as πείρω, περάω, and περαίνω, thus meaning 'which cannot be passed through to an end' (Kahn 1960: 231ff). In either way it is clear how this idea has been conceived in opposition to a reality perceived as fundamentally shaped by limitations.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. Ch. 3.2.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. Ch. 3.3.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Ch. 3.4.

profoundly rooted in this text: I predominantly focus on δίκη in its associations to notions of time and necessity. In the penultimate chapter, I focus on the notion of retributive justice (δίκη as ποινή) and discuss how, in moments of dramatic climax, justice is brought into the awareness of characters as a due process rather than a single act. Lastly, in the concluding chapter, I concentrate on the theme of opposites and its relevance for the overall dramatic movement of the trilogy. This conceptual structure roughly overlaps with the chronological progress of the text: in this chapter I analyse passages from the beginning of the *Agamemnon*; in the next one I focus on the two longest odes from *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*; and in the last chapter prominence is given to *Eumenides*.

6.2 Time and necessity

Δίκη δ' ἐπ' ἄλλο πρᾶγμα θηγάνει βλάβας
πρὸς ἄλλαις θηγάναισι Μοῖρα. (*Ag.* 1535-6)

Δίκας δ' ἐρείδεται πυθμὴν,
προχαλκεύει δ' Αἴσα φασγανουργός. (*Cho.* 648-9)

ὦ Δίκα,
ὦ θρόνοι τ' Ἑρινύων [...]
εἰς τὸ πᾶν σοι λέγω·
βωμὸν αἶδεσαι Δίκας. (*Eum.* 511-12; 537-8)

The above passages are here gathered to recall how the mechanism of δίκη in the *Oresteia* operates from within a world that is inhabited by all these figures, such as *Aisa*, *Moirai*, and *Erinyes*, and other kindred forces conditioning human existence in a necessary and inexorable manner.⁵¹⁰ Their existence – indeed the very existence of a

⁵¹⁰ For an interesting hypothesis of how Fate is conceived in Homer on the analogy of a bond tied around mortal subjects see Onians 1988: 310ff; 378ff; and Lloyd 1966: 192, for a study of the system of kindred imageries of binding and compulsion in the *Oresteia* see Lebeck 1971: 63-8.

notion of compulsion⁵¹¹ – could not be imagined without the dimension of time. Anaximander, in describing his cosmic retaliation as a process carried out κατὰ τὸ χρεών and κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν already had such metaphysical insight crystal clear. Similarly, in the *Oresteia*, the three notions of δίκη, time, and necessity are firmly interconnected and interdependent.

While the concise style of the mottos quoted is particularly effective in conveying gnomic sounding truths, one must turn to longer passages to experience their meaning in its dramatic concretization. If various outlooks on the causes and consequences of retaliation coexist like interwoven threads running through the tragic fabric of the *Oresteia*, as it is often the case, this fabric acquires a particularly rich texture in the choral odes. They are a privileged locus in which to look for evidence of the complexity of the concept of retributive justice because – as I hope to bring to the fore – the Chorus’ perspective on the events often has a multifocal quality. It is chiefly through the voice of the Chorus and their swings of moods and change of attitudes that the poet succeeds in making gnomic wisdom and human suffering meet and interact in a single concoction. Choral songs are the place *par excellence* in which the question of retributive justice is made to bear on the nature of tragic experience and human ‘action is exhibited as the vehicle of a universal law’.⁵¹²

6.3 Agamemnon 40-257: time and necessity

A good starting point is the great *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* in which a variegated assemblage of mythological figures and cryptic poetic expressions cooperate to convey the idea of time and necessity.⁵¹³ Upon reading it, one is inevitably left with a distinctive impression that a sense of compulsion hovers over the events narrated. The war of Troy was necessary; Paris’s penalty needed be exacted at one time or another; for Zeus Xenios has sent the Atreidae as a ‘late avenging’ Fury against the

⁵¹¹ One of the most complex notions in the field. For key-readings: Edwards 1977; Gantz 1982; Rosenmeyer 1982: Chs. 9-10; Lesky 1983; Parker 1983: 198-206; Winnington-Ingram 1983; Furley 1986; Williams 1993: Ch. 3; Sewell-Rutter 2007; Markovits 2009; Sommerstein 2010a: Chs. 11.1-11.3. Cairns’s study of the *OT* in 2013: 119-172 also offers interesting reflections of wider applicability. In this thesis I only focus on its connections to Presocratic thought.

⁵¹² Greene 1944: 106.

⁵¹³ This narration contains a subtle manipulation of temporal elements, cf. Barret 2007: 260ff.

transgressor (58-61). The idea of the inexorability of punishment contained in the forceful personification of the Fury, also defined by Fraenkel ‘the Curse and the Spirit of Vengeance’,⁵¹⁴ is completed and emphasised by the adjective ὕστερόποινον,⁵¹⁵ by means of which the intervention of this avenging power is immediately connected to some notion of time.⁵¹⁶ Although the adjective ὕστερόποινον has been variously translated as ‘late-following atonement’, ‘later punishment’, and ‘belated punishment’,⁵¹⁷ with translations that emphasise the belatedness of the requital, I believe that it should be understood in connection with the more general idea of ‘even if late nonetheless inevitably’. The same compound-adjective is in fact repeated later in *Choephoroi* in the context of an exactly corresponding expression, by means of which Orestes addresses Zeus ‘who sends up (ἀμπέμπων) from below ὕστερόποινον ἄταν (382-3). The same adjective employed here to connote the punishment of *atê*, ‘ruin’,⁵¹⁸ is better understood in the context of a prayer addressed to Zeus, in its gnomic connotation of ‘soon or late’⁵¹⁹ or ‘that comes late but comes at last’.⁵²⁰

As the analeptic and compressed narration of the Chorus moves forward from that point in the past, ten years ago (40), in which the cry for war from the heart of the Atreidae (47-8) was heard by Zeus, to the present time of their song, the inevitability of the war in course is restated: ‘it is now where it is, and is being fulfilled according to destiny’ (ἔστι δ’ ὅπῃ νῦν ἐστι, τελεῖται δ’ ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον, 67-8). The expression is deliberately obscure and it requires close analysis. As pointed out by Fraenkel and restated by Goldhill, its primary purpose is that of creating a point of transition from the events of the past, swiftly sketched hitherto, to the still unknown future (we learn about the outcome of the war in the following scene).⁵²¹ In this way the indefiniteness

⁵¹⁴ Fraenkel 1962: 38.

⁵¹⁵ Used twice by Aeschylus, the adjective does not recur anywhere in Greek (de Romilly 1968: 61).

⁵¹⁶ On the connection between time and divine justice and the role played by ὕστερόποινος cf. de Romilly 1968: 61ff.

⁵¹⁷ Fraenkel 1962: 38; Collard 2003: 4; Sommerstein 2008: 9.

⁵¹⁸ Due to its (often simultaneous) semantic duality of cause (*atê*-folly) and consequence (*atê*-disaster), this concept is very hard to render with a univocal translation. See Sommerstein 2013: 1-12 for an in-depth study of *atê*’s semantic history from Homer to Aeschylus.

⁵¹⁹ Sommerstein 2008: 260.

⁵²⁰ Lebeck 1971: 13.

⁵²¹ Fraenkel 1962: 42; Goldhill 1984a: 15.

introduced by the adjective ὅστερόποινον, which seems to reach a momentary fulfilment in the first half of the clause ἔστι δ' ὅπη νῦν ἔστι, is picked up by the indefiniteness of the second half of the clause τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον. By 'indefiniteness', I mean that profound sense of the unknown which is often attached to human considerations on destiny, the same sense that is made manifest in a striking parallel from the *Iliad*, in which Priam, with reference to the battle between Paris and Menelaus, comments:

Ζεὺς μὲν που τό γε οἶδε καὶ ἄθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι
ὅποτέρῳ θανάτοιο τέλος πεπρωμένον ἐστίν (3. 308-9).

Yet, it should be noted how in both the Homeric τέλος πεπρωμένον and the Aeschylean τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον, the indefiniteness associated with an expression of the future is also accompanied by the reassertion of the inevitability of what has been appointed. As commented by Goldhill, this sentence 'joins a sense of "end" to its own fated moment' thus somewhat asserting the teleology of the *telos*.⁵²² Hence, in their corresponding tautology, the two halves into which the clause ἔστι δ' ὅπη νῦν ἔστι, τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον can be split both assert the inevitability of the moment to which they refer: the presentness of the present is juxtaposed with the teleology of the future towards its fated moment, and thus the causal past, current present, and consequential future of the war of Troy, are presented as inevitable.

The introduction of the idea of a *telos* is subtle and full of significance. Indeed, as ingeniously demonstrated by Lebeck, not only does this word resonate in the rest of the whole trilogy, but its polysemy is deployed to create a system of literary threads by means of which the end of Troy, Agamemnon and Iphigenia have been linked.⁵²³ The τελεῖται of the expression just examined picks up the preceding προτέλεια,⁵²⁴ a word customarily referring to the performance of holy rites and ceremonies previous to the

⁵²² Goldhill 1984a: 15.

⁵²³ Lebeck 1971: 68-73.

⁵²⁴ Goldhill 1984a: 15.

marriage ceremony.⁵²⁵ The twofold appearance of προτέλεια in the *parodos* connects the Trojan War (65) to the sacrifice of Iphigenia (227) and in both cases it involves a deviation from its original meaning. In both cases the use of προτέλεια is ironic: in the first case the pre-nuptial rites are the suffering of the ‘Danaans and Trojans alike’ (63-7) which look forward to the reunion, the ‘marriage’, of Menelaus and Helen; in the second instance, προτέλεια might have been used with ironic allusion to the pretence of the marriage between Achilles and Iphigenia: the treachery by means of which Iphigenia was known from the tradition to have been summoned to Aulis (*Cypria*).⁵²⁶

In a sense, then, the ‘pre-nuptial rites’ of the *parodos* belong, in both instances, to the theme of the ‘corrupted sacrifice’.⁵²⁷ Whereas Zeitlin notes that ‘the punishment of Agamemnon [...] will also be imaged in the language of sacrifice’,⁵²⁸ Lebeck analyses how the four-fold appearance of the word *telos* characterises Clytemnestra’s utterance before the entrance of the king into the palace (972-4).⁵²⁹ Therefore, *telos*, in its polyvalence, is a word evocative of a series of associations. The *telos* of the προτέλεια is the *telos* of marriage, but in its subverted form in the *parodos*, it is also the fulfilment of the fleet’s departure that required the sacrifice of Iphigenia among its preliminary rites (227), and the fulfilment of the war (65). In Clytemnestra’s appeal to Zeus τέλειος (973)⁵³⁰ *telos* is the fulfilment of her prayer which is also the *telos* of Agamemnon: namely, his death.

Thus, the idea of *telos*, which first appears in the *parodos*, evokes through its polyvalence a series of associations which link in a subterranean manner, like streams of meaning under the surface of the text, events which are apparently separated. Its appearance is like spring-water: it brings to the surface a glimpse of these deeper connections criss-crossing the soil of the trilogy.⁵³¹ Within the terms of my interest in

⁵²⁵ Headlam 1925; Zeitlin 1965: 465; Lebeck 1971: 70; Goldhill 1984a: 15; Sommerstein 2008: 10.

⁵²⁶ *Cypri.* in Procl. *Chr.* 8. in West 2003b: 75. For both interpretations: Sommerstein 2008: 10; 27.

⁵²⁷ Zeitlin 1965; Lebeck 1971: 70; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 141-159.

⁵²⁸ Zeitlin 1965: 465.

⁵²⁹ Lebeck 1971: 73.

⁵³⁰ On τέλειος as one of Zeus’ principal epithets cf. Rosenmeyer 1982: 278.

⁵³¹ Cf. Goldhill 1984b.

the conjunction between necessity and time, it could be said that each mention of *telos* seems to enclose the two concepts in a single union. As the fulfilment of what has been appointed (τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπωμένον), it could almost be said that *telos* is an expression of an idea of necessity which must find its fulfilment within the limits of an unspecified future; to use Anaximander's expression: 'in due time' 'κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν'.

The Chorus return to the association of *telos* and the necessary course of events at the outset of the great cantata that follows the anapaests, in which they say, literally, that they have the authority to tell of 'the auspicious on-the-road command <consisting> of men in power', ὄδιον κράτος αἴσιον ἀνδρῶν ἐντελέων (104-5). This formulation is full of significance. With regard to the meaning of ἐντελής, Fraenkel follows Kranz in his conclusion that this adjective must be interpreted as τῶν ἐν τέλει ὄντων, thus meaning 'men in authority'.⁵³² Here the idea of 'authority', 'bestowed power', which is the first meaning suggested by the context for *telos*, intermingles with that of 'end', 'appointed outcome' which is only indirectly evoked by the proximity of the other adjective αἴσιος. The latter means here 'auspicious', 'opportune', but its stem is also connected to that of Αἴσα, a divinity, who, like Μοῖρα, allots to everyone their share and destiny.

Moreover, the 'auspicious command' of these men in power is also already set on-the-road (ὄδιον). Hence, there are many subliminal meanings that on closer inspection emerge from this sentence: the two commanders have been invested with an authority that is characterised as a propulsive power directing things towards an end (ἐν τέλει); this tension 'towards' is confirmed by the adjective ὄδιος, their command is already on the road and it is αἴσιος, auspicious because it has been, perhaps, dispensed as part of their lot by a greater power. In short, the re-formulation of the theme of the departure at the outset of the ode 'puts in a nutshell the main points of 40-62: the movement of the powerful force, the justice of the cause, the royal authority of the two leaders'.⁵³³ What is more, to West's observation it should be added that the authority of the two leaders is

⁵³² Kranz 1919: 303; Fraenkel 1962: 61-2.

⁵³³ West 1979: 2.

coloured by a teleological shading: they are the executioners of a war that will be τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπωμένον, 'fulfilled according to destiny'.

The next association of the idea of necessity with that of time in the *parodos* is perhaps more explicit. They are brought together by the words of Calchas, as the Chorus report his interpretation of the omen of the eagles:

χρόνῳ μὲν ἄγρεϊ Πριάμου πόλιν ἄδε κέλευθος,
πάντα δὲ πύργων
κτήνη πρόσθε τὰ δημοπληθέα
Μοῖρα λαπάξει πρὸς τὸ βίαιον. (126-130)

The association between the two notions of time and necessity is here overt enough to require only a brief treatment and to allow for considerations of a different order. Once again the two Atreidai are likened to a pair of mighty birds, only this time the association is not made through a simile but rather through an omen. Due to his prophetic powers, Calchas is able to see that the city of Troy will indeed be conquered. Yet he does not specify the 'when': he does not say in 'ten years' but rather 'in time'. This particular is worth noting, especially when looked at in the light of the tradition, which Aeschylus seems to deliberately alter. In both the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*, Calchas is able to predict the exact year in which Troy would be conquered: from the vision of a snake devouring a sparrow with eight chicks and then turning to stone, the prophet interprets that the Greeks, after nine years of war, would be victorious in the tenth.⁵³⁴ Conversely, here in the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon*, Calchas leaves the indication of time extremely vague: no doubt this is a good example of those cases in which 'the lyric imagination, fired by the prophetic vision, merges the before and the after into a vivid present'.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ *Il.* 2. 301-29; *Cypr.* in Procl. *Chr.* 6. In West 2003b: 73; cf. West 1979: 2. For the Homeric influence on the birds images in the *parodos* cf.: Peradotto 1969a: 237-63; Janko 1980: 291-93; Davies 1981: 248-51; Heath 1999: 396-407. Previously to West see also Peradotto 1969a: 237-63.

⁵³⁵ Rosenmeyer 1982: 332.

He also affirms that Μοῖρα will plunder the livestock of the community, using thus a personification akin, in its cosmic dimension, to that of the Erinyes.⁵³⁶ Just as the Chorus, from their point of view ten years after the war of Troy has started, compare the Atreides to a late-avenging Fury, so the words of Calchas which the Chorus remember from ten years ago expressed the same vague knowledge: Troy will be taken, the transgressor will eventually pay, and the law of retributive justice will come into effect within the limits of an indefinite time (χρόνῳ). As the two avian presences suggest a kinship of imagery between the two passages, so the themes of inevitability and indefiniteness go, once again, hand in hand. Thus, the feeling of inevitability is built during the *parodos* through the cumulative conjunction of various superhuman powers: the Chorus tell us that Zeus Xenios is the sender of Agamemnon and Menelaus in the role of Erinyes, the words of Calchas, which the Chorus report, reveal how the working of this justice is also the working of Μοῖρα. As Hammond put it: ‘Zeus is represented as working with Moira’; the Erinyes are ‘the ministrants of Moira’s rights’.⁵³⁷

To recapitulate: the expedition of the Atreidae against Troy is depicted as an act of retributive justice ordered by cosmic forces whose involvement in the matter bestow upon the event a sense of ineluctability. Moreover, a certain attention is given to the category of time, within the limits of which this act of justice must be consumed. As de Romilly wrote, it seems that ‘time is the means through which the gods achieve justice’.⁵³⁸ The comparison with the conclusion reached in some literature about the Presocratics is noteworthy: ‘The underlying idea is that Time will always discover and avenge any act of injustice’.⁵³⁹ However, this is only to the effect of leaving an impression of the indefiniteness and limitation of human knowledge: what is known is only that that ‘sooner or later in time the compensation must be paid’. Unlike in the *Iliad* and in the *Cypria*, the inexorability of an impending doom is connected to anxiety about the obscure future. To cite, once more, de Romilly: ‘This perpetual and imprecise

⁵³⁶ In *Eumenides* the Chorus of the Erinyes explain this connection to be a familial bond: they reveal that both themselves and the Μοῖραι were born from the womb of Night (962). Cf. Int. II. 3; and Chs. 6.5; 8.3.

⁵³⁷ 1965: 54; 52.

⁵³⁸ 1968: 61. For other fundamental contributions on the subject: Rosenmeyer 1982: 311-35; Barret in De Jong and Nünlist 2007: 255-74.

⁵³⁹ Jaeger 1947: 35.

threat reflects the twofold nature of time. For man lives in uncertainty, and yet knows he is caught in a legitimate and unavoidable process'.⁵⁴⁰ The *parodos*, as previously shown,⁵⁴¹ concludes on this very mixed note:

Δίκα δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει·
τὸ μέλλον δ' ἐπεὶ γένοιτ'
ἄν κλύοις· πρὸ χαιρέτω·
ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν·
τορὸν γὰρ ἥξει σύνορθρον αὐγαῖς (250-4).

6.4 Agamemnon 40-257: *the inextricability of justice and injustice*

One may note how the dramatic complexity of the *parodos* allows for the comparison with some aspects of Presocratic cosmology to extend even further. Besides the attention dedicated to the two aspects of time and necessity, the Chorus present the justice of the Trojan War as tightly interlocked with injustice. Indeed, when closer attention is brought to the context in which this depiction takes place, one may discover that a portion of the events (109-59; 184-249) preceding the war of Troy are, simultaneously, the same events leading up to another act, namely, the sacrifice of Iphigenia (218-49).

It has long been recognised that the portent of the eagles and the hare is the strongest of the links that bind the story of Troy to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. This is due not only to the most obvious fact that it is the omen itself which provokes the anger of Artemis and, hence, the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter, but also because the link between the loss of innocent lives which the war must bring and the reckless sacrifice of Iphigenia is itself foreshadowed in the portent. Most scholars concur in interpreting the eagles as a symbol standing for the Atreidae and the hare as a symbol standing either for Iphigenia,⁵⁴² for the loss of innocent lives which the war will involve,⁵⁴³ or for a combination of the two.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ 1968: 65.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Ch. 4.1.

⁵⁴² Stanford 1939: 143-4; Finley 1955: 252; Whallon 1961: 81.

I have already recalled how, through the language of *telos*, Aeschylus manages to create a connection between distant events and how, in the *parodos*, the twofold appearance of προτέλεια connects the Trojan War (65) to the sacrifice of Iphigenia (227). In between, the words of Calchas interpreting the portent (126-55) restate in a veiled but powerful manner the connection between these two events. Indeed, I would follow Vidal-Naquet in his observation that Calchas himself seems to emphasise the underlying ambivalence of the portent. On the one hand the hunted hare with young is Troy, whose capture are subsequently described through the metaphor of a hunting net which neither young nor adult is able to overstep (357-60).⁵⁴⁵ On the other hand, as the detailed demonstration of Stanford has illuminated, the ambiguity of line 136 suggests that the hare is also Iphigenia sacrificed by her father.

Whereas the primary meaning of αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογεράν πτάκα θυομένοισιν, referring to the eagles, is: ‘slaying a trembling hare and its young before their birth’, it could also mean, if taken to refer to the Atreidae, for whom the eagles stand: ‘sacrificing a trembling cowering woman, his own child, on behalf of the army’. As Stanford points out, πτάξ or πτώξ originally meant a ‘timorous cowering thing’ and became only subsequently attached to the hare. In *Eumenides* it is applied by the Erinyes to Orestes (326), and although most commentators, taking it metaphorically, translate it as ‘hare’,⁵⁴⁶ I would be inclined to follow Stanford in regarding this translation as inaccurate. My reason for rejecting it is that the Erinyes refer to Orestes as a πτώκα to then add: ‘a proper sacrifice to cleanse a mother’s murder’ (326-7). To regard the slaughtering of a hare as a proper sacrifice for the purpose indicated sounds a bit incongruous.

Instead, I believe that πτώξ should be taken simply to mean ‘trembling animal’, with reference to the wretchedness of Orestes in his present position of a sacrificial victim; a position which the Erinyes probably regard much more literally than metaphorically.

⁵⁴³ Lloyd-Jones 1962: 189; Kitto 1961: 66.

⁵⁴⁴ Peradotto 1969: 246; West 1979: 4-5; Winnington-Ingram 1983: 99; Nussbaum 1985: 245-6; Vidal-Naquet in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 147.

⁵⁴⁵ Vernant and Vidal Naquet 1988: 147.

⁵⁴⁶ Sommerstein, for instance, 2008: 397.

Stanford's analysis proceeds by showing the 'quintuple ambiguity' of the verse thus: αὐτότοκος, by analogy with αὐτόπαις and αὐτόγονος, means 'self-produced', his own 'child'; the first and most common meaning of λόχος is that of 'host' or 'band' - whereas, in fact, that of 'child-birth' is rarer - and thus πρὸ λόχου can mean both 'in front of' or 'on behalf of the host'; and, finally, the literal meaning of θύειν is of course 'to sacrifice' before than 'to slaughter'. Hence this verse is, no doubt, 'an astonishing feat of amphibological dexterity',⁵⁴⁷ asserting in the most powerful way the connection between the Trojan War and the sacrifice of Iphigenia also restated by the twofold appearance of the word προτέλεια.

The sacrifice of Iphigenia is certainly among those passages in which, as Romilly expresses it, 'distant memories and future prophecies join together'.⁵⁴⁸ As a corrupted sacrifice, an aberrant προτέλεια, the slaughter of Iphigenia, Calchas predicts, will allow for the rise of 'a fearsome, guileful keeper of the house, a Wrath that remembers and will avenge a child' (154-55). In the prophet's oracular words, which are themselves a distant memory of the Chorus who is narrating, 'the coming sacrifice of Iphigenia is half-identified with the wrath it will generate',⁵⁴⁹ and thereby joined to the future developments of the whole play. Vidal-Naquet writes that 'in one sense the whole play is going to show how this corrupt sacrifice [...] follows upon others and brings others in its wake just as that monstrous hunt, the feasting of the eagles, is preceded and followed by others'.⁵⁵⁰

Finally, it should be noted how the Trojan War and the sacrifice of Iphigenia are also linked through the theme of necessity. I have already shown how the expedition against Troy, presented as an act of retributive justice supported by Zeus and Μοῖρα is constantly immersed in an atmosphere of inevitability. A similar sense of compulsion hovers over the sacrifice of Iphigenia as the Chorus, to describe Agamemnon's resolve to proceed with the sacrifice, immortalise this moment of decision-making as a *subjugation to necessity*: ἀνάγκας ἔδω λέπαδνον (218). Hence, West was right in

⁵⁴⁷ Stanford 1939: 143-4.

⁵⁴⁸ de Romilly 1968: 77.

⁵⁴⁹ Sommerstein 2008: 19.

⁵⁵⁰ Vernant and Vidal Naquet 1988: 148.

writing that ‘we are justified in asking whether the business of Artemis and the hare does not have some deeper significance in relation to Agamemnon’s whole destiny’,⁵⁵¹ Linguistically, contextually and factually linked, the Trojan War and the sacrifice of Iphigenia are, above anything else, immersed in the same atmosphere of inexorability.

In conclusion to this section some further considerations may be adduced. The *parodos*, which is centred on the events preceding the expedition against Troy, begins by focusing on the fault of Paris and the just punishment carried out by Menelaus and Agamemnon, and, in a compositional twist, ends by focusing on Agamemnon’s monstrous slaughter of his daughter. Since the death of Iphigenia will be put forward by Clytemnestra as one of the motives behind her killing of Agamemnon (1417; 1432), his daughter’s sacrifice is destined to define Agamemnon as guilty in the eyes of at least one other character of the play. As such, a portion of the events that, in the language of the Chorus, characterise Agamemnon as a prosecutor of justice and executioner of divine punishment, also lead him to commit an injustice he will have to pay for.⁵⁵²

The sacrifice of Iphigenia, in the context of the war, is only the first example of a long list in which an act of justice (δίκη) is entangled with an act of injustice (ἀδικία), in a cycle of revenge by means of which each ‘victor’ is transformed into a ‘victim’. Thus ‘Iphigenia and the war are inextricable’,⁵⁵³ and, in their conjunction, they set the first example of the inextricability of justice and injustice, so characteristic of all the retributive acts that, in this tragedy, follow one another. In so doing the *parodos* anticipates what one eventually discovers to be a central concern of the whole trilogy: if retributive acts among humans always involve the interlocking of justice and injustice, the vendetta of the ‘blood for blood’ takes the form of an everlasting cycle. Truly, ‘an ode composed on this scale is no mere prelude to action, no mere decoration; in fact, it lays down, as firmly as can be, the intellectual foundations of the whole trilogy’.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ West 1979: 4.

⁵⁵² Lesky 1966: 82-3. Cf. Winnington-Ingram 1965: 41: ‘It is characteristic of Aeschylean tragedy that the penalties are inflicted by human-beings on one another’. On this point we shall return.

⁵⁵³ Winnington-Ingram 1983: 75.

⁵⁵⁴ Kitto 1961: 65.

The cycle of retributive acts among human beings presented by the *Oresteia* can be structurally comparable as the tragic counterpart of the cycle of retributive acts among the opposing elements in Presocratic cosmology where the ‘law of nature’ is envisaged as a cyclical sequence of requitals in which the participants cede and take in turn in accordance with their allotment. From Anaximander B1 in particular, it emerges how this justice is closely linked, on the one hand, to a sense of ‘compulsion’ or ‘necessity’, and, on the other, to some sort of inexorable time-limit, respecting which, the ‘pendulum’ of justice must swing back and fro. The *parodos* has proved a valid case-study to demonstrate how the justice of the war of Troy and the injustice of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, in their unity, are also connected to a sense of necessity and to an idea of the inexorability of payment imposed through time. As such the first acts of retributive justice presented in the *Oresteia* immediately acquire a ‘cosmic’ dimension that is comparable to that of Anaximander B1. In both conceptions alike ‘the idea of justice [...] was not looked upon as a mere convention, but as an immanently effective norm inherent in reality itself’.⁵⁵⁵ My subsequent study shows that the *parodos* is no isolated instance, but that a similar metaphysical backdrop emerges equally from the analysis of other passages.

6.5 Agamemnon 355-502

The first *stasimon* picks up many themes from the *parodos*. During the opening anapaests (355-66) the victory against Troy is simultaneously celebrated as: a victory supported by Zeus and as a victory belonging to the glories of Night (355-6; 362-3), a victory that involved slavery and suffering for adults and youngsters alike (358-61), a victory to be conceived as a divine punishment against Paris (363-6). Hence, the theme of a war ordained by superhuman powers as a requital is vigorously restated during this anapaestic preamble both at the level of language and imagery: while the Chorus make no mention of the Atreidae’s pair, Zeus Xenios is said to have ‘brought this about’ (τὸν τάδε πράξαντα, 363), ‘having long since bent his bow at Alexander’ (ἐπ’ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τείνοντα πάλαι τόξον, 363-4), whereby they convey the figure of a ‘god-executioner’. As noted by Fraenkel, the passage is an ‘unmistakable echo’ of 60

⁵⁵⁵ Jaeger 1947: 35.

ff. in the *parodos* in which Zeus is said to have sent the Atreidae against Alexander (ἐπ’ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ) and that ‘the stretching of the bow coincides with the sending out of the avenging expedition’.⁵⁵⁶ The unmentioned Menelaus and Agamemnon are conspicuous in their absence, especially considering the insistence on the direct involvement of Zeus in the matter, figuratively and linguistically underlined by the image of the bow and the verb πράσσειν, a verb central to the dynamics of linguistic appropriation of justice: it is used both by Agamemnon (δικαίων θ’ ὦν ἐπραξάμην, 812) and Clytemnestra (ἄτιμα δ’ οὐκ ἐπραξάτην, 1443) in their claims of rectitude for their deeds.

At the commencement of the lyrical part, the theme of Zeus’ direct intervention in the business of the war is picked up through the concise dictum ἐπραξεν ὥς ἔκρανεν (369), in which the linguistic assonance between the two verbs points at the twofold nature of Zeus’ power, both promoter and executioner of justice. As the lyrics unfold, the theme of justice is enlarged and the faith in the gods is restated: whoever expresses scepticism about the concern of the gods with human affairs is impious, for the gods will punish those who, having acquired abundance in excess, have ‘kicked the altar of Justice into oblivion’ (369-84); Paris’s story exemplifies the pattern of crime and punishment (οἶος καὶ Πάρις [...], 399), whereas that of Helen allows the Chorus to introduce the theme of the great suffering ‘because of someone else’s wife’ (448-9) and, thereby, to remind us of the disproportion between the crime and punishment in question. In this way, at the end of the fifth stanza and in preparation for the last one, the long-delayed mention of the Atreidae is powerfully striking (451).

Recalling their epithet in the *parodos*, they are defined through the vocabulary of *dikê*, the ‘prosecutors’ (πρόδικοι) by means of which the metaphor of the war as a lawsuit is recalled.⁵⁵⁷ But unlike the corresponding passage in the *parodos* they are here invoked in connection with the resentment and the sorrow caused, as the Chorus will again lament the day of Agamemnon’s return, ‘on account of Helen’ (800). The intratextual reminder achieved through the language of *dikê* and the legalistic metaphor contribute to forcefully underline the shift in focus between the *parodos* and the first *stasimon*, in

⁵⁵⁶ Fraenkel 1962: 191.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Rutherford 2012: 131ff.; Macleod 1983: 31ff., Fraenkel 1962: 27.

which the Chorus moves from an assessment of the role of the Atreidae in the Trojan war in terms of punishment to an assessment of their role in terms of crime. Those who were described as the prosecutors of justice are now – that ‘the enemy’s soil covers its conquerors’ and that ‘instead of human beings urns and ashes arrive back at each man’s home’ (454-5; 434-6) – described as the perpetrators of injustice.

In the last antistrophe, the theme of the war-caused bereavements reaches its climax⁵⁵⁸ and the undulant pattern of thought developed during this ode comes full circle. No doubt, the ode culminates with a theme that harks back to the beginning: the faith in the inescapable punishment sent by the gods against those who sin (461-70). Thus the whole ode is characterised by circularity, a literary form that suits the meaning conveyed. Indeed, although not mentioned overtly, Agamemnon is the unmistakable referent at whom the Chorus’ veiled utterance points: first, vv. 459-60 seems to allude to the ‘possibility of a *coup d’etat*’ against one of the Atreidae;⁵⁵⁹ second, the theme of ‘excessive praise’ (468-70) anticipates the atmosphere of the ‘carpet scene’; finally, the Chorus’ wish never to be a ‘sacker of cities’ points forwards to the epithet they will use to welcome Agamemnon on his return (πολιπόροθης, 472; 783). Thus Fletcher is certainly right in claiming that ‘in the final antistrophe a premonition of Agamemnon’s imminent doom breaks to the surface of the elders’ thoughts’.⁵⁶⁰

To put this in doubt, as Fontenrose has done by suggesting that the elders are thinking of Paris once again,⁵⁶¹ corresponds – in my opinion – to a failure to grasp the dramaturgic subtleties here developed and the very essence of the message conveyed. For the reticence of the Chorus should be understood as stemming from the emotion of anxiety they are immersed in (460) and their comprehensible resistance to accepting the uncomfortable conclusion that Agamemnon is as blameworthy as Paris. But, as in the *parodos*, this is precisely the realization towards which the Choral narration moves: the inextricability between justice and injustice.⁵⁶² If Agamemnon is then the main referent

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. Athanassaki 1994: 156.

⁵⁵⁹ Sommerstein 2008: 54.

⁵⁶⁰ Fletcher 1999: 32.

⁵⁶¹ 1971: 77.

⁵⁶² Cf. Lebeck 1971: 37: ‘although Paris and the Trojans may be the ostensible subject in the opening strophes [...], each statement is filled with implication involving Agamemnon’.

of the last stanza, the ode opens with the theme of the punishment of Zeus and Night against the crime of Paris and Helen and terminates with the theme of the punishment of Zeus and the Furies (463) against the crime of Agamemnon. Thereby the formal circularity of the ode mirrors the circularity of the cycle of vendetta which the ode conveys in content.

What is more, the first *stasimon* introduces the traditional theme of ‘surfeit’, a widespread concept among the poets of the time. The notion of κόρος is key to the understanding of Presocratic cosmology. For instance, according to Kirk, Anaximander’s B1 refers to ‘the constant interchange between opposed substances’ in which the prevalence of one substance at the expense of its contrary is ‘injustice’, whereas the infliction of punishment is that reaction leading to the wrong-doer being deprived of part of its original substance. This is then given to the former victim in addition to what was his original portion. Thus, the former victim is now itself led to a condition of surfeit (κόρος), committing in turn injustice against the former aggressor.⁵⁶³ Similarly, the theme of surfeit plays an important role in the cycle of crime and punishment enacted by the *Oresteia*, and this is particularly evident in the first *stasimon*, in which it represents another linking factor between the crime of Paris and that of the Atreidae. Hence both Anaximander and Aeschylus derived the theme of κόρος from their common cultural background and adapted it to fit their individual aim. What should be noted, however, is the profound similarity in structure of these two separate operations: the idea of excess is attached to a conception of injustice perceived as the transgression of a limit, and a conception of justice perceived as the reparation of such transgression within the larger cosmic picture of an iterative cycle.

Indeed, the Solonian couplet ‘excess breeds insolence, whenever great prosperity comes to men who are not sound of mind’ (6. 3-4), could be used as a concise moral formula to explain Agamemnon’s attitude in this play, but, as noted by Sommerstein,⁵⁶⁴ it seems also to be alluded to by the Chorus at the beginning of the first *stasimon* with reference to Paris:

⁵⁶³ K.R.S. 2007: 119-20.

⁵⁶⁴ 2008: 46.

[...] πνεόντων μεῖζον ἢ δικαίως
φλεόντων δωμάτων ὑπέρφευ (376-7)

[...] οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἔπαλξις
πλούτου πρὸς κόρον ἀνδρὶ
λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας
βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν. (381-4).

Worth noticing in this passage is the newly refined meaning and further variation on the theme of *dikê*, which, by means of its juxtaposition with the concept of *κόρος* seems to gain here a connotation more in the direction of ‘measure’, ‘moderation’, and ‘respect of one’s own limits’. This seems to be the kind of justice administered by *Μοῖρα*, the deity who allocates to everyone his lot and metes out punishment for its infringement. In an ode in which the intervention of Zeus is first associated with Night and then with the Furies – in this trilogy mother and sisters of the *Μοῖραι* respectively – it seems very fitting that justice may gain the sort of colouring suggested. One may find Vlastos’ definition particularly illuminating:

Cosmic justice is a conception of nature at large as a harmonious association, whose members observe, or are compelled to observe, the law of measure. There may be death, destruction, strife, even encroachment (as in Anaximander). There is justice nonetheless, if encroachment is invariably repaired and things are reinstated within their proper limits.⁵⁶⁵

Hence, by the same reasoning, the *κόρος* of Paris becomes here in the first *stasimon* a cosmic injustice: it is the infringement of a law of measure; the human and moral law of moderation.

Although the word is not repeated, the concept of surfeit and lack of moral measure is restated with reference to Agamemnon:

⁵⁶⁵ Vlastos 1947: 156.

τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ
 ἄσκοποι θεοί, κελαι-
 ναὶ δ' Ἐρινύες χρόνον
 τυχηρὸν ὄντ' ἄνευ δίκας
 παλιντυχεῖ τριβᾶ βίου
 τιθεῖσ' ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ' αἴσ-
 τοις τελέθοντος οὔτις ἄλ-
 κά.τὸ δ' ὑπερκόπως κλύειν
 εἶ βαρύ (461-70).

The proverbial wisdom of ‘excess breeds *hybris*’ is linked here - in which the idea of excess is underlined by prefixes such as πολυ- or ὑπερ - to other traditional ‘truths’ such as the alternating pattern of fortune and the supervision of Zeus over human affairs as the guarantor of justice.

Hence, in the first *stasimon* the Chorus move from an initial optimism expressed by the faith in the gods and a feeling that those guilty have paid their due to the growing pessimistic realization that Agamemnon must also be called to respond for his crimes. However, this shift of perspective, which has been aptly defined as a sort of ‘internal dialogue’ of the Chorus,⁵⁶⁶ far from enfeebling the overriding theme of retributive justice allows it to acquire a most powerful tragic dimension. Athanassaki and Fletcher have both demonstrated the complexity of this *stasimon*’s choral voice.⁵⁶⁷ Fletcher, in particular, by identifying the three narrative voices of the poet, the chorus in its persona as Argive elders, and the characters in the chorus’ narrative, and by showing the way these voices blend and separate throughout the ode, was able to show its intricate polyphony. I therefore partially rely on Fletcher’s analysis to enhance the points I made thus far and to prepare the grounds for those I make next.

As mentioned above, from their posture of great authority at the outset of the ode the Chorus speak as if they were conveying an unequivocal interpretation: the justice of the gods has been accomplished and the Chorus speak as if the causes of the war had to be raised and understood above the personal motives of Menelaus and Agamemnon. This

⁵⁶⁶ Fletcher 1999: 33.

⁵⁶⁷ Fletcher 1999; Athanassaki 1994.

unilateral and unemotional perspective is abandoned, as noted by Fletcher, in the second strophic system, in which the Elders, who until then were letting no other voices speak, allow the words of the δόμων προφῆται to intrude into the narrative. The long scholarly debate attached to these mysterious figures' identity does not concern us here as much as does the question concerning the closure of their discourse and, most importantly of all, its function and effect.

To the best of my knowledge there have been four suggestions concerning the demarcation of the προφῆται's discourse: Wilamowitz, Deveroux, and Paley end the quotation at 411, as if the speech had to be confined to a brief outburst of grief; Murray, Thomson and Lattimore end the quotation at 415; Campbell at the end of the strophe at 420; whereas the majority of scholars beginning with Pauw, Shütz, Wecklein, followed by Verrall, Fraenkel, Page, Rose, Lloyd-Jones, West, and Sommerstein, concur in placing the end of the quotation at 426, for, as Fraenkel explains, the quotation would thereby terminate at the corresponding position in the antistrophe to that at which it begins in the strophe. Finally, Athanassaki has gone even further in putting the end of the quotation at the close of the third strophe (455).⁵⁶⁸ Such variety of suggestions has its cause in the lack of explicit indication in the text and the fact that no hypothesis on where to place the closure, as demonstrated by both Athanassaki and Fletcher, is utterly unambiguous. This is not the place to argue in favour of one position over the other: for that would be contrary to my conviction that such ambiguity is a deliberate narrative technique devised by the author to blend various voices together.

Indeed, both Athanassaki and Fletcher, notwithstanding their divergent interpretations of where to demarcate the closure of the προφῆται's speech, have already underlined the fact that the poet 'has opted for the powerful effect of the ambiguity that results from lack of clear demarcation', in order to create a 'speech which seems to issue from two separate sources'.⁵⁶⁹ In other words, the choral voice of the δόμων προφῆται, speaking through the choral voice of the Argive Elders, allows the reader to contemplate the Trojan War from a simultaneity of different points of view. Whoever they may be,

⁵⁶⁸ For this summary see Fletcher 1999: 37, Athanassaki 1994: 150; Fraenkel 1962: 223.

⁵⁶⁹ Athanassaki 1994: 161; Fletcher 1999: 36.

these figures allow with their speech for a more intimate and personal tone to intersperse the plain gnomic continuum of the previous strophic pair. Through their discourse we come closer to Menelaus' individual and human misery as we see what cannot be seen (φάσμα, 415) and we hear a lament we cannot hear (σιγῆς, 412).

Therefore, to Athanassaki's and Fletcher's observation that this passage is double-voiced it should be added that is also triple-viewed, for it involves the Chorus of Elders recounting the speech of the προφῆται, reporting in turn the painful experience of Menelaus. When the description of Menelaus' suffering comes to an end, and presumably the narration is resumed as the direct speech of the Elders, the polyphonic effect prepared can be heard at its best. From the suffering of an individual man closely focussed through this kaleidoscope of multiple perspectives, the poet retrocedes through a zooming out that moves from the suffering of the individual man to that of the whole house and, again, from this single house to a grand panoramic of every house in Greece (427-31). The pathetic description of Greece' suffering, as observed by Lebeck, parallels and renders almost insignificant that of Menelaus' suffering,⁵⁷⁰ while at the same time, involving a further shift in perspective: at 449 one realises that what came first must have partially been the choral voice of each Greek household joined together in their grief for the dead.

This shift in perspectives is also accompanied by an enormous shift in time dimension: from the suffering of Menelaus caused by Helen's elopement before the War, we reach the suffering of the Greeks after the War. Hence, the multiplicity of perspectives is matched by a 'multiplicity of timeframes',⁵⁷¹ and yet the transition from one to the other is perfectly smooth. Two factors contribute to this effect of smoothness: the thematic analogy between the personal and collective woes and the predominance of the present tense for a summation of both Menelaus's sorrow at the origin of the war and of the aftermaths of the very same war (ταδ' ἔστι, 428 / τάδε τις βαύζει, 431).⁵⁷² This temporal anomaly 'gives the narrative', as Athanassaki puts it, 'an iterative quality,

⁵⁷⁰ Lebeck 1971: 44.

⁵⁷¹ Athanassaki 1994: 160.

⁵⁷² But also: πάρεστι ἰδεῖν, 411-12; ἔρρει, 419; πάρεισι, φέρουσαι, 421; τά and at 415 even a future: δόξει ἀνάσσειν, 415; πρέπει, 431; θιγγάνει, 432; ἀφικνεῖται, 436; πέμπει, 441; γεμίζων, 443; στένουσι, λέγοντες, 445; κατέχουσιν, 454.

pointing out thereby the recurrence of the feeling of grief and anger over a very long period of time',⁵⁷³ but also dissolves the *consecutio temporum* in a sort of contemporaneous blend. The double-voiced quality of the narration allows for the past grief of Menelaus recounted by the προφήται to overlap with the present grief of the Argives recounted by the Chorus, to the effect that one perceives the past as a 'living and controlling element'.⁵⁷⁴

Hence, through this passage, Aeschylus conveys the law of retributive justice at an emotional level. Rather than as a logical transition, the movement from a perspective showing the Atreidae's action in terms of justice to one showing it in terms of crime, is conveyed emotionally through the blending of past and present sorrows, with the latter outdoing the former. The multivocal quality of the central strophes, in which different points of view overlap and coexist, allows for a subtle shift of reference and time-frame, by means of which the suffering of the past becomes one with that of the present. As put by Kitto: 'we are to feel that the Past is an active factor in the Present; not merely that the characters do what they do because of something that happened before, but that the past horror is waiting to be reincarnated as a present horror'.⁵⁷⁵ The suffering which was part of the cause of the war blends with the suffering that is the consequence of the war.

As the Chorus resume – although one cannot say exactly when – their role of unilateral narrators, they restate, as we have seen, the same truths which were valid for Paris with reference to Agamemnon; and, although together with the re-appropriation of their supremacy in the narration they also regain a gnomic and detached tone in their utterance, the emotional response provoked in the recipient of their message has changed, to the effect that their 'revised perspective on the events seems absolutely natural'.⁵⁷⁶ Finally, it should be noted how, at the culmination of this ode, which so powerfully conveys the theme of retributive justice, the themes of the ineluctability of a divinely ordained justice and the indefiniteness of time are, once again, joined together.

⁵⁷³ Athanassaki 1994: 160.

⁵⁷⁴ Kitto 1961: 73.

⁵⁷⁵ Kitto 1961: 72.

⁵⁷⁶ Fletcher 1999: 42.

The justice of the gods is not ‘without a scope’ (οὐκ ἄσκοποι θεοί), it is a far-reaching sight that pierces through different time-frames indiscriminately, bringing together apparently separate events in a sort of abstract present tense: as Zeus’ bow did not miss the target of Paris when he sent a Fury against him, it will not be ἄσκοπος in sending black Furies against Agamemnon. Thus at the end of the first *stasimon* the three themes of retributive justice, necessity, and time are, once again, majestically combined. As I have shown, the Chorus engage in a sort of internal dialogue by means of which the unilateral and detached tone of their *gnomai* is confuted in the light of the human condition: the impact of the cosmic law of retributive justice on human existence is conveyed through the polifocal viewpoint of multiple and simultaneous perspectives.

As usual in the *Oresteia* various attitudes and interpretations of reality coexist: first, the characters, including the Chorus, present and interpret the flow of events in which they are immersed according to the traditional outlook of cosmic justice and Zeus’ will. Yet this world-view is simultaneously problematized from within: for the characters often either manipulate this world-view to their advantage or they portray the unbearable suffering it imposes on the individuals and the collectiveness. In both cases, the intimate and relativistic perspectives of single and group characters are constantly brought to clash with the universal utterances about justice, time and necessity, with which they alternate. The *parodos* and the first *stasimon* can then be seen each as a miniaturised exemplification of this dramatic technique, in which certain truths are presented so as to be assimilated both at the level of judgment and at the level of emotions. Hence in the *Agamemnon* not only ‘action and dialectic’ are ‘made lyric’,⁵⁷⁷ but lyricism is presented as a – perhaps the most immediate – human response to the dialectical essence of reality.

⁵⁷⁷ Kitto 1961: 74.

CHAPTER 7

The Workings of *Dikê*

7.1 *Setting the mood*

At the end of *Choephoroi*, after the culmination⁵⁷⁸ of the cycle of sanguinary vendetta in Orestes' slaughter of his own mother, the Chorus sing:

ἔμολε μὲν δίκαι Πριαμίδαις χρόνον,
βαρύδικος ποινά·
ἔμολε δ' εἰς δόμον τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονος
διπλοῦς λέων, διπλοῦς Ἄρης·
ἔλασε δ' εἰς τὸ πᾶν
ὁ πυθόχρηστος φυγὰς
θεόθεν εὖ φραδαῖσιν ὠρμημένος. (935-41)

[...]

ἔμολε δ' ἧ μέλει κρυπταδίου μάχας,
δολίοφρων Ποινά·
ἔθιγε δ' ἐν μάχῃ χερὸς ἐτήτυμος
Διὸς κόρα – Δίκαν δέ νιν
προσαγορεύομεν
βροτοὶ τυχόντες καλῶς –
ὀλέθριον πνέουσ' ἐπ' ἐχθροῖς κότον. (946-52)

This is the first strophic pair that opens the third and last *stasimon* near the end of *Choephoroi*. In the strophe, the Chorus, as if turning back to scrutinise the past in search of some causal explanation, give an account of the main chain of events that has preceded and led to the final murder: the Trojan War, which brought about the fall of the family of Priam (935-6), the murder of Agamemnon at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (937-8),⁵⁷⁹ and the matricide committed by Orestes under the influence

⁵⁷⁸ The Chorus themselves perceive the act thus: notice the verb ἐπακρίζω at 932.

⁵⁷⁹ Most commentators read διπλοῦς λέων with reference to Orestes and Pylades (Garvie 1986: 304; Collard 2008: 195; Sommerstein 2008: 333; Medda 2011: 452). For alternative

of Apollo (939-41). Here, unmistakably, δίκη is equated with ποινή and is portrayed by the Chorus as the connecting principle between past and present, as the overarching law governing each sanguinary act. The equation of δίκη with ποινή is skilfully prepared through style as well as content. The threefold anaphora ἔμολε... ἔμολε... ἔμολε⁵⁸⁰ marks the steps of this process of identification: first, the equation is plainly stated by means of apposition (δίκᾱ, ποινά) and further underlined through the epithet βαρύδικος;⁵⁸¹ second, the past is connected to the present (ἔμολε μὲν... ἔμολε δέ) to the effect that each act of vengeance is read as a manifestation of the same retributive justice; third, the last repetition of ἔμολε, which opens the antistrophe, expounds the equation between justice and retribution in more abstract terms.

The exact coincidence between strophe and antistrophe, with the striking ‘correspondence of epithet + ποινά’,⁵⁸² is particularly worthy of notice: while both adjectives, as compounds, add conceptual layers to the idea of justice, the stylistic repetition has the function of underlining the fact that the antistrophe should be read as an elaboration of the ‘facts’ collected in the strophe. ‘Crafty-minded revenge’ has come, while Justice, who is the very daughter of Zeus – we are told – and who ‘breathes deadly wrath against the enemy’ (952) has touched ‘the hand involved in the battle’ (ἐν μάχᾱ χερὸς, 948).⁵⁸³ Indeed, Garvie is right in recognising Orestes as the implied subject of the action and the owner of the hand, yet the lack of an explicit referent allows the ‘hand’ to acquire simultaneously a less personal connotation. The ἐν μάχᾱ

interpretations: Valgimigli 1980; Hiltbrunner 1950; Higgins 1978 :30. I read διπλοῦς with reference to the common action of two metaphoric lions (Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, cf. Smyth 1957) and not to the double action of one lion. Διπλοῦς is the cause of a similar ambiguity at *Cho.* 375-9 (cf. Garvie 1986: 142), and its understanding bears some weight in my argument. Throughout the *Oresteia* Aeschylus makes mainly two uses of the adjective: first, to describe a repetition of the same action or a double of the same entity (*Ag.* 642; *Cho.* 973; *Eum.* 129, 944); second, to describe two distinct effects or aspects of the same action or reality (*Ag.* 325, 537; *Cho.* 761). However: the only other time in which the adjective is used in the nominative in conjunction with a concrete subject is *Cho.* 973, where Orestes refers to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as διπλοῦς τυραννίδες; when Aeschylus describes the twin-effect of an action, he is more explicit and uses expressions such as διπλῇ συμφορᾷ (*Ag.* 325; *Cho.* 931); and Orestes’ singleness (μόνος) against two (δισσοί) opponents was stressed at 866-7. Finally, calling the downfall of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus ‘the house of Agamemnon’ (937) would be odd.

⁵⁸⁰ 935, 937, 946.

⁵⁸¹ Similarly, Garvie 1986: 305.

⁵⁸² Garvie 1986: 308.

⁵⁸³ My translation.

χερός could almost stand for every hand which has been touched by Justice in a moment of revenge: it could be the hand of Agamemnon when he was destroying the house of Priam, or that of Clytemnestra when she was vindicating Iphigenia, as well as being the hand of Orestes during his matricide. Hence, at the end of *Choephoroi*, by linking Orestes' murder of his mother to all the acts of vendetta that preceded it, the Chorus present in the most powerful way their interpretation of justice as a divine penal mechanism: Δίκη, daughter of Zeus, is identified with Ποινή, and each retributive act is presented as the element of a pattern.

Overall, the Chorus sing in a joyful mood: their song is one of triumph which celebrates the victory of Justice and the restoration of the house (942-5), the hope of a new era of light (πάρα τε φῶς ἰδεῖν), freedom and purification from evils (961-71). They sing of the gods with pious devotion: for always, it seems, 'divine power prevails' (κρατεῖ δ' αἰεὶ πῶς τὸ θεῖον) against 'ills' (κακοῖς, 959). However, this mood of joy and declaration of faith in the capability of the gods to cure evils rapidly succumbs when the Chorus is confronted with the actual horror of matricide. At first, Orestes, whose speech opens the final scene, picks up the same triumphant mood of the Chorus' (973-1076). In his proud presentation of his deed ('behold!', ἴδεσθε, 973), he offers a firm account of the details of his act and the motives behind it: Clytemnestra is presented as a tyrant and a monster, and he seems to have no doubts that justice has been attained (973-1006). However, the general atmosphere rapidly changes as the Chorus challenge Orestes' boldness in their first two anapaestic interventions (1007-9; 1018-20): transfixed by the horror of matricide, instead of responding to Orestes they address Clytemnestra's corpse directly (which is the subject of διεπράχθης) and refer to the act as a sorrowful deed (1007). What is more, they now remind Orestes that 'for him who remains, suffering comes into flower' (1009) and that if 'some troubles are here now', also 'some will come later' (1020). Orestes' initial indignation as he asks ἔδρασεν ἢ οὐκ ἔδρασεν; and calls his deed a νίκη (1017), quickly gives way to nerve-racking fear:

Πρὸς δὲ καρδίᾳ Φόβος
ἄδειν ἑτοῖμος ἦδ' ὑπορχεῖσθαι Κότῳ (1024-5)

As he begins to feel the burden of his deed, his certainty gives way to the frantic urgency of self-justification, by means of which Orestes anxiously seeks to plead the justice of his murder (1026-1044): his matricide, he says, was not without justice (οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης). And indeed it was not – one may add – for Orestes’ justice is that very one about which the Chorus sang in their *stasimon*: the justice of retaliation, a justice ‘who breathes deadly wrath (κότος, 952) against the enemy’ and who has now begun to breathe her wrath against Orestes. The introduction of his madness is accompanied by the suggestion that he must now himself suffer as a consequence of the same retributive law which caused his mother’s death. Orestes’ incipient realization of this, matched by his tangible emotional upheaval, leads the Chorus-leader to yet another reversal of mood.⁵⁸⁴ As Orestes begins what has been defined as ‘a dramatic race with madness’,⁵⁸⁵ the Chorus-leader adopts a comforting role; as if unwilling to accept Orestes’ increasing despair, she comments: ἀλλ’ εἶ γ’ ἔπραξας (1044). But rational arguments and consciousness of rightness are now too feeble as antidotes to the onset of madness; the visions begin (1048) and Orestes departs pursued by his ‘mother’s wrathful hounds’ (1054).

From a jubilant song and a confident speech to anguish, despair, and madness: the *exodos* of *Choephoroi* most powerfully depicts the clash between two possible ways of looking at retributive justice. The abstract and rational analysis of the mechanism of such justice is portrayed in its juxtaposition to human psychology and emotions; the recognition of the infallibility of divine power, which intervenes with surgical accuracy to remove evil and administer the equality of the *lex talionis*, is dramatized in its moment of culmination as something wholly unsustainable for a human being. Orestes’ consciousness of the righteousness of his deed does not prevent him from going mad as a reaction to the horror of matricide. Thus *Choephoroi* ends with the portrayal of a tragic impasse. In the concluding anapaests, after Orestes’ departure, the audience’s attention is redirected to past events (1065-74), but the mood is utterly different from that of the *stasimon*: each event is perceived as a ruinous tempest (χειμῶν, 1066). The tone varies

⁵⁸⁴ This undulating emotional pattern, in which one or both party undergoes a substantial (or several) change of attitude, is a typical characteristic of the interaction between Chorus and characters in the *Oresteia*. Conacher has accurately studied it in 1974: 323-343, although this specific instance does not feature among his examples.

⁵⁸⁵ Conacher 1987: 125.

from pathetic – as when emphasis is being placed on the ‘sad suffering’ (μόχθοι τάλανες, 1069) – to utterly desperate:

Ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει
μετακοιμισθὲν μένος ἄτης; (1075-6)

There seems to be no end in sight for the cycle of blood-vendetta and relentless action of Ἄτη, as long as Δίκη, daughter of Zeus, remains the same thing as Ποινή.

7.2 Δίκη as Ποινή and the code of revenge

At a very simple level of significance, δίκη is the code of revenge of the *lex talionis*, which involves a balance of action and suffering (i.e. no offence must go without retaliation). This code is stated by various characters at various points of the narrative, for instance: by the Herald, with regard to Paris and Troy, neither of which ‘can boast that what they did was greater than what they have suffered’ (ἐξεύχεται τὸ δρᾶμα τοῦ πάθους πλεόν, *Ag.* 533); by Cassandra, in her prophecy of Clytemnestra’s and Aegisthus’ death which will counterbalance her own and Agamemnon’s death: ‘when a woman dies in return for me, a woman, and a man falls in return for a man who had an evil wife’ (1318-19);⁵⁸⁶ as well as by Electra in her prayer ‘for the killers to meet justice and perish in their turn’ (τοὺς κτανόντας ἀντικαθθανεῖν δίκη, *Cho.* 144).

But this δίκη code is most forcefully formulated by two highly emotional choral passages: the long epirrhematic exchange between the Chorus of Elders and Clytemnestra after the murder of the king in the *Agamemnon* and the great *kommos* shared by Orestes, Electra and the Chorus of Female Slaves around the tomb of the dead king in *Choephoroi*.⁵⁸⁷ In the *Agamemnon* (1407-1576), the Chorus engage with

⁵⁸⁶ As Fraenkel comments: ‘Striking expression is here given to the idea of the inevitability of *talio*’, 1962: 615.

⁵⁸⁷ A note on modern terminology: it is a scholarly habit to call *kommos* every lyric or semi-lyric exchange between a Chorus and one or more actors, notwithstanding their content. Instead, I choose here to call *kommoi* only those *epirrhemata* (semi-lyric) and *amoibaia* (fully lyric), or a combination of the two, which are also lamentations in content. Considering the threnodic nature of the Chorus’ *ephymnia* at 1489-96 and 1512-1520, the *epirrhema* between the Chorus

Clytemnestra in a dramatic exchange over 150 verses long, in which the law of blood for blood is repeatedly invoked by both parties: first, after the murder of Agamemnon, the Chorus remind Clytemnestra that she will ‘suffer stroke in return for stroke’ (τύμμα τύμματι τεῖσαι, 1430) and, shortly afterwards, the same rule is repeated by Clytemnestra herself: ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων (1527). Subsequently, the Chorus reinforce Clytemnestra’s dictum by means of four formulas, each except the last also picking up and exaggerating Clytemnestra’s phonetic iteration though several ostentatious polyptota:

ὄνειδος ἦκει τόδ’ ἀντ’ ὀνείδους. (1560)

φέρει φέροντα. (1562)

ἐκτίνει δ’ ὁ καίνων. (1562)

παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα. (1564)

Similarly, during the long and complex *kommos* of *Choephoroi* (306-478), as the Chorus remind the siblings of the uncompromising and ineluctable requirements of retributive justice, the foundations of the code of vendetta are, once again, laid down in strikingly analogous terms:

ἀντὶ μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ γλῶσσα τελείσθω.
(309-10)

ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν πληγὴν τινέτω. (312)

δράσαντι παθεῖν. (313)

These foundations, which are vigorously said to be cried out by Justice herself (Δίκη μέγ’ ἀϋτεῖ, 311), are described with three mottos all of which add to the *Agamemnon*’s list. As Kitto writes: ‘With this there is a gathering-together and an emphatic

and Clytemnestra to which I refer above could be regarded as a *quasi-kommos*. For further details and bibliography cf. Cornford 1913: 41-4 and Garvie 1986: 122.

restatement of the old themes’.⁵⁸⁸ In particular, the dicta expressing the idea that passive retribution awaits active guilt sound closely akin with each other: ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων, δράσαντι παθεῖν, παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα.

The inexorability of this law (νόμος), which dictates a balance of action and suffering, is also depicted in this *kommos* through the powerful image of blood dripping to the ground: ‘when drops of gore flow to the ground, they demand other blood’ (φονίας σταγόνας | χυμένας εἰς πέδον ἄλλο προσαιτεῖν | αἷμα, 400-2): the *lex talionis* is literally depicted as a ‘law of blood for blood’. And when lifeblood flows to the ground and it is drunk by those chthonic powers who enforce the justice of retribution, in their awakening they bring ‘further ruin upon ruin’ (ἄτην | ἐτέραν ἐπ’ ἄτη, 403-4). As Lebeck writes: ‘The blood which falls to earth leaves an indelible stain which only blood can wash away [...]. Hence one act of vengeance requires another in atonement’.⁵⁸⁹

Gathered together and scanned in a single glance, these mottos display a remarkable consistency: they all point to the symmetry of retaliation, in which wrong-doing, here underlined by the verbs ἔρδειν and δρᾶν, is followed by equal suffering (πάσχειν), and the inexorability of this rule is conveyed by means of anaphoric repetitions and gnomic-sounding utterances. However, when one looks at them in their context, considering the emotional dynamics in which they are embedded, as well as the utterances about the divine with which they are connected, these detached formulas acquire many nuances and broader levels of significance. In both passages, through the progression of the interaction between the characters and the Chorus, the rule of vengeance is slowly revealed in its tragic dimension.

7.3 Agamemnon 1407-1576

Before the murder of the king, Cassandra had twice prophesied all the future deaths, namely Agamemnon’s, Clytemnestra’s and her own, as well as the past crime of Atreus,

⁵⁸⁸ Kitto 1961: 82.

⁵⁸⁹ Lebeck 1971: 80, who offers an in-depth analysis of the whole motif of dripping and flowing in the trilogy, which she treats as an ‘outgrowth of the gnome παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα’.

ancestor of the house. In other words, her ‘vision adds the final link to the chain of causes which can only end in Agamemnon’s death’.⁵⁹⁰ Considering that the main focus of the play had hitherto been that of Paris’ guilt and the Atreidae’s disproportionate retribution for it, Cassandra’s scene marks a clear shift of emphasis and is pivotal to the dramatic advancement of the play. It also represents the perfect preparation for the scene and the epirrhematic exchange to follow.

As the idea of abiding wrath in the family is evoked and described through the image of the Erinyes – a choir of unpleasant singers and a human-blood drinking band that never leaves the house (1186-1190) – a new, more distant starting point than that of Helen’s elopement is established as the primeval source for the house’s present calamities (πρώταρχον ἄτην, 1192).⁵⁹¹ Moreover, as the horrific crime of the preceding generation, the slaughter of the innocent children of Thyestes, is evoked, one cannot help making the link with the horrific slaughter of the innocent child of the present generation. Indeed, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, one may recall, was said by the Chorus to rouse hereafter in the house a fearsome Wrath ‘that remembers’: μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος | οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποινος (154-5). Thus Agamemnon’s crimes are linked to those of his father, Atreus, their savage and all-daring character displayed in the horrific killing of innocent children.

Also, through Cassandra’s prophecy, a connection between what she describes and the war is established. This connection, which has perhaps already been proleptically suggested by the symbolism of the pregnant hare, is that the war ‘was inspired by the same spirit’:⁵⁹² a spirit of hatred and violence, a spirit of wrath and horror in which crimes are punished through a justice that always entails an equivalent or even graver action than what preceded it, representing thus a cycle in which *hybris* begets *hybris* and

⁵⁹⁰ Lebeck 1971: 53.

⁵⁹¹ Similarly Kitto in 1959: 30; see also Doyle 1983: 59, according to whom to define an event as πρώταρχος is to treat it as the cause of other events. Interestingly, in a recent article Sommerstein argues in favour of this ἄτη as the only instance in this trilogy whose primary meaning is that of ‘mental aberration’ instead of the more frequent ‘disaster, ruin, destruction’. Assuming hence this ἄτη to be mainly causative, Sommerstein interprets it as ‘the folly that possessed the mind of Thyestes and Aërope’, 2013: 7.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

atê comes upon *atê*.⁵⁹³ This connection is also made explicit through Cassandra's repeated juxtaposition of the suffering of the city of Ilium, (first at 1167-1172 and later at 1286-8 in which she also describes Agamemnon's death as a 'verdict' received 'before the tribunal of the gods') with all the sufferings that have been imposed or will be provoked by a new act of vengeance: the suffering of Thyestes' children at the hands of Atreus (1096-7; 1215-22), that of Agamemnon at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (1100-4; 1223-31) and the suffering Cassandra herself had to endure on account of Apollo (1149; 1256-81). Before the murder of Agamemnon takes place, Cassandra's speech reveals the similar spirit which animated every retributive act up until this moment and in many ways prepares the grounds for the confrontation of Clytemnestra with the Chorus.

In the long *epirrhematic* exchange after the murder of Agamemnon, the theme of retributive justice is investigated as a causal explanation. The prelude of Cassandra's scene introduces all the missing elements for the theme of retribution to be investigated as such. Indeed, both participants can now avail themselves of the idea of the *μνάμων Μῆνις* and of a *daimon* residing in the house. This, however, far from implying a convergence between Clytemnestra and the Chorus, determines instead a fierce dialectic. The nature of the exchange around the theme of responsibility is a heated debate in which neither party seems capable of committing themselves to a univocal position and keeps influencing the other's attitudes in a relentless interchange of emotions. As Winnington-Ingram comments: 'the traditional form of lamentation is complicated by a divergence of sympathy between the participants, by argument and counter-argument, and by reference to the deepest philosophical issues of the trilogy'.⁵⁹⁴ I shall now proceed to illustrate the main stages of this debate.

This *epirrhema* could be described as an ever-receding sequence in which the queen and the Chorus embark together on a desperate search for a causal explanation of the murder. The whole exchange is preceded by a long monologue in which Clytemnestra

⁵⁹³ *Ag.* 763-6; *Cho.* 402-4.

⁵⁹⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1983: 111.

gives open avowal to her hatred for Agamemnon (1371ff) and states with triumphant defiance her full responsibility for her deed:

ἔστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις.
οὕτω δ' ἔπραξα, καὶ τάδ' οὐκ ἄρνήσομαι,
ὥς μήτε φεύγειν μήτ' ἀμύνασθαι μόρον. (1379-81)

To which she adds, after the Chorus' first amazed reaction (1399-1400), the following remark:

οὗτός ἐστιν Ἀγαμέμνων, ἐμὸς
πόσις, νεκρὸς δέ, τῇσδε δεξιᾷς χερὸς
ἔργον, δικαίᾳς τέκτονος. (1404-6)

With this reply Clytemnestra restates her indifference to the Elders' judgment as well as her responsibility for the act. Yet, this time, the statement gains a specific colouring: it becomes a statement of justice (1406) and a defiant admission of her identity as Agamemnon's wife (1405). With this reply the *epirrhema* proper begins: the Chorus' agitated singing, a mixture of attacks against the queen and lamentations for the king, are answered by Clytemnestra's spoken replies.

The Chorus' first and aggressive intimidation: ἀπέδικες ἀπέταμες ἀπόπολις δ' ἔση (1410), made emphatic through anaphoric repetition, elicits a long response from Clytemnestra, in which the reasons for her hatred of Agamemnon are revealed. First she introduces the theme of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, to which she refers through the pathetic circumlocution: 'he sacrificed his own child, the darling offspring of my pangs' (1417-18). It is worth noticing that the theme of the sacrifice of Iphigenia has been purposely suppressed for much of the play. Thanks to the way Clytemnestra phrases it, namely, by juxtaposing the piteous love of the mother (φιλτάτην ἐμοὶ ὠδῖνα) against the indifference of the father (ἔθυσεν αὐτοῦ παῖδα), the first reference to Iphigenia's death since the *parodos* is extremely efficacious.

A similar schema to the one described above is repeated in the first antistrophe: to the Chorus' menacing remark τύμμα τύμματι τεῖσαι, this too characterised by a stylistic care which involves alliteration and an initial polyptoton, the queen responds with an oath sworn in the name of 'Justice that was due for my child', in the name of *Atē* and Erinys, through whose aid she claims to have slain Agamemnon (1431-3).⁵⁹⁵ Furthermore, she evokes Agamemnon's extramarital relationship with 'the various Chryseises' as well as the most recent one with Cassandra (1438ff). By the end of the first antistrophe then, the Chorus, having moved as they have from the threat of exile to a more lethal penalty, have sharpened the tone of their threats, whilst Clytemnestra has made a full list of all her personal motives for the murder as well as a powerful assertion of the righteousness of her deed. The Argive Elders seem at this stage temporarily at a loss and ready to direct their emotions elsewhere.

So they switch their fury against Helen. It has been argued by Conacher that the Chorus' turn against her is prompted by Clytemnestra's reference to Aegisthus (1436ff) and the idea of adultery associated with him.⁵⁹⁶ Yet no mention of Helen's adultery is made here, nor do the Chorus seem to pick up on the queen's bold speech about her lover. Rather, in the Chorus' reply, the emphasis is placed on the idea of the suffering that Agamemnon and so many others had to endure for the sake of two women (1453-61). Helen, although a new name to the present debate, had already been the main target of the Chorus' passionate invective during the second *stasimon*.⁵⁹⁷ There too, what prompted their rant against Helen was the news of the shipwreck and the many sufferings she had managed to cause to both Trojans and Greeks. There too, as here (1461), Helen was associated with Eris and Erinys (698; 749). Hence, the primary reason behind the Chorus' introduction of the 'Helen motif' is not a rational move prompted by an argumentative will to denounce Clytemnestra's adulterous behaviour, but rather an emotional impulse to turn against a woman whose evil action and fatal role

⁵⁹⁵ I do not see in Clytemnestra's mention of Δίκη a suggestion that Justice herself is here a coadjutor in the murder. The context is still that of Clytemnestra's exposition of her own personal motifs and the proud affirmation of the legitimacy of her deed. To begin reading so early in the text, as Conacher 1974: 326 does, the beginning of Clytemnestra's withdrawal of her deed from the sphere of personal will does not do justice to the dramatic momentum of this passage.

⁵⁹⁶ 1974: 326.

⁵⁹⁷ The so-called 'Helen Ode'.

is still fresh in their memory. In their paralleling of the two sisters and their destructive power, the Chorus' mind is still occupied with the bewilderment deriving from Clytemnestra's murder of their king.

Most significantly, the introduction of the Helen motif has a nodal importance in the development of this epirrhematic composition which is marked by a formal change: the simple schema of the Chorus' brief stanzas answered by Clytemnestra's replies in trimeters is abandoned in favour of a more elaborate structure. Henceforth, the Chorus embark on a formal ode in which they sing each time one stanza followed by an *epithymion* that is then followed by Clytemnestra's more solemn anapaestic replies.⁵⁹⁸ Indeed, the initial and simple dynamics of the Chorus accusing Clytemnestra and of the queen defending herself are broken by the introduction of the theme of Helen's guilt. Therefore, the second strophe represents a new stage of the debate about which several observations must be made.

First, although it is Clytemnestra's deed that prompted the Chorus to make the association with Helen, in the first *epithymion* the Chorus seem almost to forget temporarily the responsibility of the queen and direct all their anger against Helen alone, whom they now address in the second person (1455-61). So much does their new target absorb the Elders, that they even bring themselves to blame the murder of Agamemnon on Helen herself: νῦν τελέαν πολύμναστον ἐπηνθίσω (1459). Second, the Chorus' introduction of the Helen motif pushes for the first time the causation of Agamemnon's suffering back into the past, to an earlier stage of the king's life and beyond the present circumstance. Last, they give Clytemnestra the opportunity to allude to other aspects of Agamemnon's guilt besides the sacrifice of Iphigenia as well as to turn the comparison with Helen to her own advantage.

With her following anapaests, Clytemnestra reproves the Chorus for their outburst against Helen (μηδ' εἰς Ἑλένην κότον ἐκτρέψης, 1464-5) and reminds them that she is not the only one who brought death to the Greeks. In this way, the epirrhematic exchange repeats in more compressed terms what has been a constant oscillation

⁵⁹⁸ Kranz 1919: 301-20; Fraenkel 1962: 660; Conacher 1974: 328.

throughout the play, namely, the alternating attribution of the Greek casualties to both Helen and Agamemnon. The Chorus has repeatedly admitted during the play the share of Agamemnon in causing so much suffering to his people, often declaring the general resentment against him; now that the Chorus accuse Helen of being the only ἀνδρολέτειρα (1465), Clytemnestra simply retorts against them a view that, before this exchange, they had often expressed themselves.

The second antistrophe represents, once again, a further stage in the *epirrhema*. It begins with the emphatic vocative δαῖμον followed by a long relative clause ὅς..., by means of which the Chorus describe the assaults of the *daimon* on the house, Menelaus and Agamemnon (significantly called ‘the Tantalids’), and the power the *daimon* exercises through the agency of like-souled women: κράτος τ’ ἰσόψυχον ἐκ γυναικῶν [...] κρατύνεις, (1468-71).⁵⁹⁹ After their initial fervent invocation, directly addressed to the *daimon*, in the following period the Elders go on to describe him in the third person. By describing the *daimon* as ‘standing over the corpse’ (ἐπὶ σώματος [...] σταθείς), and since it is, in fact, Clytemnestra who is standing over the corpse, the Chorus seem to make here a partial identification between the two.⁶⁰⁰ As pointed out by Fraenkel, this identification is endorsed by the presence of the verb ἐπεύχεται (1474), a clear intratextual reference to both ἐπεύχεται at 1262, by means of which Cassandra described Clytemnestra’s attitude towards the murder, and also to ἐπεύχομαι at 1394, which is used by Clytemnestra herself in her first monologue, while she is standing over the corpse, to describe her feeling of satisfaction for the murder.⁶⁰¹ In her reply (1475-80) Clytemnestra agrees with the Chorus’ idea (νῦν ὄρθωσας στόματος γνώμην,

⁵⁹⁹ As explained by Fraenkel 1962: 695-8, it is difficult to reach any satisfactory interpretation of the obscure ἰσόψυχον: a) the adjective introduces a comparison between the two women and the temper of men, b) it introduces a comparison between κράτος and the spirit of the two women (Smyth 1963: 131), c) it is the ψυχαί of the two women to be compared with each other. b) seems perhaps a more natural reading. However, given the Chorus’ insistence on the similarities of Clytemnestra and Helen, sharply juxtaposed in the preceding strophe (1453-4), it is also tempting to accept c) and treat ἰσόψυχον as a transferred adjective from γυναικῶν (Denniston and Page; Sommerstein; Medda). Perhaps this recent translation is the best compromise: ‘are exercising equal-souled power from women’ (Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 223). Luckily this unsatisfactory conclusion does not bear much on the present argument.

⁶⁰⁰ Fraenkel 1962: 699; Sommerstein 2008: 179; Medda 2011: 348. I here take the participle to refer to the *daimon* and not to Clytemnestra, as for instance does Page in printing σταθείσα (1972: 190).

⁶⁰¹ Fraenkel 1962: 699.

1475) and vehemently endorses the idea of a δαίμων as the primeval source (ἐκ) of the ‘lust to lick blood’ (ἔρως αἱματολοιχός, 1478) which possessed her during the murder. This image perfectly mirrors and overturns the image previously created by the Chorus: the power which the δαίμων derives ἐκ γυναικῶν is turned by the queen into a lust the γυνή derives ἐκ δαίμονος (δαίμονα [...] ἐκ τοῦ, 1477-8).

As a consequence of this temporary and ironic agreement imposed by Clytemnestra’s rhetorical skills, the Elders are submerged by an even greater wave of desperation (φεῦ φεῦ [...] ἰὸν ἰή): in the third strophe they pick up for the third time during three consecutive stanzas the idea of the δαίμων, of which they imagine the importance (μέγας) and exceeding wrath (βαρύμηνις, 1481-4). Furthermore, the Chorus invoke now the name of Zeus himself, thereby reaching a further point in their retrospective quest for an original cause to the present ἀτηρὴ τύχη (1483). The spirit and the ruin which assail the house are now presented by the Elders as the will of Zeus, ‘Cause of all things’ (παναίτιος), ‘Effector of all effects’ (πανεργέτης), according to whom all comes to pass (τελεῖται) for mortals (1486-7). Indeed, the first stanza of the third strophe ends with the Chorus’ theological dilemma: τί τῶνδ’ οὐ θεόκραντόν ἐστιν;⁶⁰²

Hence, the Chorus and Clytemnestra, by arguments and counterarguments, have embarked together on an ever-receding search which moves from a survey of the all too human motives of Clytemnestra, reaches the divine agency of the family’s *daimon* and culminates with the mention of Zeus ‘Cause of all things’. From Clytemnestra’s initial and powerful assertion of responsibility for her deed, the participants of this exchange have opened a vista of multiple determinations. This is why the Chorus, in the second *epithymion*, as if realizing the risk they are running, feel the need to restate the concrete agent of the murder: they feel the need to remind themselves that the assassination of the king may derive ἐκ δαίμονος but it has also been committed ἐκ χερὸς of Clytemnestra.

⁶⁰² This rhetorical question has often been cited in this thesis. Here it can be finally appreciated in its dramatic context.

What follows is a proper *coup de théâtre*. Clytemnestra's reply, as she asks the Chorus indignantly

αὐχεῖς εἶναι τόδε τοῦργον ἐμόν;
<μὴ > μηδ' ἐπιλεχθῆς
'Αγαμεμνονίαν εἶναί μ' ἄλοχον; (1497-9)

represents a complete reversal, point by point, of what she claimed at the outset (1404-6) when she claimed Agamemnon's corpse to be 'the work of this right hand of mine'.

Now, after the queen and the Chorus have followed together a backward-looking inquiry into the divine causes of the murder, Clytemnestra is able to deny in the most confident way every trace of personal responsibility. As Conacher rightly says: 'the murderer herself expresses, within a hundred verses, first the personal and then the supernatural explanation of the deed, each in mutually exclusive terms',⁶⁰³ for indeed Clytemnestra moves on to claiming to be the very παλαιὸς δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ Ἀτρέως, and to have only lent the semblance of her body to the avenging spirit of the house (1500). As pointed out by Raeburn and Thomas, by talking of herself in third person ('taking the likeness of this corpse's wife', 1500), Clytemnestra 'is detaching herself as far as possible from the murder'.⁶⁰⁴ The Chorus, once more baffled by the queen's extreme argument and her unexpected attempt to shift responsibility away from herself, aggressively respond:

ὥς μὲν ἀναίτιος εἶ
τοῦδε φόνου τίς ὁ μαρτυρήσων; (1505-6)

Their initial unwillingness to yield to Clytemnestra's denial of her responsibility is soon accompanied, however, by the compromising suggestion: 'But an avenging spirit from his father's crime might be your accomplice' (πατρόθεν δὲ συλλήπτωρ γένοιτ' ἂν ἀλάστωρ, 1507-8).

⁶⁰³ Conacher 1974: 329.

⁶⁰⁴ Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 225.

By this point, then, various divine figures, Ἑρίες, the δαίμων, and the ἀλάστωρ, spirits akin to each other that have turned the house of Atreus into their permanent dwelling, have entered the discussion and recalled Cassandra's vision of the Erinyes. The remaining portion of the *epirrhema* is a partial repetition of the previous discussion, in which Clytemnestra reasserts her hatred for Agamemnon (1520ff), reconnects to the Iphigenia motif (1526; 1555) and eventually reasserts the full responsibility for her deed (1552ff). But although this last portion of the exchange is indeed characterised by a regression to 'the present, the personal and the particular',⁶⁰⁵ it is also the place in which the discourse about retributive justice gains a broader dimension, and the participants show in turn a fully developed control over their formulations about it. Indeed, it is in this last section of the discussion that Clytemnestra and the Chorus utter several of those mottos which I listed earlier.⁶⁰⁶ They can now be appreciated in their context and for both their argumentative and lyrical effect.

The last stage of this bitter and complex confrontation is marked by what seems an attempt by both parties to take possession, in their claim for justice, of the truth of 'blood for blood'. The tragic dimension is given by the irony that, indeed, they are both right. So, when Clytemnestra's gnomic wisdom ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχω (1527) is pronounced in connection to her murder of Agamemnon as a punishment for his murder of Iphigenia, she is certainly right: Agamemnon did make a payment that matched his deed. But so are the Elders right when, thinking about what is still to come, they turn the queen's wisdom against her and remind her that παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα (1564). Indeed, the queen – she who has acted – shall suffer too.

At the end of this exchange and thanks to the themes which emerged in their confrontation with Clytemnestra, the Chorus have no doubt that although one shower of blood is ending, 'Moirai is sharpening the sword of harm on another set of whetstones, for Justice to do another deed' (1535-6), because this is the ordinance (θέσμιον) which 'remains firm while Zeus remains on his throne' (1562-3).

⁶⁰⁵ Conacher 1974: 330.

⁶⁰⁶ § 2.

Once the confrontation is over, the issue of Clytemnestra's responsibility has been explored in all its complexity. To use Conacher's words: the idea of 'an individual responsibility for a consciously chosen deed of violence which may also be seen as the fulfilment of the will of Zeus or of a family curse' is one of its leading themes.⁶⁰⁷ This theme functions here as the very heart of the exchange between Clytemnestra and the Chorus and, simultaneously, it reiterates in a final climax what has been a constant issue since the beginning of the play.⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, both the participants have undergone various remarkable psychological alterations. Clytemnestra has moved from fervent affirmation of her responsibility to vehement denial of it and back again to the initial position; at the same time, the Chorus have moved from fervent affirmation of Clytemnestra's responsibility to a more timid acceptance of the possibility of Clytemnestra's co-responsibility with an avenging spirit. At another level of analysis, it may also be observed how the queen's initial and triumphant boldness has progressively given way to fright and worried contemplation of what may be reserved for her in the future.

Finally, through the form of the epirrhematic composition, the theme of retributive justice has been enlarged and problematized: δίκη as ποινή is here conveyed as an irreducible idea which can be valid from several perspectives and thus liable to simultaneous appropriation by a plurality of subjects. The dynamics of this process of appropriation have been presented as a complex mechanism in which human agency is contemplated together with divine agency and the personal motives of the individuals are inscribed within the higher will of Zeus, to whom the ordinance of the *lex talionis* is ultimately attributed. Retributive justice is thus depicted as a complex geometry in which human motives, family curses, avenging spirits and divine will meet and converge.

In this long passage the characters express a conception of the universe in which human action is conceived as a reflection of cosmic dynamics. And even when confronting each other, the characters seem almost invariably to believe or exploit the conception of

⁶⁰⁷ Conacher 1974: 324.

⁶⁰⁸ The sacrifice of Iphigenia is another example of a consciously chosen deed which may also be seen as the fulfilment of divine will.

a universe in which various spheres are interwoven into a complex metaphysics. Throughout the *Agamemnon*, at least, even when characters disagree with each other, their disagreement never originates from the clash of different world-views. It would be wrong, in other words, to view these exchanges as Vernant sees those in *Antigone*: ‘For each protagonist, enclosed in his own universe, the vocabulary used remains for the most part opaque; it has one sense and one sense only’.⁶⁰⁹ Here, conversely, conflicts originate from within the same understanding of reality and events are explained in strikingly similar terms.

Thus, even the most vehement confrontation takes place within the same conceptual grid, which is complex enough to allow room for divergence with regard to the particular, but in which the participants make use of the same referents. It is always the same conception of Justice, as Kitto describes it, a justice that is ‘intolerable’, for it is ‘inspired by wrath and carried out by crime’, the justice of the ‘punishment of a crime by worse crime’.⁶¹⁰ Thus this metaphysics is a metaphysics of ineluctable conflict, something about which the characters of this tragedy show constant and touching awareness. Indeed the Chorus conclude: ‘Who can cast the seed of the curse out of the house? The family is glued fast to ruin’, a statement which Clytemnestra cannot contradict: ‘You have struck on this oracular saying with truth’ (1565-8).

7.4 Choephoroi 306-478

At the core of the *Oresteia*’s second play lies the horror of an inhuman equation: vengeance as matricide. The whole play is concerned with Orestes’ responsibility and with the dilemma posed by an act of vengeance which is simultaneously an act of purification and an act leading to further pollution. Thus, this play brings the paradox of retributive justice to perfect culmination. In the *kommos* - the centrepiece of the play – Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus of Trojan female slaves unite in an ecstatic dirge which

⁶⁰⁹ They never amount, for instance, to a conflict such as that between Antigone and Creon in which *physis* is brought to clash with *nomos*. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 42.

⁶¹⁰ Kitto 1959: 38.

is also a prodigious appeal for help: as they lament Agamemnon's death, they simultaneously invoke his ghost to assist Orestes' vengeance.

This *kommos* has been widely studied. Scholars have grappled, in particular, with its connection to the preceding trimeters and with the question of its relation to the subsequent action.⁶¹¹ Since Wilamowitz's moral interpretation (followed later on by Srebrny), according to which the *kommos* shows the development of Orestes' decision from doubt and anxiety to decision and determination, critics are still divided on the question of its dramatic purpose. According to some scholars, such as Schadewaldt, Reinhardt and Kitto, the *kommos* is static and devoid of any debate or internal conflict on Orestes' part, whose resolve to kill his mother had already been expressed and whose manifestation of uncertainty during the lyrics is purely conventional.⁶¹² According to others, such as Lebeck and Lesky, the *kommos* is dynamic, the conventional motif of lamentation has a deeper significance, and Orestes is still troubled by 'the problem posed by an act simultaneously right and wrong'.⁶¹³ Finally, both Sier and Garvie, finding the mean between these two positions, hold that although there is no indication in the *kommos* of Orestes' internal struggle, the *kommos* must be understood as dramatically dynamic. Whereas according to Sier this piece serves the purpose of enhancing the impression of Agamemnon's spiritual presence, according to Garvie the *kommos* has the function of showing Orestes reaching his decision 'not so much at different and consecutive times, as paratactically, in different but parallel ways'.⁶¹⁴

Following those who attribute a dynamic quality to the *kommos* I believe in its parallel unfolding of many levels of Orestes' decision, for although it is certainly true that Orestes takes part in it after having already taken the decision to kill his mother, as Conacher put it, 'there is a difference between logical choice and the emotional impetus

⁶¹¹ Gruber 2009: 393-410; Sier 1988; Garvie 1986: 122ff; Winnington-Ingram 1983: 138ff; Conacher 1974: 330ff; Lebeck 1971: 110ff; Srebrny 1964: 55ff; Kitto 1959: 43ff, 1961: 81ff; Kraus 1957: 98ff; Pohlenz 1954: 58ff; Reinhardt 1949: 112ff; Lesky 1943; Setti 1935: 112ff; Schadewaldt 1932; Enger 1857.

⁶¹² 'Nicht der Mensch ist zu Anfang weniger entschlossen, dann mehr und völlig, sondern das Bild seiner Entschlossenheit ist zuerst gleichsam nur im Umriss da, dann öffnet es seine Gründe, gewinnt bestimmtere, tiefere, leidenschaftlichere Züge', Schadewaldt 1932: 351.

⁶¹³ Lebeck 1971: 114

⁶¹⁴ Garvie 1986: 123-4; Sier 1988: 82.

which the deed itself requires'.⁶¹⁵ Moreover, although Schadewaldt has shown the undisputable presence of typical threnodic elements in this *kommós*, in the light of Swift's recent study, it is easy to expect them to have been twisted or in some way subverted.⁶¹⁶ Enlarging Garvie's rather isolated observation that Aeschylus adapts the ritual form of lament to the 'specific dramatic requirements of his play', I argue that beyond the question of Orestes' decision, the *kommós* has the dramatic function of reintroducing the theme of retributive justice and of bringing once more to the fore the universal code on which Apollo's command is based.

During the prologue, the *parodos* and the first episode of the play, the threnodic atmosphere and the ritual context for the *kommós* have been carefully constructed: Orestes sees a 'gathering of women [...] so striking in their black garments' and he correctly infers their role as libation bearers for his father (10-15); in the first strophe of the *parodos* the Chorus of Slaves describe the traditional behaviour of female mourners – rapid beating of hands, cheeks furrowed by nail-cuts, and torn garments – (23-31); and Electra, by asking them for advice on the words to use during 'these drink offerings of mourning' (87), resembles the chief mourner who leads the lament.⁶¹⁷ Undoubtedly the *parodos* seems to begin with what amounts to a *threnos* in honour of Agamemnon and to replace 'the dirge which was denied him at his funeral'.⁶¹⁸ These funerary overtones constitute the perfect preparation for the subsequent *kommós*.

Retributive justice is one of the centrepieces of this exchange: it can be viewed as the focal point for converging lines of force. Its thematic significance emerges clearly from the opening anapaests (306-314) in which the Chorus of female slaves begin by imparting to Orestes, in uncompromising terms, the ineluctable law of Justice:

⁶¹⁵ Conacher 1974: 339.

⁶¹⁶ Swift 2010: 298-364. For more on this topic cf. Athanassaki and Bowie 2011: Chs. 17; 18.

⁶¹⁷ Beside Swift see also Alexiou 2002: 4-7; Garland 1985: 23-31 and on this specific passage Vickers 1973: 88; for Aeschylus' manipulation of conventions see Hutchinson 1985: 178-81; also compare Denniston on E. *El.* 146-9, and Stevens on E. *Andr.* 826 ff.

⁶¹⁸ Garvie 1986: 54, but, similarly, also Kitto 1961: 81.

ἀλλ', ὦ μεγάλοι Μοῖραι, Διόθεν
 τῇδε τελευτᾶν,
 ἥ τὸ δίκαιον μεταβαίνει.
 “ἄντι μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ
 γλῶσσα τελείσθω”, τοῦφειλόμενον
 πράσσουσα Δίκη μέγ' ἄϋτεῖ·
 “ἄντι δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν
 πληγὴν τινέτω.” δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν,
 τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φωνεῖ. (306-14)

In their black outfits visually reminiscent of the Erinyes, the Female Slaves begin by addressing the *Moirai*. As the two divine guilds are often associated, the Chorus' invocation to the *Moirai* follows naturally on Apollo's threats concerning the Erinyes and their striking appearance seems almost an embodiment of the god's menace. In this guise, the female slaves instruct the royal pair in the terrible law of δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν, through what must have been a most visually and verbally compelling effect.

These anapaests are in sharp contrast with both Orestes' speech before the *kommos* and his sung reply to it. In the last speech before the *kommos*, Orestes firmly voices his resolution and the many motives (πολλοὶ ἕμεροι) both human and divine that, joined together, point the same way (299ff) to a 'deed' (ἔργον) that 'must be done' (ἐργαστέον, 298). Although Lebeck is inaccurate in claiming that Orestes does not mention 'the law of Dike' among his reasons,⁶¹⁹ certainly his appeal, when compared to what comes in the *kommos*, is rather feeble:

εἰ μὴ μέτειμι τοῦ πατρὸς τοὺς αἰτίους
 τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν, ἀνταποκτεῖναι λέγων. (273-4)⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁹ Lebeck 1971: 113.

⁶²⁰ I adopt the punctuation of Page and Sommerstein where τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν must be taken with what precedes. The following ἀνταποκτεῖναι λέγων assumes thus an exegetical function determining that 'in the same manner' means 'killing in return'. With the alternative reading – followed for instance by Garvie – which takes τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν together with what follows, the meaning is weaker: 'to kill them in the same manner in their turn', i.e. by deceit.

By means of this hypothetical period Orestes refers to the *lex talionis* only to clarify the nature of the vengeance that Apollo's oracle has imparted: retribution has to be equal (τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν), an equivalence which (following the punctuation I have chosen) implies killing in exchange (ἀνταποκτείνειν). Yet vengeance and the manner of execution are here described in terms of human action dependent on the god's command, but no reference is made to the universal code behind such divinely imposed obligation.

By contrast, from the opening anapaests of the Chorus the law of δίκη acquires another dimension: to Apollo's command, which Orestes presented as the main 'divine' motive behind his otherwise human intentions, the female slaves add a much older cause (τριγέρων μῦθος, 314). In the words of the Chorus, *Moirai*, Zeus, and Justice are united as the main powers presiding over the law of retributive justice, and as a deed encouraged by their assembly, Orestes' action acquires immediately a new aspect. Some elements of their speech are particularly striking. The stylistic features of the formulaic expressions denoting the *lex talionis* have already been noted above;⁶²¹ here the whole idea of justice is complicated and made emphatic through the double pair of alliterative synonyms τελείσθω/τινέτω and αὐτεῖ/φωνεῖ and the juxtaposition of τὸ δίκαιον with the personification of Δίκη and her shout.⁶²²

The latter juxtaposition in particular allows the idea of justice to acquire two layers of significance: one given by τὸ δίκαιον which – whatever the exact meaning of μεταβαίνει may be – conveys the idea of a mutable and thus individual-related justice, and the other given by Δίκη which, through the solemnity of her divine form,⁶²³ conveys a sense of immutability and certainty. What is more, in this passage a connection is established between the two: it is Justice as a personification who, shouting aloud, lays down the abstract and eternal foundations upon which individual

⁶²¹ p. 10, vv. 309; 312; 313.

⁶²² As noticed by Garvie, the two concepts are not quite the same (p. 128). See also Garvie for a discussion of the possible meanings of μεταβαίνει.

⁶²³ Her status as a divine figure is not explicitly declared here, but the passage suggests a parallel with *Moirai*. The connection between Justice and *Moirai* is an insisted one (*Ag.* 1535-6; *Cho.* 648.9) and later in the play Justice is called 'daughter of Zeus' (948-9).

action (i.e. Orestes') must be based.⁶²⁴ Yet, of course, an action based on a law saying that suffering comes to those who act is no reassuring prospect: the generalization of the phrasing allows for the intuition to creep in that the deed Orestes is compelled to undertake will entail no resolution. The cycle of suffering has no end. With their confident opening anapaests the Chorus set then what will be the tension running throughout the whole *kommos* and anticipate some of the paradoxical conclusions which Orestes reaches only at the end of this exchange (438; 461). In what follows, I shall illustrate the ways in which a tragic consciousness of the cosmic dimension of retributive justice is progressively acquired by the participants of the *kommos*.

After these opening anapaests, the first part of the *kommos* falls into four lyric triads, each of which is divided by the anapaests of the Chorus and in each of which the first strophe is sung by Orestes and the antistrophe by Electra (AA, CC, DD, FF), the two being separated by a stanza of the Chorus. Moreover, the four stanzas of the Chorus are also two pairs of responding strophai and antistrophai (BB, EE).⁶²⁵ This complex structure reflects the content and marks out the dramatic progression of the exchange: initially the Chorus have a confident leading role and with a sequence of firm exhortations they attempt to direct the avengers' feelings and thoughts to full resolve for vengeance, but by the end their confidence vacillates and their role is taken over by the avengers themselves. Thus, during the first section of the *kommos* the Chorus and the avengers exchange emotional states: in the first two triads the Chorus' confidence stands between Orestes' and Electra's wailings (ABA, CBC), in the second pair of triads the Chorus' anxiety stands between Orestes' and Electra's growing vim (DED, FEF). Hence, the theme of retributive justice is here developed within a single climactic unity of oscillating emotional states.

To Orestes' and Electra's first interventions (AA), which have been effectively described by Conacher as amounting to 'little more than plaintive attempts to reach the

⁶²⁴ I reject Sommerstein's personification of τὸ δίκαιον in his translation (2008: 251) as well as Gagarin's reading of it in terms of abstract justice (1976: 70), for in both cases the tension of the passage would be lost.

⁶²⁵ For this division of the *kommos* cf. Conacher 1974: 335ff; Garvie 1986: 124.

shade of Agamemnon',⁶²⁶ the Chorus respond in each case with the reassuring notion that lament may turn into revenge (B-anaps.): first, by reminding Orestes that Agamemnon's φρόνημα lives on and thus a copious γόος will reach him (324-31),⁶²⁷ second, by reminding Electra of god's (θεός) ability to turn 'the laments at a tomb' (θρήνοι ἐπιτυμβίδιοι) into a paean (340-4). The initial lesson of the Chorus, who in the opening anapaests instruct Orestes and Electra in the law of 'blood for blood' is slowly absorbed by both the avengers, who in the second lyric triad (CC), begin to react to the Chorus' lead each in turn expressing the impossible wish that Agamemnon had a different destiny from the one he met:

εἰ γὰρ ὑπ' Ἰλίου [...] πάτερ. (345-6)
μηδ' ὑπὸ Τρωΐας [...] πάτερ. (363-4)

Orestes wishes that his father had died in a more glorious way at Troy, while Electra in her responding antistrophe echoes and 'corrects' her brother by suggesting what should really be wished for:

πάρος δ' οἱ κτανόντες νιν οὔτω δαμῆναι,
<x →> θανατηφόρον αἶσαν
πρόσω τινὰ πυνθάνεσθαι
τῶνδε πόνων ἄπειρον. (368-71)

In this passage, at last, the idea of Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' murder, constantly alluded to by the Chorus since the opening anapaests, is finally adumbrated in the words of one of the two siblings. Yet the notion of the *lex talionis* makes its entrance in the consciousness of Electra in the tenuous manner of a wishful prayer: 'may instead his killers have been slain so'.⁶²⁸ What is more, not only does Electra wish for the killers to

⁶²⁶ Conacher 1974: 335.

⁶²⁷ The connection between lament and revenge at 330 remains whether one follows M.'s ἔνδικος or Murray's emendation ἐκ δίκαν which I follow here: the point is in both cases the semi-personified γόος's ability to reach the death and eventually lead to revenge.

⁶²⁸ The passage is controversial: I take here οὔτω δαμῆναι to mean loosely 'to have been slain in the same manner as Agamemnon', i.e. 'being killed and dying ignominiously' and not, as Garvie does, 'fighting at Troy'. As pointed out by Sommerstein (and Garvie himself) that would be inapplicable to Clytemnestra. Even without 'looking for realism in what is an unreal wish'

have been slain instead of Agamemnon, but she describes also their hypothetical murder as a death appointed by *aisa*: a personified power whom the Chorus will vividly depict as the ‘swordsmith’ of Justice (646-52).⁶²⁹ Orestes’ and Electra’s wishes still work here then to detain the action to be taken and the focus keeps being diverted from Orestes’ task: he may have already made the choice, but still something is missing for him to attend to the question of vengeance with full emotional adherence. Once more, it is the Chorus’ role to redirect their attention to the matter at hand and to convert their lament into action (372-9). Thus, during the first two triads, the central strophai and antistrophai of the Chorus as well as their conclusive anapaests, are a sequence of firm exhortations which have the purpose of emboldening the avengers and which seek to engage them with the powers of the underworld which Agamemnon is said to inhabit.

The anapaests linking the first and second pair of triads (372-9) determine a shift in the general attitudes of the participants. Through them, the Chorus finally hit the mark and Orestes’ vindictive fervour is awakened. Their poignancy is reflected by their formal centrality and length⁶³⁰ and the decisive effect they have in directing Orestes’ thoughts as they pierce his ear, as he himself claims, ‘like an arrow’, is openly stated: now ready to direct in full his energy towards revenge, Orestes invokes the various avenging forces – Zeus and ‘ὅσπερόποινον ἄταν’ – which will support his deed (380-5). From this moment on the roles of the participants are inverted and the rhythm of the exchange increases: we see the Chorus’ confidence becoming unsteady as they describe their inner feelings (386-93; 410-17); we feel the pace of the *kommos* being quickened once the theme of retributive justice is brought more prominently into focus. From the third triad onwards, it could be said – borrowing Reinhardt’s vivid expression – that lament truly turns into revenge (‘Klage wird zu Rache’).⁶³¹

(Garvie 1986: 141) the fact still stands that Electra could ‘hardly wish for a glorious death for Aegisthus’ (Sommerstein 2008: 259). In support of my my view cf. Georgantzoglou 1990: 227-30.

⁶²⁹ Moreover, cf. *Ag.* 1535-6 in which *Moirai* features in the same role covered here by *Aisa*. The two are strongly linked and used almost interchangeably throughout the trilogy.

⁶³⁰ Twice that of the other two.

⁶³¹ 1949: 114-5, 119.

Orestes' first voicing of the theme is striking, although it is only the first example of a long list of utterances which adds layers of significance to the notion of retributive justice. At the end of his invocation of Zeus, as he turns from the universal functions of *Atē* to the present situation, Orestes adds the controversial remark: 'but nevertheless for my parents there will be fulfilment' (τοκεῦσι δ' ὅμως τελεῖται, 385). The fact that Orestes abandons his direct invocation of Zeus in favour of the impersonal τελεῖται, marks in style the avenger's emotions: it could almost be taken as an expression of the fact that Orestes, who is processing his newly acquired knowledge, still hesitates to draw a direct link between his future deed and the universal code behind it. Moreover, the plural τοκεῦσι represents a striking circumlocution for 'mother' through which Orestes achieves a double effect: first he avoids too explicit a formulation of the matricidal essence of the vengeance to be taken; second and most notably, by means of the plural form a significant ambiguity is produced.⁶³² Indeed, as pointed out by Lebeck, the verb τελεῖται can in fact mean 'fulfilment of revenge for the father, for the mother penalty paid in full', whereas the dative, as pointed out by Sommerstein, could be both 'the dative of the recipient ("to my parents") or of the agent ("by my parents")'.⁶³³ Thus τοκεῦσι, lending itself to antithetical readings, encapsulates the essence of the law of 'like for like', in which one parent will pay retribution to the other by means of the same penalty.

Orestes' appeal is reiterated by Electra in her responding antistrophe (D) in which the theme of revenge is further developed. Electra echoes her brother by calling on Zeus and the nether powers (κλῦτε δὲ Γᾶ χθονίων τε τιμαί) to aid him and by picking up

⁶³² Other solutions have been offered. Cf.: Garvie, 1986: 145; Lebeck, 1971: 118. The main obstacle is represented by the fact that if τοκεύς in the singular means 'father', in the plural it means 'parents'. What is then the meaning of this plural? May Orestes be referring to both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as 'parents'? This is most unlikely. A popular interpretation is that of treating the plural τοκεῦσι as a sort of 'generic' plural used to refer to Clytemnestra only (Medda, 2011: 403). However, translations of τοκεῦσι as a singular miss entirely, in my opinion, the point of the passage: the ambiguity of 385 must be preserved, for it is functional to the development of one the *kommos*' principal themes.

⁶³³ Lebeck, 1971: 118; Sommerstein, 2008: 260. In order perhaps to enhance his point, Sommerstein 2008: 260 also prints ὁμῶς (and translates thus, 'For my parents, both alike' [...]) losing the important antithesis of ὅμως with the preceding ὑστερόποινον. This antithesis is very natural, especially since Orestes moves here from his considerations of the universal workings of *Atē* – who can generally be 'late-avenging' – to the immediate circumstance of his τοκεῖς, who will 'nonetheless' be exposed to such workings.

his restlessness with regard to his revenge's delay; she is echoed in turn by her brother in his appeal to the νεπτέρων τυραννίδες and φθιτῶν Ἀραί (405-6). However, what is most striking about Electra's response is the way she presents retribution as a righting of injustice: δίκαν δ' ἐξ ἀδίκων ἀπαιτῶ, something which the Chorus immediately elaborate in their subsequent anapaests with abundance of details. The demand of 'justice in place of injustice' is characterised by the slave women, unmistakably, as a 'law (νόμος) of blood (φονίας σταγόνας) for blood (ἄλλο αἷμα)' where injustice is a slaughter crying out for a Fury to bring 'further ruin upon ruin' (ἄτην ἑτέραν [...] ἐπ' ἄτη, 403-4).

Electra's δίκαν δ' ἐξ ἀδίκων ἀπαιτῶ is particularly worth noticing since it is 'corrected' by one of Orestes' subsequent cries, in which retribution is instead presented as a clash of two equivalent justices: Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκῃ Δίκῃ (461).⁶³⁴ The opposition between Electra's and Orestes' ways of envisioning retribution gives the measure of the distance which separates Orestes' final realization from this point of the *kommos* and is therefore crucial for an analysis aiming to unravel the dynamic quality of this piece. Orestes' personal elaboration of the struggle he must face and the implications of his vengeance represents his tragic realization: the paradox of retributive justice, posed as a matricide, is also the ultimate thematic illumination in which the whole *kommos* culminates. The next portion of my analysis follows therefore the thread leading to Orestes' final utterance, in which his heightened emotional state coincides with perfect clarity of mind: he will express his impetus in terms of a crystalline understanding of the real breadth and paradoxical terms of the law behind his action.

Hitherto, we have seen how the first half of the *kommos* is characterised by a slow inversion between the emotional states of its participants: in the first two triads the Chorus' self-confidence is framed by Orestes' and Electra's laments, in the second two triads the Chorus' fear is framed by Orestes' and Electra's vehemence. The second half of the *kommos* (423-55) presents a further reorganization in structure and a new disposition of the participants' roles. Electra takes sides with the Chorus in urging

⁶³⁴ This passage was also quoted in Ch. 5. 3. with reference to Zeus as the promoter of contrasting justices.

Orestes to act according to the schema: strophai-ABC antistrophai-CAB, in which Orestes sings only antistrophe C. His lyrics are hence isolated between those of Electra and the Chorus. The new schema matches the reorganization of the characters' roles: while Electra and the Chorus join forces to narrate the outrageous events which followed the murder of Agamemnon, Orestes' choice becomes the thematic linchpin of this section.

After Electra's and the Chorus' description of the insulting burial and degrading treatment of Agamemnon's corpse (429-33; 439-43) Orestes responds with his first explicit promise, since the beginning of their exchange, of personal vengeance:

πατρός δ' ἀτίμωσιν ἄρα τείσει
ἔκατι μὲν δαιμόνων
ἔκατι δ' ἁμᾶν χερῶν.
ἔπειτ' ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν. (435-8)

To this Electra and the Chorus reply in turn in an attempt to consolidate his decision (444-50; 451-5). In particular, the Chorus' encouragement to record this decision by implanting it within the 'quiet depths' of his 'mind' is especially effective and revealing of their determination to pierce through his consciousness:

γράφου· δι' ὧτων δὲ συν-
τέτραινε μῦθον ἡσύχῳ φρενῶν βάθει. (451-2)⁶³⁵

As the kernel of this section of the *kommos*, Orestes' decision is emphatically coloured with several shades of meaning, each contributing to nuance the notion of justice as retribution within the context of the trilogy. His words deserve close attention.

⁶³⁵ Some scholars (e.g. Lloyd-Jones; Conacher 1974: 338), following Sidgwick's γράφου <πάτερ> at 450, read Electra's and the Chorus' response as an application of the goad of shameful mutilation to the spirit of Agamemnon himself (1884). Yet I believe, with the majority of the editors (e.g. Garvie; Sommerstein; Page; Thomson; Collard et al.), that this narrative is here exclusively addressed to Orestes.

In only five verses Orestes manages to refer to all the entities, both human and divine, which are or will be caught in the cycle of retribution: his father (πατρός); his mother, who will pay (τείσει) for the murder of Agamemnon; the gods (δαιμόνων); and himself (ἐγώ). When looked at in connection with the opening anapaests of the Chorus, these words truly reveal that Orestes has fully absorbed, metabolised, and made his own the initial lesson of the slave women. Justice will be attained ‘by the help of his hand’ as well as ‘by the help of the gods’, because, as the Chorus reminded him, τὸ δίκαιον (308) depends on and derives strength from the superior will of *Moirai*, Zeus and Justice. The intratextual reference (τινέτω/τείσει, 313, 434) is appropriate for the context: for Clytemnestra’s insulting burial of Agamemnon Orestes will indeed exact ‘hostile words for hostile words’ and ‘a bloody stroke for a bloody stroke’ (309-13). Finally, with his last claim ἔπειτ’ ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμην Orestes seems also to have already processed the full implication of his deed. As argued by Garvie, Lebeck, Srebnny and Lesky,⁶³⁶ the strong optative in remarkable juxtaposition with the aorist participle probably means something more here than a conventional formula to express longing.⁶³⁷ Orestes is aware that his own action might lead him to his own destruction; he understands the implication of the unabated law of δράσαντι παθεῖν.

About this portion of the *kommos*, two other brief observations must be made: first, the participants’ accusations are more overtly directed to Clytemnestra; second this section anticipates in metre, and is thus closely linked to, the final section of the *kommos*. Indeed, to Electra’s utterance of the word ‘mother’ (422), long avoided in explicit form since the beginning of the *kommos*, the Chorus respond with a spate of lamentation. The subtle change in awareness, with regard to what is at stake, is marked by a change in metre: the Chorus burst now into a dirge in lyric iambics, which, as noticed by Conacher, anticipate the direct appeals to Agamemnon at the end of the *kommos*.⁶³⁸ Thereby a closer link between these elements is engendered: a more explicit accusation of Clytemnestra leads to a more explicit invocation of Agamemnon. The matricidal nature of vengeance and the appeal to Agamemnon are interwoven strands that form a

⁶³⁶ Garvie 1986: 162-3; Lebeck 1971: 200; Srebnny 1964: 83; Lesky 1943: 95.

⁶³⁷ This is the view held by Pohlenz 1954: 60 and Reinhardt 1949: 117ff; whereas Zeitlin in 1965: 496 argues that Orestes finds the deed so repulsive that he really wishes for his own death.

⁶³⁸ Conacher 1974: 338.

single climactic unity and give dramatic body to Orestes' previous utterance τοκεῦσι δ' ὅμως τελεῖται (385), the momentous ambiguity of which I explained above.

The *kommos* ends with a series of emphatic appeals to Agamemnon himself. In this last portion of the exchange Orestes finally takes the lead and the preceding structure of the *kommos* is reproduced in miniature: the three parties share a single strophe and antistrophe (456-65) followed by a final strophic pair (466-78) in which the Chorus alone cry out their conclusive remarks about the nature of this internecine retribution. After a threefold invocation to Agamemnon in the first strophe, at the beginning of the following antistrophe Orestes pronounces the aforementioned Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκᾱ Δίκᾱ (461). Stylistically very elaborate, these words form Orestes' last utterance in the *kommos*. As the culmination of an intense dramatic progression by means of which the notion of retributive justice has acquired several layers of significance, Orestes' utterance stands as an isolated statement of fact within repeated prayers, symbolising the fact that in his full resolve the avenger has gone past the stage of mere wishing.⁶³⁹

Orestes' awareness of the complex nature of the looming conflict is most effectively conveyed through style: the chiasmic disposition Ἄρης Ἄρει Δίκᾱ Δίκᾱ around the sylleptic ξυμβαλεῖ confers a striking symmetry to the sentence. Formal symmetry points here to the symmetry of justice and the employed rhetorical devices underline the double nature of the conflict: a violent conflict as well as justice. Moreover, the sentence not only conveys the brutal nature of the struggle Orestes has to face, but also its paradoxical essence: Δίκᾱ Δίκᾱ states that justice will clash with justice, and Orestes thereby expresses his understanding that Clytemnestra will defend her deed in terms of 'justice' too.⁶⁴⁰ Orestes' gnomic-sounding statement seems almost to 'correct' Electra's previous prayer for justice to come instead of injustice (398), and the *kommos* culminates with the tragic realization of the deadlock imposed by retributive justice within the family.

⁶³⁹ For this reason, I believe with Garvie that Pauw's ξυμβαλεῖ is preferable to Porson's ξυμβάλοι, and as the description of future action it is also preferable to M's ξυμβάλλει.

⁶⁴⁰ 'Each individual can interpret justice to suit his own claim', Vickers 1973: 28.

In the concluding stanza, the Chorus respond with terror (τρόμος, 463) to this justice appointed by ‘fate’ (τὸ μόρσιμον, 464). In their final outburst further emphasis is laid on the intrafamilial essence of Orestes’ vengeance: in the first strophe they lament it as a πόνος ἐγγενής, as a bloody stroke of ruin, and a pain hard to bring to an end (466-70); whereas in the antistrophe each element is repeated and somewhat spelled out until the whole description of the mechanisms of this justice is powerfully defined as a hymn sung by the gods below:

δώμασιν ἔμμοτον
τῶνδ’ ἄκος, οὐδ’ ἀπ’ ἄλλων
ἔκτοθεν, ἀλλ’ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν,
δι’ ὧμᾶν Ἔριν αἵματηράν.
θεῶν τῶν κατὰ γᾶς ὅδ’ ὕμνος. (471-5)

Now that a general overview of the dynamic evolution of the *kommos* has been given, I will turn to those elements in it which point to a subversion of the ritual conventions. Throughout the *kommos* the Chorus, Orestes, and Electra were united in an ecstatic dirge containing and yet twisting various elements of a ritual *threnos*. In her recent study, Swift outlines the conventions of ritual lamentation, and draws several conclusions about the genre’s style and preoccupations, some of which are particularly relevant for the present analysis. Looking at the *kommos*, it is crucial to bear in mind the following points: first, mourning is often depicted and described as an ‘activity segregated along gender-lines’, in which women were expected to ‘behave in a distraught manner’, while men were expected to display more self-restraint.⁶⁴¹ Second, the *threnos* is a public event, conceived to convey universal messages and to draw a moral from the situation at hand: as such, personal grief was avoided in favour of an appeal to the inevitability of suffering in human life. Last, there seems to have been an expectation of both a eulogy of the deceased and often also of an idyllic description of the place inhabited by the dead, characterised as both divine and pleasant. As we shall presently see, the *kommos* of *Choephoroi* simultaneously alludes to and twists each of

⁶⁴¹ Swift 2010: 305. Cf. Alexiou 2002: 4-10.

these components which are expected of a traditional funerary lamentation.⁶⁴² This distortion, however, is functional to the dramatic progression of the piece; its funerary motifs are skilfully subverted so as to match the paradoxical circumstance of a death which is in fact the murder of a husband at the hand of his wife and which is mourned by the joint lament of their respective children.

The first blatant example of subversion is given by the inversion of the traditional roles of the participants. This emerges clearly from the opening anapaests (306-14) in which the Chorus of female slaves, far from behaving in a distraught and plaintive manner, begin by imparting in uncompromising terms to Orestes the ineluctable law of Justice. Indeed, in this *kommós* not only are women and men united in a practice which traditionally conceives them as segregated, but the sober consolatory role usually allotted to men is here covered by the Chorus of slave women who attempt throughout to turn Orestes' and Electra's laments into effective action. As a consequence, the lament proper is interspersed with the theme of revenge and various threnodic elements are in fact twisted so as to bridge the gap between the two: they are twisted so as to turn sorrow into emboldening anger. This is particularly clear with both the elements of eulogy and the description of the place inhabited by the dead: in their first strophe and antistrophe (BB), the Chorus sing of the life of Agamemnon in the underworld, not an idyllic place but the realm of the nether powers, in which the king maintains his position as a prominent ruler (355-62). Thus, the traditionally gender-based positions are here inverted: manly behaviour is given to the women and Orestes takes on the feminine role together with his sister. Another element Aeschylus deliberately subverts is the public dimension of ritual lamentation. Indeed, the whole exchange is almost immersed in an atmosphere of secrecy (σιγᾶθ', ὅπως μὴ πέυσεταί τις, ὦ τέκνα, 265) and the first portion of it, contrary to the ritual praxis, is interspersed with Orestes' and Electra's descriptions of their personal circumstances (405-9; 418-22; 445-50) and of Electra's and the Female Slaves' detailed descriptions of Agamemnon's death (429-33; 439-43).

Now, what is most interesting about this process is the way in which, from the beginning to the end of the *kommós*, some of these subversions are slowly 'rectified'. At

⁶⁴² Swift 2010: 298-364.

the beginning of the second part of the *kommos* (423ff), in which Electra and the Chorus join forces to infuse vindictive fervour into Orestes, the female slaves finally readopt a mourning behaviour similar to the one they had during the *parodos* (23-31) and proceed by describing it in powerful terms: through the *figura etymologica* ἔκοψα κομμὸν and by comparing themselves to professional mourners, as the ἡλεμιστρία seems to suggest,⁶⁴³ they introduce a lengthy description of their self-beating and hair tearing (423-8). Simultaneously, as Orestes becomes emboldened he abandons his position of self-pity and wishful praying in favour of self-confidence and determined resolve (434-438) and, as previously mentioned, in the last part of the *kommos* he is able to adopt a leading position formally comparable to that of a leading mourner (456ff).

It is almost ironic that only when lament has finally turned into revenge and the essence of retributive justice, fully spelled out through the powerful assertion Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκη Δίκα, the three parties finally rearrange their role and their exchange acquires a more traditional appearance. Yet, this should not be seen as arbitrary. Rather, it is the product of careful dramaturgical design: Orestes draws from lament the impetus he needs to act, but when his resolve is finally fully processed the essence of his lament is revealed by the framework in which it is presented. In this way, the theme of the subverted *threnos* is deployed by Aeschylus to bestow further strength on the dynamic progression of this formidable exchange.

In conclusion, it is surely wrong to view this *kommos* as a static piece or as simply an invocation aiming to arouse Agamemnon's ghost or Orestes' spirit of vengeance.⁶⁴⁴ This is a complex piece in which various thematic patterns alternate, cross, and converge into a single climactic unity. Meanwhile 'lament turns into revenge', grief and fear alternate with self-confidence, horror is interwoven with urgency. However, I have also shown that the theme of retributive justice can be identified as the focal point of the piece, to which each character constantly refers and in which these patterns meet. Only in this sense then is Kitto right in claiming that with the *kommos* 'there is a gathering

⁶⁴³ Sommerstein 2008: 266.

⁶⁴⁴ 'The working up of Orestes and of the spirit of Agamemnon to vengeance is all part of the same operation', Conacher 1974: 339.

together and an emphatic restatement of the old themes'.⁶⁴⁵ This restatement is all the more emphatic precisely because it is presented as a dynamic process.

What is more, in the three sections of the *kommos*, the main superhuman forces behind this law of justice are evoked and addressed in turn: Zeus, *Dikê*, *Moirai*, *Aisa*, *Atê* and Erinyes, the continual evocation of Earth, the underworld, and the gods below, contribute to colouring these powers with a distinct chthonic tinge, which is in keeping with the setting of a dirge that takes place at a tomb. The direct appeals to Agamemnon suggest that his ghost, now a chthonic *daimon* too, will contribute as well to Orestes's deed. Therefore, almost all the forces that were mentioned in the *Agamemnon* as co-responsible entities for the murder of the king are now in *Choephoroi* invoked by Orestes and Electra for the murder of Clytemnestra and the law on which matricide is based is reasserted before the deed is accomplished.

As we reach the end of this analysis, the dramatic development of this piece can be further illuminated through a comparison with the Presocratic material. For while Electra's request for vengeance: δίκαν δ' ἐξ ἀδίκων ἀπαιτῶ (398) presents retribution, in parallel fashion to Anaximander B1, as a righting of injustice, Orestes presents *dikê*, less straightforwardly, as a clash of two equivalent justices (461). Similarly to the Heraclitean conception, *dikê* is described by Orestes' desperate cry as a principle of conflict. Hence the opposition between Electra's and Orestes' ways of envisioning retribution resonate with the contemporary philosophical debates around the question of cosmic justice. Like the Elders of the third *stasimon*,⁶⁴⁶ Electra and Orestes seem to have internalised at a deeply emotional level the fearful nature of divine retribution; what is more, they also seem capable of producing, throughout their dynamic exchange, more than one perspective on the elusive question of *dikê*. The main function of this tripartite *kommos* is then to recapitulate the complexity of the law of blood for blood in the *Oresteia*: simultaneously presented as stretching towards a cosmic dimension as well as irremediably confined to a stifling familial enclosure; simultaneously universal and yet excruciatingly personal

⁶⁴⁵ 1961: 82.

⁶⁴⁶ Cf. Ch. 8.1.

CHAPTER 8

A Cosmos of Opposites

The trilogy ends with a partial sense of closure: Orestes has been acquitted and the cycle of vendetta has come to a halt, the rift between Chthonic and Olympian powers which dominated the whole of *Eumenides* has been healed, and the people of the city (ἀστικὸς λεώς, 997) are said to have reached some form of wisdom in due season (σωφρονοῦντες ἐν χρόνῳ, 1000), with the joint aid of Zeus and Μοῖρα (1045-6). Thus at the end of the trilogy – after the question of justice and its shortcomings has been brought to the fore – there is a gathering together of three fundamental themes: time, necessity and the unity of opposites.

That ‘Aeschylean tragedy is antithetical in its structuring of the material’ has long been noticed.⁶⁴⁷ Opposites genuinely pervade the world of the *Oresteia*. However, what has perhaps not been sufficiently stressed, is how such structural choices bear a philosophical as well as a dramatic significance. Just as in the thought of Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, opposites play a fundamental function that is at the same time literary, symbolic, and cosmological. Whereas in the previous chapters I showed how the oscillation between justice and injustice requires a temporal dimension of continuity and the ineluctable tie with a dimension of necessity, here I investigate further the configuration of the unity of opposites in the trilogy. More specifically, I offer an interpretation of the dramatic development of the *Oresteia* as a movement from a confusing oscillation between opposites to a harmonious unity of opposites.⁶⁴⁸

8.1 *Opposites in the Agamemnon and Choephoroi*

In the first two plays, and the *Agamemnon* in particular, conflict often engenders a confusion of opposites. The very beacon which promises to bring a happy release from

⁶⁴⁷ Rosenmeyer 1982: 335, but see also Reinhardt 1949: 68ff.

⁶⁴⁸ This differs from Seaford’s interpretation (2003; 2013) who sees the action of the trilogy as a movement from ‘the Heraclitean unity of opposites to their Pythagorean reconciliation’, 2013: 17. Cf. Int. I. 3.

misery (εὐτυχὴς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων, 20) is awaited as a 'fire of darkness' (ὄρφναίου πυρός, 21). Having appeared it is described as a 'day-like light in the night' (νυκτὸς ἡμερήσιον | φάος, 22). The sequence not only 'emphasises the symbolic contrast between light and darkness',⁶⁴⁹ its paradoxical essence also encapsulates the general state of affairs.⁶⁵⁰ The inversion of traditional norms and the abhorrent redistribution of social roles are configured around the polarization of the sexes and a symmetry of radical oppositions. The opposition between Zeus and Artemis in the *parodos* – and the confusing mixed message they send to humans: 'auspicious but not unblemished' (δεξιὰ μὲν, κατὰμομφα δέ, 145) – as well as that between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra stand out as powerful examples. As illustrated in Goldhill's accurate depiction, the conflict between the latter two is structured as a struggle between various oppositions: man and woman, husband and wife, king and queen. But most importantly, this polarised symmetry engenders a confusion of opposites in which the 'woman becomes man-like and the man becomes feminised'.⁶⁵¹ Powerfully symbolical of this confusion of roles is the description of Clytemnestra's 'male-counselling heart' (γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον [...] κέαρ, 11) in which the juxtaposition of γυναικὸς ἀνδρο- emphasises the inversion of normal Greek gender-roles.⁶⁵²

Social disorder, underpinned by inversion of roles, finds its counterpart at an emotional, cosmological and divine level. The alternation between joy and sorrow, which can be easily traced in the prologue, is picked up in the paradoxical refrain αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τὸ δ' εἶ νικάτω (121; 138; 159) and is often recalled during the first play, where we repeatedly witness the frustrated efforts of various characters to conceive of one without the other. This is particularly obvious in Clytemnestra's imaginary description of the sack of Troy (321-50) and her wish for unequivocal good to prevail (τὸ δ' εἶ κρατοίη μὴ διχορρόπως ἰδεῖν, 349), as well as in the Herald's wish not to defile a day of good omen by the uttering of bad news' (εὖφημον ἥμαρ οὐ πρόπει

⁶⁴⁹ Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 69.

⁶⁵⁰ For the negative side of the beacon imagery see Tracy 1986: 257-60; for a study of the fire imagery in the whole trilogy see Gantz 1977: 28-38.

⁶⁵¹ 2004: 36; cf. Seaford 2013: 20.

⁶⁵² Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 67. For a very engaging study of Clytemnestra's masculine characterization see Winnington-Ingram 1983: 101-19.

κακαγγέλω | γλώσση μιαίνειν, 636-7).

In both instances the optimistic desire for gain to outweigh loss is frustrated: Clytemnestra's initial picture of the opposite emotional states of conquerors and conquered – conceived in their unmixed unity as vinegar and oil in the same vessel (322-3) – gives way to the suggestion of a probable reversal of fortunes (341ff).⁶⁵³ similarly, the Herald's desire not to pollute his good news is frustrated by the necessity of having to communicate the news of the disastrous shipwreck. Despite both characters' desires for ultimate differentiation and lack of balance between bad and good news, opposites states combine in an undifferentiated unity. In the Herald's speech, this confusion is projected onto the cosmological sphere and despite his desire not to mix good and evil (πῶς κεδνὰ τοῖς κακοῖσι συμμείζω, 648), his words cannot keep them apart anymore than the opposite elements of fire and water could be prevented from conspiring together: ξυνώμοσαν γάρ, ὄντες ἔχθιστοι τὸ πρίν, | πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα, 650-1).

The attitude and vocabulary of Clytemnestra and the Herald are reminiscent of those of the Elders in the *parodos* and their use of the image of justice with a pair of scales (Δίκη [...] ἐπιρρέπει, 250; μὴ διχορρόπως, 349; πῆμα δ' οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει, 574). The idea of stability – or lack thereof – is often evoked in the language of scale-weighting: a symbolic usage whose poignancy is comparable to that of the bow and the lyre in Heraclitus, but whose significance does not entirely coincide with theirs.⁶⁵⁴ In fact, the scale is not employed here to describe a condition of harmonious unity of opposites – which is its ultimate potential – but rather to evoke disastrous oscillation. In this sense the scale is a multivalent symbol: it captures well the Anaximandrian idea of alternation between ἀδικία and δίκη, and as a symbolic object one could compare it to the keys of interchange (κληῖδας ἀμοιβούς) held by πολύποινος δίκη in Parmenides' proem (B1. 14). Yet it also expresses the characters' frustration about instability and their aspiration to put an end to their constant reversal of fortunes. So, while Seaford is right in claiming that 'equilibrium in Aeschylus is not a dead

⁶⁵³ Notice the construction μή+subjunctive expressing fear of concrete possibility.

⁶⁵⁴ *Contra* Seaford 2003: 151; 154. Whereas he sees 'the need to differentiate united opposites' as a 'dominant idea' in the *Oresteia* (2003: 150) I argue precisely the opposite: the action of the trilogy finds its culmination in the reconciliation and unity of opposites in an harmonious whole.

metaphor',⁶⁵⁵ he is wrong in the one-sided interpretation he gives of it.⁶⁵⁶ As an instrument of justice, its symbolic value in the *Oresteia* is as ambiguous as justice itself: in the cycle of vendetta dramatized in the first two plays justice is the weighing out of action and counter-action and it implies anxiety as much as hope; in *Eumenides*, in which action moves towards a reconciliation of opposite forces, it is the idea of justice as simultaneous rather than alternating equilibrium that prevails. So when Athena, using her power of persuasion, charms the Erinyes' wrath away, the image of the scale reappears:

οὐ τᾶν δικάϊως τῆδ' ἐπιρρέποις πόλει
μῆνιν τιν' ἢ κότον τιν' ἢ βλάβην στρατῶ· (*Eum.* 888-9)

It would be *unjust* for the Erinyes to 'let fall' or 'bring down' (ἐπιρρέπειν as in a scale) any wrath when justice is finally equated with balance.⁶⁵⁷

In *Choephoroi*, the same themes as in the *Agamemnon* are restated with even greater emphasis. Orestes takes the place of his father in the opposition of genders (an opposition which is replicated in the nexus Orestes-Electra; Aegisthus-Clytemnestra; Orestes-Clytemnestra; Apollo-Cassandra) and the oscillation of δίκην διδόναι is almost overtly conceptualised. The whole scene around the tomb of Agamemnon is characterised as a paradox. The libation ordered by Clytemnestra is presented as a 'graceless favour' (χάριν ἀχάριτον, 44)⁶⁵⁸ and determines for Electra a confusing mission, one in which she is therefore forced to mix opposite intentions within a single prayer:

ταῦτ' ἐν μέσῳ τίθημι τῆς κεδνῆς ἁρᾶς,
κείνοις λέγουσα τήνδε τὴν κακὴν ἁράν (145-6)

⁶⁵⁵ 2003: 151.

⁶⁵⁶ 'Like the bow and the lyre of Heraclitus, scales in equilibrium embody unity of opposites, but are also – unlike bow and lyre – an instrument of divine Justice. It is this that implies hope', 2003: 154.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. Ch. 8.4.

⁶⁵⁸ Cf. Ag. 1545.

Just like her mother and the Herald before her she is unable to keep good separate from evil. The self-contradictory nature of her task is then asserted through the oxymoron παιῶνα τοῦ θανόντος (151) which picks up the idea of the παιῶνα Ἑρινύων at *Ag.* 645: the same ritual song unites the opposite modes of celebration and lament.⁶⁵⁹

Most importantly, in this play, the cycle of offence and counter-offence is conceptualised in the form of an abstract unity of opposites: a unity, just as in Heraclitus, which is primarily rendered through style and language. In chapter 2.2, we saw how the three pairs of συλλάψεις in B10 – the united oppositions of ὅλα καὶ οὐκ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον – differ from the kind of opposites deployed in other fragments (e.g. B88), in that they are raised from the particular to the universal. These types of conceptual antitheses, reached through a binary logic like that of ‘yes’ and ‘no’, can be recognised in the two striking lines from the *Agamemnon*:⁶⁶⁰

τύμμα τύμματι τεῖσαι (*Ag.*1430),
ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων (1527)

They are re-employed even more frequently in *Choephoroi*:

ἄντι μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ γλῶσσα τελείσθω (*Cho.*
309-10),
ἄντι δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν πληγὴν τινέτω (312)

Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκᾱ Δίκα (461)

Here the antitheses between equal elements are enhanced by the formal symmetry of their formulation. In each of these compressed sayings the opposition of mutually annulling actions is raised from the particular to the universal (i.e. we read of ‘hostile words’, ‘bloody strokes’ and clashing ‘violence’ and ‘justice’ and not of their specific

⁶⁵⁹ Cf. Ch. 7.4.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. Ch. 7.3.

concretization) and the dramatic specificity of each instantiation dissolves temporarily in the realm of abstraction.

Even at the end of the play, when the action is about to culminate in matricide, Orestes and Clytemnestra choose to detach themselves from their deed and ascribe responsibility to the neutral agency of destiny:

Clyt.: ἡ Μοῖρα τούτων, ὦ τέκνον, παραιτία.

Or.: καὶ τόνδε τοίνυν Μοῖρ' ἐπόρσυνεν μόρον. (910-11)

The specificity of this death (μόρος) is linked within the symmetry of stichomythia to the broader agency of destiny (Μοῖρα), thereby raising the particular oppositions of the two murders (regicide and matricide) to the status of abstract opposition between equal non-human forces.

However, just as Heraclitus links the sphere of human cognition to the governing principle of the cosmos (B1; B45), so in the *Oresteia* conflicting μοῖραι can be found both at a cosmic level, as we have just seen above, as well as within the intimate sphere of private interiority:

τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γὰρ πεσὼν ἅπαξ θανάσιμον
πρόπαρ ἄνδρὸς μέλαν αἶμα τίς ἄν
πάλιν ἀγκαλέσαιτ' ἐπαείδων;
οὐδὲ τὸν ὀρθοδαῖ
τῶν φθιμένων ἀνάγειν
Ζεὺς †αὐτ' ἔπαυσ'† ἐπ' ἀβλαβεία;
εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα
μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν
εἶργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν,
προφθάσασα καρδία
γλῶσσαν ἄν τάδ' ἐξέχει.
νῦν δ' ὑπὸ σκότῳ βρέμει
θυμαλγῆς τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπελπομέ-
να ποτὲ καίριον ἐκτολυπεύσειν
ζωπυρουμένας φρενός. (Ag. 1019-33)

This passage – the second antistrophe of the third *stasimon* (975-1034) of the *Agamemnon* – is interesting and deserves careful consideration. The Argive Elders are as usual prey to confusion and conflicting emotions. The whole ode – which follows the critical entrance of Agamemnon into his palace – opens with a question that well encapsulates their anxiety: ‘Why, why does this fear persistently hover about, standing guard in front of my prophetic heart?’ (975-8). As the ode unfolds, the Elders illustrate in more detail the nature of and reasons behind their confusion: even though they witnessed with their eyes the return of the king, no reassuring confidence (θράσος, 982; 994) sits ‘on the throne of their heart’ which uncontrollably intones the ‘unlyrical dirge’ of the Erinys (982-92). This chant of terror is perceived by the Chorus themselves as spontaneous, unhired (ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος, 979), and self-taught (αὐτοδίδακτος, 992); it is indeed the product of an undeniable knowledge – that of the law of retributive justice – that has slowly implanted itself in the Elders’ consciousness through their reflections on past events.⁶⁶¹ This painful awareness is described in terms of a ‘heart whirling in eddies that betoken fulfilment around a mind that understands justice’ (996-7). Through this vivid description of their inner emotions, the Chorus communicate what could otherwise be expressed in rational terms as – in Sommerstein’s paraphrase – their ‘certainty that wrong will not go unpunished, that justice will surely be fulfilled’.⁶⁶²

Yet this knowledge of justice, held by the Elders in their ἐνδίκῳις φρεσίν (996), is as irresistible as it is visceral and ineffable. When it comes to the point of expressing it, the Elders find themselves lacking the ability to speak.⁶⁶³ Most poignantly, the Chorus interpret their speechlessness in the face of their fearful foreboding as a further mechanism of *dikê*:

⁶⁶¹ Cf. Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 172: ‘The ode is no longer structured by a narrative of *past* events as in the earlier choral movements’.

⁶⁶² 2008: 116.

⁶⁶³ ‘The song never proceeds beyond instinctive emotion to explicit understanding’, Thalmann 1985a: 99.

εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα
 μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν
 εἶργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν,
 προφθάσασα καρδία
 γλῶσσαν ἄν τάδ' ἐξέχει. (1026-9)

In these conclusive words of the Chorus resonate the two main motifs running through the whole ode: the Chorus' unrelenting description of their disquieting feelings (προφθάσασα καρδία | γλῶσσαν ἄν τάδ' ἐξέχει), and their unwelcome faith in divine ordinance (ἐκ θεῶν). Yet the focus on the inevitability and unalterability of the mechanism of justice is narrowed here to its physiological applicability. The anatomical restriction of a speechless heart, a reflection itself of the Elders' psychological restraint, is described in the language of universal allotment (μοῖρα): the heart shall not overstep its measures and hold a task the gods apportioned to the tongue. Aeschylus' employment in this passage of the concept of a 'double' μοῖρα has puzzled commentators over the years; its refined dramatic significance deserves indeed all the attention received.⁶⁶⁴

The main points of interpretation are which μοῖραι the Chorus have in mind and in what sense and why one imposes a constraint over the other. Their stylistic juxtaposition (μοῖρα μοῖραν) suggests a contrast, but scholars disagree on whether their irreconcilability is also due to a difference in nature between the two.⁶⁶⁵ Scott for instance reads μοῖρα together with τεταγμένα and only μοῖραν together with ἐκ θεῶν. According to this interpretation the passage would read something like 'were it not that the destiny prescribed prevented the destiny from the gods from getting more than its due' and would imply a difference of type between the two μοῖραι.⁶⁶⁶ The τεταγμένα μοῖρα – as the lot of man in general – is contrasted to the μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν as a fate specifically given by the gods.⁶⁶⁷ I personally follow the majority of

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Fraenkel 1962: 463ff; Scott 1969: 339ff; Bollack and Judet de la Combe 1981-2: Vol. II 257-68; Thalmann 1985a: 99-118; Raeburn and Thomas 2011: xxxviii; 178ff.

⁶⁶⁵ See Thalmann 1985a: 100-1 for a very clear summary of interpretations.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. Fraenkel: 'The τεταγμένα μοῖρα is the lot of man in general, established and ordered by God (or by the natural order); it is his fate or destiny. [...] On the other hand, the following μοῖραν indicates the portion or lot with which the individual is endowed', 1962: 463.

⁶⁶⁷ Scott 1969: 339-40.

commentators in taking together μοῖρα ἐκ θεῶν τεταγμένα with εἶργε: i.e. the constraint proceeds from the gods and μοῖρα has the same sense in each case.⁶⁶⁸ Surely, ‘a conflict, in Greek belief, between “fixed fate” and a particular destiny’ seems odd,⁶⁶⁹ and in the normal state of things, the ordinance of μοῖρα and that of the gods go hand in hand: indeed, even the Erinyes speak later on of their charter ordained by a μοῖρα and accepted by the gods (θεσμὸν | τὸν μοιρόκραντον ἐκ θεῶν δοθέντα τέλεον, *Eum.* 391-3). To take ἐκ θεῶν as the source for both μοῖραι results in a linguistic dovetail; its stylistic purpose is to seek in syntax the sense of equilibrium between the two ‘apportionments’ conveyed in content.

To what, then, do these μοῖραι refer? The thought must be related to its immediate context as well as the broader dramatic context of the *stasimon* and the whole play. Only in this way is it possible to grasp the manifold significance of the Elders’ ambiguous phrasing. First of all, I believe⁶⁷⁰ that in the direct context of the hypothetical clause to which μοῖρα μοῖραν belongs, their first meaning should be understood in relation to the two nouns of the apodosis: καρδία and γλῶσσαν, whose juxtaposition picks up the case sequence nominative + accusative. Thus in the immediate context μοῖρα μοῖραν refer to tongue and heart respectively. Like in Theognis 1187-8, in which μοῖρα is said to be the source of boundaries (τέρμα),⁶⁷¹ here in Aeschylus μοῖρα is the apportioned function of things which is externally limited by the apportioned function of other things: while the protasis of this clause alludes to this universal principle, the apodosis shows its application to the internal physiology of humans. The heart, which is endowed with its own μοῖρα shall not usurp that of the tongue.

However, seen against the backdrop of the whole ode, the Elders’ words acquire a broader significance and the notion of μοῖρα resonates with universal implications. In

⁶⁶⁸ Kitto 1959: 25; Goodwin 1877: 82; Bollack and Judet de la Combe 1981-2: Vol. II 265-6; Thalmann 1985a: 101; Raeburn and Thomas 2011: 179.

⁶⁶⁹ Thalmann 1985a: 101.

⁶⁷⁰ This view has been held by various scholars before me: see Thalmann 1985a: 102, n. 13 for their review.

⁶⁷¹ οὔτις ἄποινα διδοὺς θάνατον φύγοι οὐδὲ βαρεῖαν | δυστυχίην, εἰ μὴ μοῖρ’ ἐπὶ τέρμα βάλοι

the scene preceding the *stasimon*, Agamemnon entered his house after treading on the purple-dyed robes Clytemnestra laid ahead of him. So when the Chorus sing of the fatal end (τέρμα) which awaits ‘a man in his insatiable pursuit of fitness’⁶⁷² (1001ff), it is hard not to relate the Elders’ words to their king’s unscrupulous display of wealth. Yet the Chorus, incapable of speaking openly about their fearful foreboding, express their thought in general terms: first, they use the metaphor of the heavily laden ship which can be refloated and saved from disaster only by jettisoning a portion of its cargo (1008-16), then, in the words leading up to the μοῖρα passage, they speak of the inexorability of human death: ‘But once the black blood of death has fallen on the earth in front of a man, who by any incantation can summon it back again?’ (1017-24). In both cases, Zeus is seen as presiding over these ordinances (1014; 1024): indeed, they are both cases of μοῖραι descending ἐκ θεῶν.

A tension between a fearful unsaid and the outspoken reflections that originate from this unsaid charges the whole of the ode. Wary not to formulate in too explicit a statement their intuition about Agamemnon’s impending doom, the Chorus meditate in a general tone on the limits of human existence. The *fil rouge* running through the ode seems to be that human destiny is governed by limits that are not to be transgressed, for when they are – such as in Asclepius’ case (1021-4) – a superior force is bound to intervene and restore the perturbed order. In their concluding words, the Elders return to the feelings of terror and torment with which they already opened their song, but their recent meditations lead them to describe their psychological paralysis in terms of conflicting μοῖραι. The idea of the organs’ particular allotment and the boundaries between them epitomises at a deeply personal level a universal rule: ‘the principle of reciprocal restraints on one another by the *moirai* of different things, by which this order is maintained, is *dikê*’.⁶⁷³

Hence, what Anaximander and Heraclitus observe about natural phenomena, Aeschylus’ Elders claim in no too dissimilar terms about their inner organs. Just as *Dikê* and the Erinyes in Heraclitus’ B94 guard against the sun overstepping its measures

⁶⁷² The verse is corrupt: I rely on Sommerstein’s edition and translation (2008: 117).

⁶⁷³ Thalmann 1985a: 104.

(μέτρα), *Dikê* and the Erinyes in the *Oresteia* ‘prevent’ each individual *moira* ‘from getting more than its due’. This understanding is deeply rooted in the consciousness of various characters and resurfaces at important junctures of the narrative:⁶⁷⁴ in a striking dramatic paradox, the Elders of the third *stasimon* express their understanding of divine retribution as a fear that their heart, being itself an organ subjected to a similar mechanism of justice, is not allowed to verbalize; Clytemnestra swears her ‘righteous oath’ by ‘the fulfilled Justice that was due for my child’ (μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην), ‘by Ruin and by the Fury’ (Ἄτην Ἐρινύον τε, 1432-3); and the Chorus will later on retort against her that ‘Μοῖρα is sharpening the sword of harm on another set of whetstones, for Justice (Δίκη) to do another deed’ (1535).⁶⁷⁵ With its narrative of human experience presented as a regular alternation of occurrences, deeds, and conditions, the *Oresteia* dramatizes the human perspective on *dikê* as a cosmic force presiding over the world-order. In parallel fashion to early Greek thought, it can be said that the *Oresteia* too depicts a world-order structured around conflicting parties and their individual μοῖραι. Hence in this universe, not only oppositions are decreed by destiny: different destinies are in opposition with each other.

8.2 *The unity of opposites in Eumenides*

At the end of *Eumenides*, we see Μοῖρα and Zeus forming a union (συγκατέβα, 1046), and just as at the outset of the trilogy, we see light (that of the procession) moving through darkness.⁶⁷⁶ The fundamental polarity between day and night, light and darkness, is deeply rooted in the trilogy and its symbolic poignancy can only be compared to that of Parmenides’ poem.⁶⁷⁷ But unlike the choral refrain at the beginning of the *Agamemnon*, which incited words of sorrow while inflaming hopes for good (αἴλινον αἴλινον εἶπέ, τό δ’ εὔ νικάτω), the choral refrain at the end of the trilogy encourages only auspicious words and cries of victory (εὐφραμεῖτε, 1035, 1038; ὀλολύξατε, 1043, 1047). The new harmony among gods and the people of Athens is

⁶⁷⁴ So that ‘beneath the apparent confusion in the minds of his chorus, the motifs and the basic thoughts of the play continue’, Scott 1969: 337.

⁶⁷⁵ For the image of Destiny as swordsmith for Justice cf. *Cho.* 648-9.

⁶⁷⁶ For a full analysis of the significance of the torches of *Eumenides* in connection to the beacon and others fires in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* cf. Gantz 1977: 38.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Ch. 3.4.

accompanied by cries of unmixed joy for all: χαίρετε, χαίρετε [...] δαίμονες τε καὶ βροτοί. As we shall soon explain, the restoration of peace at the end of the *Oresteia* is presented as a harmonious unity of opposites to be kept ἐς τὸ πᾶν (1044).

Such are the blessings that accompany an ‘honourable victory’ (νίκης μὴ κακῆς, 903) – namely a victory which does not discredit the winners and imply for them disastrous consequences⁶⁷⁸ – around which revolves an ordered cosmos:

καὶ ταῦτα γῆθεν ἔκ τε ποντίας δρόσου
ἐξ οὐρανοῦ τε· κἀνέμων ἅήματα
εὐηλίως πνέοντ’ ἐπιστείχειν χθόνα· (904-6)

Not any more the confusion of elements we saw in the Herald speech, in which inimical elements conspired together to bring about misfortune (*Ag.* 650-1), rather the harmonious joint effort of elements respecting their individual μοῖρα and collaborating to bring about an abundance ‘not to fail with the passage of time’ (μὴ κάμνειν χρόνῳ, 908). This is the cosmic balance which derives from the unity of divine opposites as the placated Erinyes accept to share a residence with Athena and the other Olympians:

δέξομαι Παλλάδος ξυνοικίαν,
οὐδ’ ἀτιμάσω πόλιν
τὰν καὶ Ζεὺς ὁ παγκρατῆς Ἄρης
τε φρούριον θεῶν νέμει (916-19)

The temporal emphasis is now either on the permanence of such order or on the appointed time (χρόνῳ τεταγμένῳ) for further fertility (944-6). Indeed, this is a different kind of victory and divine union from the one wished for by Electra in her prayer at the tomb:

ἡμῖν δὲ πομπὸς ἴσθι τῶν ἐσθλῶν ἄνω
σὺν θεοῖσι καὶ Γῇ καὶ Δίκη νικηφόρῳ. (*Cho.* 147-8)

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. *Sept.* 716.

In this final settlement, then, in which the human avenger (δικηφόρος) is transfigured into the judicial prosecutor (δικαστής),⁶⁷⁹ and the Erinyes are transfigured into Σεμναὶ θεαί (*Eum.* 1041), a different kind of justice is at play: not a justice ‘bringing victory’, rather a victory bringing justice – not any more δίκη as ποινή which cyclically tilts the weight first one way then another, but a justice which brings the scales finally on balance. How can we explain this shift from one type of unity of opposites to another? One way of doing it is to show how, underneath the events, the *Oresteia* dramatizes a movement from a cosmological model in which opposites either clash or coalesce to one where, after their initial differentiation, opposites are united in a harmonious whole.

As shown above, the cycle of offence and counter-offence dramatized in the first and second plays is analogous to that which in Presocratic thought is projected onto the cosmos: not only a simple cycle of vendetta limited to a social process, but the alternation of a ‘justice’ enacted among equal parties alternately injured and injuring. The tragic mechanism at play in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* is firmly placed within the framework of an ordered universe, characterised for the most part by conflict and obscurity, but nonetheless devoid of chaos.⁶⁸⁰ This is not a universe ruled by a benevolent or providential order, but nor is it ruled by an accidental one: the strict pendulum of *dikê* is precisely what makes human suffering and defencelessness all the more despairing.

In this cosmos, as in the Anaximandrian model or in Parmenides’ repeated imagery,⁶⁸¹ the temporal dimension of the oscillating pendulum of justice produces a transition between opposites which seem impelled by an impersonal necessity. Each action is presented as provoking a reaction, this tragedy of ‘intrafamilial violence and conflicting obligations’, as put by Goldhill, is a pattern of revenge which is also a pattern of

⁶⁷⁹ The poignant alternative between δικαστής and δικηφόρος was introduced by Electra at *Cho.* 120.

⁶⁸⁰ *Contra* Kitto: ‘In the *Agamemnon* [...] their [i.e. Olympians and Erinyes] joint system of Justice, which they share with all the human actors in the play, ends in chaos’, 1961: 89. *Cf.* instead Cairns’ statement about the *OT* which would apply here: ‘This is not a benign or providential vision, but nor is it a random one [...]. This model may derive from attempts to explain what appears to be, from a human perspective, a random and absurd universe, but it is not itself descriptive of such a universe’, 2013: 159.

⁶⁸¹ *Cf.* Ch. 3.4.

‘reversal, where the very act of taking revenge repeatedly turns the revenger into an object of revenge’.⁶⁸² At this stage the dimension of time has almost a circular quality to it: distant connections link present events with past and future in eternal repetition.⁶⁸³ But unlike the sense of cosmic equality which derives from a circular conception of time in the Preosocratic models, the temporal circularity of tragedy is perceived as a threat.⁶⁸⁴ Moreover, the backdrop to this is a divine world where dark chthonian forces and Olympian gods conspire towards the same punitive end, i.e. in which divine opposites coalesce.

In *Choephoroi*, the bankruptcy of this system of justice is displayed, through matricide, in its absolute culmination. Since after Clytemnestra’s death no human avenger is left to carry out the deed, the Erinyes are forced to act in their own persons: in this way, the divine onto which retributive justice has been constantly projected – chthonic powers, gods, and ghosts – appear on stage and fall heir to man’s conflict. In *Eumenides* Orestes’ deed becomes the object of divine conflict and the problem of justice has to be faced by the gods themselves. Human conflict is ultimately mirrored at a divine level through the clash of Olympian and Chthonic powers. The rift which separates the Olympians from the Erinyes at the beginning of the play, namely the *differentiation* within the divine sphere, is the first step towards the creation of a new order in the world of men.⁶⁸⁵

8.3 *Differentiation of opposites in Eumenides*

While in *Choephoroi* Apollo allies with the Erinyes whom he invokes in his insistence on matricide (*Cho.* 283), in *Eumenides* Apollo and the Erinyes are emphatically opposed as

⁶⁸² 2004: 26-27.

⁶⁸³ Cf. Rosenmeyer: 1982: 330ff: ‘The unity of the curse infecting the house of Atreus, crime merging with crime as if they were all part of one and the same central, timeless stain, testifies to the synoptic understanding’.

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. de Romilly 1968: 25; Vernant 1988, Also, cf. Csapo and Miller 1998: 87-125, who distinguish between an ‘aristocratic temporality’ characterised by unity, continuity, and eternal repetition and ‘democratic temporality’ that is by contrast linear, historical, and privileges present and future over the past. For a study of choral intertemporality in the *Oresteia*: Grethlein 2013. For a study of the diminishing import of the past from *Ag.* to *Cho.* and *Eum.* cf. Kyriakou 2011: 89-184.

⁶⁸⁵ Cf. Lebeck in 1971: 134-41, although I would reject her interpretation of the Furies becoming now the subject of δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν. Cf. also Sommerstein in 2010: 272.

Olympians and chthonic and their roles are repeatedly differentiated.⁶⁸⁶ This differentiation is effected, as already noted by Seaford, ‘by the juxtaposition of Apollo and the Erinyes in a visual contrast of opposites’:⁶⁸⁷ in particular stand out the four oppositions of female/male, old/young, ugly/beautiful and dark/bright.⁶⁸⁸ The Erinyes themselves especially insist on that last contrast in the first *stasimon*, where they describe their nocturnal and chthonian nature:

μᾶτερ ᾗ μ’ ἔτικτες, ὦ
μᾶτερ Νύξ. (321-2)

δόξαι δ’ ἀνδρῶν καὶ μάλ’ ὑπ’ αἰθέρι σεμναὶ
τακόμεναι κατὰ γᾶς μινύθουσιν ἄτιμοι
ἀμετέραις ἐφόδοις μελανείμοσιν. (367-70)

τοῖον ἐπὶ κνέφας ἀνδρὶ μύσος πεπόταται,
καὶ δνοφερὰν τιν’ ἀχλὺν κατὰ δώματος
αὐδᾶται πολύστονος φάτις. (378-80)

ἄτίετα διέπομεν λάχῃ
θεῶν διχοστατοῦντ’ ἀναλίφ λάπα. (385-6)

καίπερ ὑπὸ χθόνα τάξιν ἔχουσα
καὶ δυσάλιον κνέφας. (395-6)

The ode opens with the invocation of their mother Night: from whom they, like the Hesiodic Κῆρες (*Theog.* 211; 217),⁶⁸⁹ derive their function as merciless avengers (322) which they lay claim to in opposition to Apollo (323) – the place of Night is then significantly taken by Μοῖρα in the antistrophe (335). As the ode develops the darkness of their nocturnal origin is progressively linked with the deadly realm of the underworld (κατὰ γᾶς/ὑπὸ χθόνα), depicted – in opposition to the bright surface (ὑπ’ αἰθέρι) where men pursue their vainglories and the Olympians (θεῶν) reside – as a

⁶⁸⁶ *Eum.* 69-73; 185-91; 197; 350-2; 365-6; 385-6.

⁶⁸⁷ 2012: 269.

⁶⁸⁸ For this last pair: *Eum.* 52, 370/182 (where Apollo has a golden bow).

⁶⁸⁹ Cf. Sommerstein 2008: 395 n. 82.

‘sunless slime/darkness’ (ἀναλίφ λάπα/δυσάλιον κνέφας). At the end of the ode, after the word ‘darkness’, Athena makes her entrance. To her question of who they may be (408) the Erinyes restate their connection to Night (Νυκτὸς αἰανῆ τέκνα, 416) and the underworld (Ἀραὶ δ’ ἐν οἴκοις γῆς ὑπαὶ κεκλήμεθα, 417). Finally, this darkness is most significantly transferred – in Apollo’s subsequent words – to another kind of realm: the darkness of a mother’s womb (ἐν σκότοισι νηδύος, 665).

Clearly characterised, in opposition to the Olympians, as nocturnal and chthonian, the Erinyes also define themselves as straight-judging (εὐθυδίκαιοι, 312) – enforcers of the inexorable justice of the ‘ordained laws’ (νόμων θεσμίων, 490-1) according to which the doer must unconditionally suffer (312-20). Their previous insistence on their matrilineal connection to Night explains their particular repulsion towards matricide (425; 427; 493) and underlines their opposition with Orestes and Apollo, both men representing their fathers’ side. For the Erinyes – εὐθυδίκαιοι and so concerned with restating their difference – Athena’s upright judgment (εὐθεϊαν δίκην) must be the product of diacritical differentiation:

ἄλλ’ ἐξέλεγγε, κρῖνε δ’ εὐθεϊαν δίκην. (433)⁶⁹⁰

It is as if after having weighed out everything on the scale of argument and counterarguments Athena is expected to use the authority, conferred to her by the Erinyes themselves (434-5), to pick one side and carry out old-fashioned punishment. Instead, after having heard the case, Athena plainly declares:

τὸ πρᾶγμα μεῖζον, εἴ τις οἴεται τόδε
βροτὸς διαριεῖν· οὐδε μὴν ἐμοὶ θέμις
φόνου δικάζειν ὀξυμηνίτους δίκας (470-2)

The institution of the Areopagus is born out of the divine recognition that human action can only be dealt with by taking into account the complexity of motives behind it (426).

⁶⁹⁰ Orestes will subsequently pick up the imperative demand: σὺ δ’ εἰ δικάίως εἴτε μή, κρῖνον δίκην· (467). This whole exchange contains a virtuosic literary play on the word *dikē*: cf. Goldhill 1986: 29ff. and Mitchell-Boyask 2009: 99-100.

Athena suspends her judgment and her intervention marks the beginning of a reconciliation of all oppositions.

8.4 *The reconciliation of opposites in Eumenides*

Athena herself embodies a fundamental unity of opposites. A motherless woman (μήτηρ γὰρ οὔτις ἐστὶν ἥ μ' ἐγείνατο, 736), and thus – as she likes to underscore – her father's child in the fullest sense (κάρτα δ' εἰμὶ τοῦ πατρός, 738) she defies the female/male binary opposition hitherto at play. The opposition between the Erinyes, champions of Clytemnestra, and Apollo's champion of Orestes, relied in fact heavily on the female versus male logic: Apollo, in defending Orestes speaks for Agamemnon as a 'noble man' (ἄνδρα γενναῖον) killed by the hands of a woman (πρὸς γυναικός, 625-7), and subsequently, he disparages the motherhood of Clytemnestra with his famous Anaxagorean argument of the theory of procreation. The female versus male opposition finds in Athena a way to coexist.

Daughter of 'Olympian Zeus' (664), and therefore unfamiliar with the darkness of the womb (665), Athena casts her vote in favour of Orestes. However, although her vote goes to him due to her earnest preference for the male (737),⁶⁹¹ it is important to stress that Athena's choice brings about a tie,⁶⁹² in which the cases of both parties are eventually given equal recognition.⁶⁹³ This is precisely the argument the goddess will adopt in her attempt to persuade the Erinyes that they have *not* been dishonoured (οὐκ ἔστ' ἄτιμοι, 824) or defeated:

οὐ γὰρ νενίκησθ', ἀλλ' ἰσόψηφος δίκη
ἐξῆλθ' ἀληθῶς, οὐκ ἀτιμία σέθεν. (795-6)

Since the result of the trial (δίκη) is a truly equally divided vote (ἰσόψηφος),⁶⁹⁴ the scale of justice has not been tilted one way or the other. Orestes is acquitted but not

⁶⁹¹ An interesting discussion of this point remains Winnington-Ingram 1983: 124ff. For an account with which I disagree see Porter 2005: 1-10.

⁶⁹² Cf. Int. I. 3 for my position on this issue.

⁶⁹³ Although, technically, the votes condemning matricide outnumbered the others.

⁶⁹⁴ I prefer this to the possible alternative rendering 'a trial where the voting was fair' (Podlecki 1989:184).

declared innocent and the reputation of the Erinyes is safe. This new form of justice (δίκη) is not a victory (νίκη) which inexorably follows the rules of necessity (i.e. one commits injustice and therefore it must be punished); it is the balanced result of a process of persuasion – a tie between equally attention-bidding cases.⁶⁹⁵

With reverence and care (848-50), and the promise of future glory (οὐπιρρέων γὰρ τιμιώτερος χρόνος | ἔσται πολίταις τοῖσδε, καὶ σὺ τιμίαν | ἔδραν ἔχουσα..., 853-5), Athena eventually persuades the Erinyes to stay in the land.⁶⁹⁶ Their assimilation and transformation marks the ultimate reconciliation of opposites into a harmonious whole. The older goddesses unite with the young (882-4), and their fear-inspiring role (517-9) is absorbed by the new system (990-4). The whole trilogy ends with the ultimate image of a unity of opposites: the reconciliation between dark and bright, old and new, female and male, Olympian and Chthonian: Μοῖρα, the ancient female deity who was previously claimed to have assigned the Erinyes their functions (334-5; 961), is now reunited with Zeus to the benefit of the citizens.

8.5 *Fear in time and the golden midpoint*

Hence, the *Oresteia* dramatizes a transition from one type of cosmological order to another. The cosmos of the first two plays is pervaded by opposites either alternating or locked together in tragic confusion. The same governing forces which affect the cosmos affect the social order of man. In this cosmos a cyclical conception of time prevails where retributive justice takes place according to the rules of a strict necessity. Past, present, and future join together in a place of horror: humans fear the unknown and their inexorable destiny. With *Eumenides* we move into a different universe. It has been argued that ‘in *Eumenides* we move [...] into a stable cosmology pervaded by the prevalence of one opposite over the other’.⁶⁹⁷ I argued the reverse, namely that with the

⁶⁹⁵ On the relationship between Necessity and Persuasion and the potential influence of *Eumenides* on Plato: cf. Rabinowitz 1981; Winnington-Ingram 1965: 48ff; Cornford 1937: 362ff.

⁶⁹⁶ ‘Athena, with her dignity and courtesy, is far more impressive; as the protectress of the men of Athens and foundress of the Areopagus she carries more weight’ [than Apollo], Winnington-Ingram 1983: 125.

⁶⁹⁷ Seaford 2012: 273. I do not believe that the dramatic movement of the *Oresteia* can be interpreted so squarely as a movement from *one* type of Presocratic cosmology to another as he seems to believe (cf. 2013: 17).

last play, we move into a universe in which opposites are initially differentiated and then reunited into a harmonious nexus. The finale of the *Oresteia* dramatizes the ultimate unity of opposites.

With the final foundation of polis institutions,⁶⁹⁸ we also see a change in the shape of time and the role of fear. As the focus moves from the contemplation of the mythological past to the contemplation of the historical present, in an exquisite metatheatrical twist, the stage is turned into a mirror for its audience. If as some have said, tragedy has been ‘designed to resolve temporal tensions’,⁶⁹⁹ the *Oresteia* has also been designed to resolve, through time, tragic tensions. In the historical ‘now’, epitomised on stage by the foundation of the Areopagus, a different type of justice is sought – one where persuasion prevails over necessity – and time is exalted in its aspects of linearity and perpetuity.⁷⁰⁰ Simultaneously, fear is no longer connected to the temporality of alternation and impending doom but to the punctuality of the present. If the Erinyes had illustrated the role of fear likewise:

ἔσθ’ ὅπου τὸ δεινὸν εὔ
καὶ φρενῶν ἐπίσκοπον
δεῖμ’ ἄνω καθήμενον· (517-19)

Athena’s subsequent speech shows that fear is not dissipated, but forms the basis of the new order:

ἐκ τῶν φοβερῶν τῶνδε προσώπων
μέγα κέρδος ὄρω τοῖσδε πολίταις·
τάσδε γὰρ εὖφρονας εὖφρονες αἰεὶ
μέγα τιμῶντες καὶ γῆν καὶ πόλιν
ὀρθοδίκαιον
πρέψετε πάντως διάγοντες. (990-5)

⁶⁹⁸ For a recent discussion of their function and significance in both Athenian democracy and Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* see Mitchell-Boyask 2009: 98-107.

⁶⁹⁹ Burke 1966: 137 subsequently cited by Rosenmeyer 1982: 330 and Barret 2007: 255.

⁷⁰⁰ 853-5; 898; also notice the repeated temporal expression ἐς τὸ πᾶν (83; 291; 401; 670; 891; 1044).

Just as the old and the new order are connected through the interplay of opposites, so does fear represent another element of continuity. But just as opposites are reassembled in a new organic whole, so individual horror of the unaccountable evolves into the beneficial foundation of social respect and justice under law. As noticed by Gantz, even the imagery of the πυριδάπτω λαμπάδι (1041-2) after summarising and re-echoing all the appearances of fire in the trilogy – a very Heraclitean element indeed –conveys how even this element preserves its destructive ‘devouring’ properties. Yet in this, it symbolises the threat of old violence ‘put to a constructive purpose’: ‘men have learned to judge questions of right and wrong in a civilised manner’ and thus ‘even fire has transformed accordingly’.⁷⁰¹

Ironically, after their description of the importance of fear the Erinyes had formulated a principle closely recalling that of Zeus’ πάθει μάθος:

ξυμφέρει
σωφρονεῖν ὑπὸ στένει. (520-21)

and then had proceeded by urging the citizens thus:

μήτ’ ἄναρκτον βίον
μήτε δεσποτούμενον
αἰνέσης·
παντὶ μέσφ τὸ κράτος θεὸς ὥπασεν, ἄλλῃ ἄλλα δ’
ἐφορεύει. (526-30)

This equilibrium founded on fear is the wisdom of good sense (σωφρονεῖν, 521; 1000) – verbal echoes suggest that it may be the ultimate expression of the god’s χάρις βίαιος: a violent grace, a fearful harmony, a wisdom (σωφρονεῖν, 181) bestowed on men against their will. The triumph of good sense and balanced antitheses is the first experiment of democracy, the golden midpoint between anarchy and despotism favoured by the supreme and timeless unity of all opposites: θεός.

⁷⁰¹ Gantz 1977: 38.

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