Philosophy on Stage

The re-enactment of pre-Socratic questions in the *Prometheus Bound*

Research Master thesis in

Classics and Ancient Civilizations

Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University

submitted by

Nicolò Bettegazzi (s1608657)

n.bettegazzi@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Supervisor: dr. Leopoldo Iribarren

Second reader: Prof. dr. Ineke Sluiter

August 2017

Table of contents

Introduction

This thesis, *Philosophy on Stage*, explores the interaction between pre-Socratic philosophy and the *Prometheus Bound*, a drama normally attributed to Aeschylus[1]. My aim is to investigate the process whereby the dramatist incorporates theoretical contents elaborated by early Greek philosophers that are in principle alien to his art. What role do such contents play when transposed onstage? And how does the tragedian contribute, through their re-elaboration, to the intellectual debates of his times? By examining the *Prometheus Bound* against some of the theological, ethical and epistemological notions of the pre-Socratics, this thesis aims at shedding new light on the interconnection between drama and contemporary philosophical speculation.

I have left aside the much-debated question of the authenticity of the play and the trilogy to which it belongs, the *Prometheia*[2]. Most scholars still accept it as a genuine work of Aeschylus (including those of antiquity, who never questioned the authorship of the play), and I shall myself proceed on this assumption. I believe in fact that the studies of Herington and Saïd have convincingly shown that the *Prometheus Bound* fits well with the other tragedies of Aeschylus, most notably with the *Oresteia*[3]: their remarks are to me more compelling than the scepticism concerning the alleged stylistic, dramaturgic and theological peculiarities of the play[4]. I am aware, at the same time, that the enigma of this drama is doomed to remain unresolved, unless new evidence be found concerning the author, the date or the contents of the trilogy. Thus, my choice is mainly methodological, since trying to address preliminarily this issue would involve entering an endless philological discussion that has been going on for over a century without yielding any definitive proof.

In any case, the authorship of the play does not constitute an essential prerequisite for the interpretation that will be elaborated in this thesis. By examining the discursive and conceptual relationship between the drama and the near-contemporary theorisations of the pre-Socratics, it is still possible to reach solid conclusions, at least concerning one aspect of the dramatic text. The *Prometheus Bound*, which one must agree could be the work of someone other than Aeschylus, will be approached here as a document recording some of the intellectual debates that were animating the Greek world somewhere around the mid-fifth century. The dating is an approximate one, but one that can be inferred from the 'philosophical evidence' yielded by the play itself. Regardless of when exactly the play was

[1] I would like to thank my supervisor, Leopoldo Iribarren, for his precious criticism, support and patience. A special mention goes also to Claire Louguet and Daria Francobandiera (from the Classics department of Lille III) for having organized and let me intervene in the seminar *Eschyle et les Présocratiques: le Prométhée Enchainé*, which has proved an important source of inspiration for the present work.

[2] For an exhaustive review of the debate, see Griffith, 1977:1-7; Conacher, 1980:141-174 and Saïd, 1985:16-20.

[3] See Herington, 1970:76-87 and Saïd, 1985:326-340. Cf. also Cerri, 1975:106 ff.

[4] A sober yet penetrating review of such criticisms is provided by Lloyd-Jones, 2003:52 ff.

composed[5], it will emerge that none of the abstractions and philosophical ideas relevant to the *Prometheus Bound* was shaped after that timeframe.

I. The interplay of tragedy and philosophy

Much work has been done in the last decades to bring out the ways in which the action of tragedy, through the re-enactment of traditional mythological sagas, helped articulate conflicts and tensions within contemporary Greek society. Research on Greek drama, in fact, has mainly focused on '*its social and political content* […] *or the anthropological and theatrical interests of its form*'[6]. Very little attention, surprisingly, has been drawn to the fact that some of the main questions asked on the dramatic stage – What is the nature of the gods? What is the relationship between gods and men? – were being asked at that very same time by the so-called pre-Socratics, a heterogeneous group of thinkers commonly regarded as the fathers of western philosophy. With few exceptions[7], the relationship between Greek drama and early Greek philosophy has been '*oddly underexplored*'[8], and only very recently it has started attracting the attention it deserves[9]. This lacuna becomes especially weighty with regards to Aeschylus (525-456 BC), who lived roughly at the same time as Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles, and could have easily accessed the older doctrines of Xenophanes and Anaximander. In fact, his dramas bear striking similarities with the ideas and language of these thinkers[10], but this should not surprise us, for Aeschylus was entitled as much as them to contribute to the intellectual debates of his days. There has been a long-standing tendency to regard his relationship with philosophy as a doxographical one: the tragic poet, provided he employs 'philosophy' at all, would be simply alluding or criticizing a given doctrine, taking no part in the elaboration of innovative concepts or notions[11]. This is a picture that does not make any justice to the actual engagement of the dramatist with the cultural issues of his society. Of the three Attic tragedians, in fact, Aeschylus is undoubtedly '*le plus théoricien*'[12], and this is so for two reasons.

The first relates to the specificities of the intellectual context in which both the dramatist and the pre-Socratics shaped their discourses. At the time when Aeschylus' tragedies were taking shape, Greek culture was not differentiated yet into a variety of specialised

[5] The dating oscillates between 479 and 424 BC. See Herington, 1970:127-129.
[6] Hall, 2010:172. Cf. Judet de La Combe, 2010:79-118 and Cairns, 2013:ix.
[7] Here is a list of papers containing important suggestions and questions, most of them begging for further developments: Herington, 1963; Capizzi, 1982; Seaford, 1986; Adán, 1999 and Allan, 2005.
[8] Seaford, 2012:240.
[9] Irby-Massie, 2008; Seaford, 2012 and Scapin 2015.
[10] Cf. Allan, 2005; Irby-Massie, 2008:133-135; Griffith, 2009:26-34; Judet de La Combe, 2010:204-212, 252-257 and Scapin, 2015:3-4.
[11] The statement of Lloyd-Jones (1971:86) is in this sense emblematic: "If Aeschylus knew of modern thinkers like Xenophanes and Heraclitus, he refrained from obtruding his knowledge upon his audience".
[12] Judet de La Combe, 2010:229.

disciplines claiming their own expertise, traditions and rules - as will instead be the case by the time of Sophocles' and Euripides' ἀκμή[13]. There was not such a thing as a philosophical practice as such, neither there were thinkers (such as the Sophists) distinguishing themselves from the poets and claiming the control, with their theoretical elaborations, on specific subjects of inquiry. If Heraclitus could criticize Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus in the same fragment[14], it is because what matters to him is the issues they raise rather than the medium by which such issues are raised. With his dramatic language, then, Aeschylus could address the theoretical questions of his times without crossing any pre-established intellectual boundary: on the contrary, his plays were meant to contribute to a shared debate on the Greek system of values and beliefs[15].

The second reason concerns the relationship of tragedy with other forms of contemporary public discourse. Greek drama is an heterogenous art-form, which elaborates its meaning through the integration of a variety of literary and performative contents: from epic and didactic poetry to choral lyric, from ritual speech-acts to legal prose, the playwright could subject every manifestation of the shared culture to his own needs of representation[16]. The originality of the tragic poet lies in his action within and on the culture of his times, which enables him to produce artistic innovations while being anchored in pre-existing traditions and contemporary practices. Drama synthetises and re-composes these discursive elements, and transposes them on the stage to shape the relationship between the characters, their individual asses and limits, indeed, the dramatic action itself. In this respect, the notions of the pre-Socratics are a fundamental component of this material: the tragedian incorporates them not only to shape and dramatize the events of tragedy, but also to elaborate innovative notions in different fields of speculative inquiry. In fact, in the *Prometheus Bound* we read the earliest reflection on the origins of civilization, and this suggests that the influence of philosophy on drama was as important as that of drama on philosophy.

In a collection of papers edited in 2013, *Tragedy and Archaic Greek thought*, Cairns has voiced the urgency to restore the centrality of Greek tragedy in the development of early Greek thought[17]: with this thesis, I aim to offer a contribution to this task.

An overview on the scholarly debate

The only monographic study on the topic is Rösler's *Reflexe vorsokratischen Denkens bei Aischylos* (1970), which discuss a large selection of Aeschylean passages which might betray the influence of the pre-Socratics – in particular, of the Pythagoreans, the medical theorists and several individual thinkers. Rösler's conclusions are mostly negative, except for the

[13] Allan, 2005:72 ff. and Judet de La Combe, 252-260, 295 ff.
[14] EGP III, 9, D20.
[15] Cf. Allan, 2005:71-75 and Judet de La Combe, 2010:98-102, 251-255.
[16] Griffith, 2009:6-58 and Judet de La Combe, 2010:245-251.
[17] Cairns, 2013:ix ff.

impact, which he acknowledges, of Xenophanes' and Anaxagoras' ideas[18]. However, two hermeneutical limits undermine his results. First, Rösler has limited his analysis to individual passages of Aeschylus, thereby renouncing to look for general parallelisms in thought, diction and structure. Second, he conceives the relationship between drama and pre-Socratic thought as an aprioristic influence of the latter on the first. The author implicitly accepts the distinction between 'poetry' and 'philosophy', projecting it onto an historical period when no such distinction, as said above, has been drawn yet.

In his article on the relationship between Aeschylus and Parmenides, Capizzi has advocated a different approach to the topic: "*it seems* – he observed polemically – *that in the cities of archaic and classical Greece there was a department of Philosophy that was not part of the Faculty of Letters, but had its private hub in a house with no doors nor windows*" (my translation)[19]. Although his conclusions rely too heavily on a shaky historical evidence (i.e. Parmenides' biographical tradition[20]), it remains that Capizzi was the first, to my knowledge, to explicitly approach Aeschylus as an active participant to the movements of his times, envisaging his influence on Parmenides and contemporary philosophy in general[21].

Seaford has interpreted, in a recent monograph, the structural and conceptual similarities between the cosmology of the *Oresteia* and that of Heraclitus as an immediate answer to the social developments – i.e. the monetisation - of fifth century Greece[22]. To be sure, the continuity between Aeschylus' and Heraclitus' cosmology can be understood in relation to the society in which they both lived, but Seaford has gone as far as to posit, dogmatically enough, a unidirectional causal link between literary (philosophical and dramatic) cosmologies and the economic processes of the polis[23]. In so doing, he reduces complex doctrines and dramas to mere reflection of specific relations of productions, thereby ignoring altogether the originality of the individual author. Besides, Seaford systematically wrenches Aeschylus' sentences from their dramatic context (as already done by Rösler), and so distorts their meaning and the tragic effects they were meant to produce.

The last and surely most important contribution to the topic is Scapin's doctoral dissertation, *The Flower of Suffering*, which investigates '*the theological tension and metaphysical assumptions*'[24] of the *Oresteia* against some of the ideas and modes of thought of Anaximander, Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Parmenides. Scapin has overcome the hermeneutical limits underlying previous researches, and has convincingly shown that the tension between opposite religious attitudes emerging from the trilogy can be read as a response to the theological debates of the time. The same, we will see, is true for the *Prometheus Bound*, where the oscillation between opposite attitudes follows the line of a

[18] For Xenophanes, Rösler, 1970:4-15; for Anaxagoras, *ibid*.:56-87.
[19] Capizzi, 1982:124.
[20] Cf. Cerri, 1999:49-52 and Coxon, 2009:39-44.
[21] Capizzi:123-125, 131-133.
[22] Seaford, 2012:240 ff.
[23] Cf. the criticism of Scapin, 2015:9-14.
[24] Scapin, 2015:8.

dialectic relationship between the archaic world-view and the notions promoted by the pre-Socratics to challenge it. The conceptual and literary originality of our drama lies, as well, in this juxtaposition, whereby different approaches to reality are placed against each other and thereby reveal each other's limits. It follows, as I shall demonstrate in more detail in the following section, that to shed a light on the relationship of drama with contemporary intellectual debates requires exploring the anchoring of such debates in the pre-existing poetic and intellectual traditions.

II. *Philosophy on Stage*: themes and aims

The fact that the *Prometheus Bound* stands in a direct relationship to contemporary philosophy is no longer a working hypothesis nor a thesis defended by a scholarly minority, but an acknowledged fact. Our drama is in fact a *'lively testament to the Greek intellectual achievements of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.'*[25], and Prometheus, its main character, '*fits with great ease the fragments preserved from the archaic thought*'[26]. Previous researches on the topic (in truth a very few), some results of which I share and adopt as the foundations of my work[27], all fail, however, to account for two fundamental questions, namely, where do the themes and topics of the *Prometheus Bound* come from? And how did the tragedian integrate contemporary theoretical discourses to re-elaborate them? Whether elaborated through the language of prose, poetry or drama, the early Greek inquiries into divine and human nature form a close-knit unity, and the contribution of the individual author is only intelligible when placed against the background of a traditional set of problems and solutions.

Between philosophy and myth

This research conceives the relationship between the early Greek thinkers and drama in two interrelated ways. The first concerns the continuity between the contents developed in drama and in the discourses of the pre-Socratics. The *Prometheus Bound* touches upon several themes that were at the heart of contemporary philosophical inquiries, and only when read against them does the tragic text reveal its conceptual complexity and originality.

[25] Irby-Massie, 2008:133. Cf. Herington, 1963, 192 ff.

[26] Adán, 1999:8.

[27] I mainly refer to Adán, 1999 which offers some precious observations on the conceptual continuity between the dramatic character of Prometheus and the cosmological notions developed by Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides. Less satisfying is instead Irby-Massie, 2008, which only lists a series of parallelisms between the drama and contemporary thinkers (mainly Heraclitus), overlooking the broader cultural framework in which these intellectual trends took shape.

The second way, systematically overlooked by the critics (but by Scapin[28]), draws attention to the fact that both Aeschylus and the early philosophers are largely dependent on the same poetical tradition, and elaborate their discourses within and against that tradition. A prominent place is occupied, in this sense, by Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. These poems were an essential point of reference not only for the pre-Socratics[29], who challenged and used them as the vehicle of their cosmological (*Theogony*) and anthropological (*Works and Days*) doctrines, but also for the author of the *Prometheus Bound*, who found there the earliest versions of the myth of Prometheus (*Theog*. 535-616; *WD* 47-105) and built his drama upon them. If the power of this drama relies, as I think, on an original reflection over the correlation between divine powers and human conduct, we might then wonder how such prominent theme was originally treated by Hesiod, and how the challenges offered against it by the pre-Socratics helped the dramatist shaping his own tragedy. It is in fact my contention that the continuity between our drama and the pre-Socratics emerges not only in concepts or language, but also in the critical attitude toward the theological and ethical contents of Hesiod's poetry.

In the *Theogony*, the myth of Prometheus narrates the conflict between Prometheus and Zeus; in the *Works and Days*, it illustrates instead the defining traits of the human condition. These two themes – the intra-divine conflict and the nature of man - form the background of my research. The thematic approach is to me the only viable method to handle the complex material at my disposal. In the first chapter, I will discuss the Hesiodic myths and the drama, so to bring to light the essential point of contacts as well as the differences between the two. In the second and third chapter, I will instead focus on the literary and conceptual continuity between the *Prometheus Bound* on the one hand, and some fragments of Anaximander, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles on the other: hopefully, this thesis will enable me to place the drama within the intellectual milieu in which it really belongs.

[28] See Scapin, 2015:15 ff.

[29] As already observed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* I. 4, 984b and elsewhere. For recent contributions on the topic, see, in particular, Vlastos, 1952; Cerri, 1998; Algra, 1999; Most, 2007; Scapin, 2015: 31-34.

The myth of Prometheus

The Prometheus Bound is the most symbolic drama of Antiquity.

Karl Reinhardt

As acknowledged by Herodotus in his *Histories* (ca. 450 BC), it was Homer and Hesiod who gave the gods their '*names, honours, skills and forms*' (II, 53), systematising the Greeks' mythological tradition. Hesiod's myths of Prometheus (a character whom Homer never mentions), thus, provided Aeschylus with an anchor, with a set of conceptual and thematic categories in which to accommodate his own ideas[30]. Although other authors and versions of the myth influenced the shape of the story narrated in the *Prometheus Bound*[31], the essential traits of the story, as we shall see, were those imposed by Hesiod in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. Starting from this assumption, I will explore the process whereby the Hesiodic themes, issues and images are appropriated by the tragedian and used as the vehicle toward the elaboration of an original dramatic project.

1. Prometheus and Zeus in the *Theogony*

Both Hesiod and Aeschylus recognize in Prometheus the god of μῆτις (as his name suggests)[32], of a type of intelligence based on cunning and deception. Prometheus is the foresighted god, he who '*knows counsels beyond all others*' (πάντων πέρι μήδεα εἰδώς, *Theog*. 559; *WD* 54), who can '*find a way out even from impossible situations*' (εὑρεῖν κἀξ ἀμηχάνων πόρον, *Prom*. 59). Most importantly, he is the only one god who can challenge Zeus by relying on his δολίη τέχνη[33]. This challenge is the centrepiece of the myth narrated in the *Theogony* and in the *Prometheus Bound*. In fact, it was the *Theogony* that provided '*the starting point for Aeschylus' own approach to the myth of Prometheus*'[34]. I shall then start by examining Hesiod's text, so to bring to light the material relevant to the dramatic action of the *Prometheus Bound*.

The scission

Hesiod tells how Prometheus, the son of the Titan Iapetus and Clymene (*Theog*. 506-510), first tried to deceive Zeus at Mekone, thereby producing a contest articulated by a series of

[30] On the concept of 'anchoring innovation', developed by the Dutch classicists, see Sluiter, 2017.

[31] See Griffith, 1977:16-17 and 1983:1-4; Reinhardt, 1991:51-59 and West, 1979:147.

[32] Cf. West, 1966:308-309, n. *ad* 510 and Griffith, 1983:2 n.5. The essential correspondence between the god's name and actions was accepted throughout Antiquity: cf. *Theog*. 559 and *Prom*. 85-87 (with the comments of the scholiasts; scholl. 85a-c). I refer to the *scholia* on the *Prometheus Bound* as they appear in Herington, 1972.

[33] In the *Theogony*, μῆτις, δόλος and τέχνη are used interchangeably to signify a 'skilful deception'; see Saïd, 1985:115-117 and Iribarren, 2017:58 n.1.

[34] Solmsen, 1949:126. Cf. Conacher, 1980:3-15 and Griffith, 1983:6.

ruses and counter-ruses. In a feast to which both gods and men were participating (535), the son of Iapetus divided up the nourishment destined to Zeus' commensals, a sacrificial ox, into two unequal portions (536-540), and then tricked Zeus into choosing one of them (548-549). This ruse, aetiology of the institution of sacrifice[35], disturbs the normative system of the Olympians, and places Zeus in a paradoxical situation: either of his choices will violate the law of partition of which he himself is the guarantee[36]. The sacrifice trick, in fact, takes place within an order that Zeus has already arranged upon the equal (ὁμῶς, 74; ἐὺ, 885) distribution of honours and prerogatives among the gods. Prometheus, then, tries to put Zeus in contradiction with himself, and he does so, most importantly, by giving an advantage to human beings: from then on, they will keep for themselves the edible portions of the sacrificed beast, leaving the fat and the bones to the gods. The same issues will be at work in the *Prometheus Bound*. The dramatist will reduce Prometheus' ruses to a single act of transgression, the theft of fire, while at the same time attributing it the symbolic values of the Hesiodic sacrifice trick. As soon as Prometheus tries to benefit mankind '*beyond proper measure*' (καιροῦ πέρα, *Prom*. 507), it is in fact the principle of equality underpinning Zeus' order that is challenged. Different from Hesiod, rather, is the logic underlying the intra-divine conflict. But let us consult the *Theogony* first.

After the trick at Mekone, Zeus punishes Prometheus by taking divine fire away from men (563-564), making it impossible to cook what they had got from the sacrifice trick. In a last attempt to help mortals, Prometheus steals the fire back and gives it to men, hiding it '*into a hollow fennel-stalk*' (ἐν κοίλῳ νάρθηκι, 567)[37]. At this point, Zeus does not take away fire from men, but sends among them a '*beautiful evil*' (καλὸν κακὸν, 585), the fabricated woman, who embodies the ontological and spatial discontinuity between gods and men (see below)[38]. In the meanwhile Prometheus is defeated and subdued, despite his cleverness, to the constraint (ὑπ᾽ἀνάγκης, 615) of a '*great bond*' (μέγας δεσμὸς, 616), unable to trick Zeus and escape his wrath. After all, the conflict was doomed from the very start to end with the victory of the '*all wise*' Zeus (μητιέτα, 520) over the '*crook-counselled*' Prometheus (ἀγκυλομήτης, 546; *WD* 48). The possession of μῆτις is not a prerogative of Prometheus alone, but a cosmic force, as we shall see, that guides divine history toward its τέλος, the reign of Zeus[39].

Ruse and sovereignty

In the *Theogony*, only Kronos, ruler of the cosmos before being dethroned by his son Zeus, shares with Prometheus the epithet ἀγκυλομήτης (18, 473, 495): the correlation between the two gods relates to the limits of their μῆτις. In fact, both have been defeated by Zeus, and in

[35] See West, 1966: 305-308 n. *ad* 507-616.

[36] See Judet de La Combe, 1996:285 ff. and Iribarren, 2017:70-71.

[37] Cf. *Prom*.109-110: ναρθηκοπλήρωτον δὲ θηρῶμαι πυρὸς/πηγὴν κλοπαίαν.

[38] See Vernant, 1985:264-265 and Iribarren, 2017:68-76.

[39] On the teleological perspective of the *Theogony*, see Judet de La Combe, 1996:270-272; Strauss Clay, 2003:12-14 and Iribarren, 2017:57-58.

both cases this happens because Zeus' cunning proves superior to theirs. For the Olympian did not fail to recognize Prometheus' ruse (γνῶ ῥ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ἠγνοίησε δόλον, 551) and could eventually turn it against him, while Kronos was deceived (δολωθείς, 494) by the ruse of Gaia and did not realize (οὐδ᾽ ἐνόησε, 488) that Zeus was about to subdue him '*with guile and force*' (τέχνῃσι βίηφί, 496). On the one side of the Olympian king stand in fact Κράτος (Power) and Βία (Force), sons of Styx, who follow Zeus and raise his authority above that of every other god (385 ff.). On the other stands the daughter of Tethys and Ocean: Μῆτις, '*she who knows the most among gods and mortals*' (887). In the *Prometheus Bound*, the character of Μῆτις will be deliberately ignored, and Prometheus himself will take up her role. It is then necessary to analyse the function that the notion embodied by the goddess covers in the *Theogony*, for the divergence between Hesiod and the dramatist only emphasizes the prominent place recognized by both authors to that type of intelligence that the Greeks called by the name of μῆτις.

Right after the repartition of the privileges and honours among the gods (885), Zeus marries Μῆτις, and then swallows her before she could give birth to Athena - '*deceiving her with guile and treacherous words*' (δόλῳ…ἐξαπατήσας αἱμυλίοισι λόγοισιν, 889-890). It is at this point that he becomes a god μητιέτα and acquires knowledge of the '*eternal plans*' (ἄφθιτα μήδεα, 545, 550, 561) on which his rule depends. The marriage with Μῆτις, in fact, endows Zeus with a security measure against the unexpected, and this is what differentiates him from the previous rulers. The set of skills embodied by the goddess – and by Prometheus himself in the *Prometheus Bound* - is the functional complement of sovereignty, one of its essential conditions[40]: it is through guile that Zeus takes power[41] and stops the chain of political and cosmic crisis undermining the divine world. In fact, if the marriage with Μῆτις enables Zeus to establish a new order, the following marriage with Θέμις (901 ff.), the goddess of divine justice, makes his decisions to be perceived as immutable[42]. This union will in fact give birth not only to Justice (Δίκη), Lawfulness (Εὐνομίη) and Peace (Εἰρήνη), but also to the Destinies (Μοῖραι) - in sum, all the aspects of continuity, regularity and stability that Zeus' power embodies. The image of Prometheus in chains held down by 'the decree of Necessity' (ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης, 615) is the image of an order that cannot be any longer changed nor challenged. We will see that the dramatist, while adopting Hesiod's plot, values and issues, will elaborate a different system of oppositions between Zeus (κράτος and βία) and Prometheus (μῆτις and θέμις), thereby erasing every trace of the teleological narrative elaborated in the *Theogony* and challenging the traditionally accepted connection between Zeus and the fixed order of a superior necessity.

---

[40] Cf. Detienne and Vernant, 1974:61-75; Cerri, 1975: 101-102 and Saïd, 1985:261-262.

[41] Cf. the description of the Titanomachy in the *Prometheus Bound* (206-213).

[42] Cf. Solmsen, 1949:35; Detienne and Vernant, 1974:104-106 and Saïd, 1985:278-279.

Toward the Works and Days

The conflict produced at Mekone is the last of the divine history, and preludes to the definitive establishment of the Olympian rule. Prometheus' final release at the hands of the mortal Heracles (526-534), son of Zeus and Alcmene, signals in fact the definitive reconciliation among the gods, and the achievement of a reigning order among them. At the same time, the final intervention of a mortal suggests that there also exists a correlation between the divine history and the existence of mortals. The myth of Prometheus, in fact, unfolds in the *Theogony* – as later in the *Prometheus Bound* - in two distinct yet connected directions: the first is the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus, the second is the relation of human beings to this conflict. For the trick of Mekone introduces a crisis within Zeus' order, but at the same time achieves a process of ontological differentiation (ἐκρίνοντο, 535)[43] between gods and men: a process that certainly puts men at disadvantage, breaking off every form of direct communication with the divine world, but that also endows them with a providential function in relation to the gods' history[44]. It will in fact be a mortal who finally releases Prometheus '*not against Zeus' will*' (οὐκ ἀέκητι Ζηνὸς, 529), thus enabling Zeus to achieve a state of harmony that no divine conflict had managed to reach.

In the *Theogony*, then, the origin of mankind is posited as the result of a rupture between two types of being separated by mortality. The perspective changes in the *Works and Days*, where the myth of Prometheus does not explain the polarity between gods and men, but the essential traits of the human condition itself. In fact, many recent studies have shown how Hesiod could approach the myth from opposite perspectives and adjust it to fit the very different contexts in which it appears[45]. In order for us to grasp the plurality of themes and semantic nuances underlying the verses of the *Prometheus Bound*, it is first necessary to draw attention to Hesiod's double telling, to the questions raised by each version of the myth. The discursive relationship between Hesiod and the dramatist, we will see, does not merely relate to the re-elaboration of the narrative of the *Theogony*, but to the active engagement with a world-view that the *Theogony* alone cannot bring to light. For the *Prometheus Bound* centres on the order of the gods, but also investigates the place of men within that order.

[43] On the meaning of κρίνω in this passage, see Reinhardt, 1991:258; Judet de La Combe, 1996:272-273; Strauss Clay, 2003:101 and Most, 2006:46 n. 27.

[44] See Judet de La Combe, 1996:269-274 and Iribarren 2016:68-70.

[45] Calabrese de Feo, 1995; Judet de La Combe and Larnoud, 1996; Strauss Clay, 2009:104-128 and Iribarren, 2017:67-81. The previous tendency, rooted in the structuralist essays of Vernant (1974:185 ff.; cf. 1985:186), was instead to emphasize the unity and coherence between the two versions of the myth.

II. The human condition

While the contents of the *Theogony* were the exclusive prerogative of the Muses, who can tell either true things (ἀληθέα, 28) or '*lies identical with true things*' (ψεύδεα…ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, 27), in the *Works and Days* it is the poet who '*will proclaim some reliable truths*' (ἐτήτυμα μυθησαίμην, 10) to his brother Perses. Such truths concern not the gods but the human condition, whose defining trait Hesiod identifies in the inextricability of work and justice[46]. This truth is deduced at the beginning of the narrative from two complementary stories: the myth of Prometheus (47-105) and that of the five races (109-201). The first explains men's necessity to work for a living, the second presents the necessity to observe justice as the only way for the present race of men, the Iron race, to oppose decadence and avoid the annihilation that has befallen the previous races of men. The two λόγοι are closely interconnected, as they are both based on the idea that the human condition is the result of a decline which can only be relieved through work and justice. It is in function of this ethical programme that the myth of Prometheus is narrated in the *Works and Days*.

Neither the punishment nor the release of Prometheus is mentioned in the *Works and Days*, since no interest emerges along the narrative for the role played by mankind in relation to the gods' history. What concerns Hesiod here is the impact of the intrigue between Zeus and Prometheus on the life of mortals, henceforth doomed to a life of toil in opposition to the blissful condition enjoyed before Prometheus' intervention on their behalf. In the beginning, in a period that closely resembles the Golden age (109-126), men lived on earth apart from evils (90-92; cf. 112-113), and knew no opposition between work and fertility (43-46; cf. 116-118). But now they must produce their own means of life, and this is the direct consequence of Prometheus' trick against Zeus:

> ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς ἔκρυψε χολωσάμενος φρεσὶν ἦσιν,
> ὅττί μιν ἐξαπάτησε Προμηθεὺς ἀγκυλομήτης.[47]

The episode of the sacrifice trick at Mekone, which was described at length in the *Theogony* (535-561), is here condensed in a single verse (ὅττί…ἀγκυλομήτης): the myth elaborated in the *Works and Days* does not account for the separation between gods and men, but presupposes it as its starting point[48]. The poet will now focus on the human condition itself, and on the episodes of the myth bearing direct consequences on it, namely the theft of fire and the creation of the first woman.

---

[46] See Judet de La Combe and Larnoud, 1996:301, Strauss Clay, 2003:31-38 and Most, 2006:xxxvii-xliii.

[47] *WD* 47-48: 'But Zeus hid it [*sc.* βίον ('the resources of life') 42], angry in his heart because Prometheus, the crook-counselled, beguiled him'.

[48] Cf. Calabrese de Feo, 1995:108 n. 22 and Judet de La Combe, 1996:274.

The meanings of fire

In the *Theogony*, Prometheus' stealing is an act of deception - *'but the good son of Iapetus fooled* (ἐξαπάτησεν) *him*' (*Theog*. 565) – whereby men are given back what Zeus had removed from them. When describing the stolen fire, Hesiod emphasizes the qualitative gap between the '*far-seen shining of tireless fire*' (566) which Zeus has forbidden to men and the perishable flame that men have at their disposal (569): in brief, two different fires which symbolize the spatial and ontological distance between immortals and mortals[49]. In the *Works and Days*, instead, the theft of fire is clearly presented as a transgression in the interest of mortals and to the detriment of Zeus - '*but the good son of Iapetus stole* (ἔκλεψε) *fire back for human beings* (ἀνθρώποισι) *from the wise Zeus* (Διὸς παρὰ μητιόεντος)' (50-51). In other words, the theft of fire is the action that defines the relationship of Prometheus, Zeus and human beings to each other. Not only Prometheus but also men – Zeus says explicitly (56) – will be penalised for this offence. The son of Iapetus is bound in '*painful bonds*' (δεσμοῖς ἀργαλέοισι, *Theog*. 522) and Pandora is sent in the world of men, there to counterbalance fire and fill human life with '*painful maladies*' (νούσων τ᾽ ἀργαλέων, 92). In the *Theogony*, fire is important to men because without it they cannot sacrifice to the gods. In the *Works and Days*, the Promethean fire is inextricably linked to the βιός which Zeus has withdrawn from men, and represents a tool on which their survival depends[50].

In conclusion, the comparison between the fire of the *Theogony* and the fire of the *Works and Days* will help us informing the complex notion of fire later developed in the *Prometheus Bound*. The πῦρ πάντεχνον[51] of drama will be at once a human and a divine element, and the stealing of fire will accordingly acquire a twofold meaning. Among the gods, it is the action that arouses Zeus' wrath and leads to the binding of Prometheus: among men, it stands instead for the beginning of civilization, for the shift toward rational modes of living. This contrast, we shall see, is what makes Prometheus a tragic character.

Hope, or the ambiguity of human life

Even the creation of the first woman takes on a different meaning in the *Works and Days*[52]. A nameless work of art in the *Theogony*, where she symbolises the polarity between gods and men, the woman re-appears here as Pandora, embodiment of the paradoxical nature of human life. Her name underlines in fact the contrast between her deceptive outlook and her true nature: seemingly, she is the beautiful gift fabricated by all the Olympians (80-82), but in truth she will consume men's resources and waste the products of their toil. Her appearance among men institutes the essential ambiguity of their condition: from now on, men will

[49] Iribarren, 2017:72-73.
[50] Cf. Vernant, 1985:186-189, Saïd, 1985:118-119 and Strauss Clay, 2003:119.
[51] *Prom*. 7. Cf. 110-111.
[52] See Calabrese de Feo, 1995; Judet de La Combe and Lernould, 1996 and Iribarren, 2017 :77-81.

constantly '*embrace their own evils*' (58). With the opening of the jar (94-95), Pandora spreads all sorts of evils into the world. Only Ἐλπίς does not fly out, as Pandora closes the opening before it could escape, '*in accordance with the plans of Zeus*' (βουλῇσι Διὸς, 99). The meaning of Hope has puzzled generations of commentators, who have taken pain to understand whether Ἐλπίς represents a good or an evil[53]. The truth is that Hope is neither of them, but rather an illusion, itself representative of the ambiguity of human life.

As Prometheus is held back by '*inextricable bonds*' (ἀλυκτοπέδῃσι, *Theog*. 521)[54] and forced to a dire immobility, so is Hope confined within an '*unbreakable home*' (ἐν ἀρρήκτοισι δόμοισιν, 96) and provides men with the means to perpetuate their own inevitable penalty: that is, an existence constantly battered by the afflictions that Zeus has imposed on them through Pandora. Because of Prometheus, human beings now bear a miserable existence: Hope is for them the only way to avert the gaze from their '*countless sorrows*' (μυρία λυγρὰ, 100). It goes very differently in the *Prometheus Bound*, as I will show in more detail below. The notion of hope will appear there as the first of Prometheus' gifts to men (*Prom*. 250-251), as a φαρμακόν that enables them to achieve civilization by undertaking activities looking to ends beyond the limits of their mortality. Hesiod's Hope represents instead the permanent expectation of a future doomed to be negative, essential trait of an existence that defines itself in opposition the golden Age, when men '*lived like gods, with no sorrow in their spirit*' (112).

From myth to drama

There was a time, under the rule of Kronos, in which men could rely on the fruits that the earth would give them '*spontaneously*' (αὐτομάτη, *WD* 118). But now their means of living are kept hidden by the gods - κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι θεοὶ βίον ἀνθρώποισιν (*WD* 42), and their survival is constantly threatened by the maladies coming upon them '*of their own will*' (αὐτόμαται, 103). Such were the dire consequences of Prometheus' affection toward mortals. Although the reasons behind the god's φιλανθρωπία are never explained in the ancient treatments of the myth[55], it is the benevolent attitude toward human beings that leads Prometheus to transgress the orders of Zeus and question the limits imposed on human beings. The same is true for the *Prometheus Bound*, where Prometheus and Zeus come to conflict because of human beings, because the consideration shown to men leads Prometheus to encroach upon the divine privilege of fire. What changes, from epic to tragedy, is the consequence of this encroachment, both within the divine and the human world.

The Hesiodic fire, instrument of sacrifice and symbol of men's inherent imperfections, is in the *Prometheus Bound* a '*great resource*' (μέγας πόρος, 111) that paves the way for the achievements of the human mind. To human beings, the theft of fire represents the

[53] The main views are discussed by Saïd, 1985:122-130.
[54] Cf. *Prom*. 5-6: ὀχμάσαι…ἐν ἀρρήκτοις πέδαις, 155: δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις…πελάσας.
[55] Cf. West, 1966:306 n. *ad* 507-616 and Griffith, 1983:2.

foundational act of civilization. To the Olympians, though, Prometheus' action merely represents the encroachment of a divine privilege, a challenge to Zeus' apportionment of honours to the gods. This is precisely why the god is bound, '*so that he might be taught to love Zeus' tyranny* (τὴν Διὸς τυραννίδα) *and forget his philanthropic attitude* (φιλανθρώπου…τρόπου)' (10-11). Prometheus has in fact gone '*beyond justice*' (πέρα δίκης, 30) and his punishment assumes, in principle, the meaning of a just measure against a '*criminal*' (λεωργὸν, 5). And yet such punishment is '*a painful view for the eyes to stare at*' (θέαμα δυσθέατον ὄμμασιν, 69), it is a '*sight that brings shame on Zeus*' (Ζηνὶ δυσκλεὴς θέα, 243). Through the representation of Prometheus in chains, Hesiod could glorify the wisdom of Zeus. In the drama, this image conveys instead the concrete representation of a τυραννίς, of a normative system based on constriction and violence rather than wisdom and equality[56]. The Prometheus of drama is as distant from the one of Hesiod as it is the tyrant whom he challenges onstage. Adversary of Zeus, the Prometheus of the *Theogony* is a trickster legitimately punished; the one of drama is instead the victim of an unjustifiable harshness.

III. The tyrant and the sophist

It constantly emerges from the drama that Zeus, whom Hesiod portrayed as the dispenser of justice, is a despot '*who keeps justice by his side*' (παρ᾽ ἑαυτῷ/ τὸ δίκαιον ἔχων, 186-187). His agents are Κράτος - the power grounded in a legal authority that is here synonym with autocratic behaviour - and Βία - the brute force, material support of power, violence that needs not justify itself. We have seen that Zeus, in the *Theogony*, would be accompanied by Κράτος and Βία, but would also marry Μῆτις and Θέμις to incorporate the positive values the two goddesses embody. In the drama, such values stand on the side Prometheus, '*god with proud thoughts* (αἰπυμῆτα)[57]*, son of right-counselling Themis*' (18). Whatever asset was traditionally assigned to Zeus the tragedian attributes to his enemy through the symbolic re-elaboration of Hesiod. The opposition between the two gods takes then the form of an antithetical relationship between the complementary conditions of power. Zeus, the violent autocrat who governs without any form of shared authority (ἀθέτως κρατύνει, 150) stands against the son of Θέμις and the god of μῆτις: these are the two values on which the stability of the cosmos depends[58].

But the re-elaboration of the Hesiodic characters goes further, since Prometheus equates, later in the play, Themis with Gaia (209-210). Even though Themis was traditionally held to be Gaia's daughter[59], the identification between the two goddesses is not unattested in

---

[56] On the political overtones of the drama, cf. Cerri, 1975:15-22; Lloyd-Jones, 1971:84 ff.; Saïd, 1985:284-291 and Reinhardt, 1991:62-68.

[57] αἰπυμήτης is an hapax in Greek literature, and seems to emphasize not the contrast (thus Griffith, 1983:86 n. *ad* 18) but the strict correlation between Prometheus' pride and Themis' ὀρθοβουλία, cf. schol. 18e.

[58] The cosmological value of Θέμις is particularly prominent in Parmenides, who presents the perfection of Being as the result of a norm, a law (EGP V, 19, D8, 37): 'it is established (θέμις) that what is be not incomplete'.

[59] *Theog*. 135. Cf. Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 1-4.

ancient cultic practices[60]. No one before Aeschylus, however, seems to have made Prometheus their son, elevating him to the rank of Titan[61]. 'Promethean' and 'Titanic' are nowadays synonym of a spiritual disposition that was for the first time expressed in the *Prometheus Bound*. Every modern version of the myth, from Goethe and Shelley through Camus and Pavese, is directly derived from the character of drama: it was Aeschylus who transformed the Hesiodic impostor into an intellectual pioneer and a symbol of the struggle to assert one's self against the external forces hostile to him. It is left to understand the reason behind this metamorphosis, and its incidence on the dramatic action.

In between past and future

The traditional lineage attributed to Prometheus – his father was the Titan Iapetus, his mother Clymene (*Theog*. 506-510) - implied the disconnection of his vicissitudes from the preceding episodes of divine history. It is only with Aeschylus that Prometheus finds himself involved in the conflict between Zeus and the Titans. In fact, Zeus overpowers the Titans because Prometheus shares with him the '*subtle tricks*' (αἱμύλας δὲ μηχανὰς, 206) that the Titans, his brothers, had previously disdained despite Gaia's prophecy that the final victory will be determined by guile (δόλῳ, 213). It is at this point, once the Titans have decreed their own defeat, that Prometheus joins forces with Zeus by mutual agreement (ἑκόνθ᾽ ἑκόντι, 218) helping him to end the Titanomachy and seize universal power. It is still Prometheus, after the battle, who distribute the honours (γέρα, 439) among the gods, fulfilling the foundational act of Zeus' sovereignty. The Titan, in virtue of his kinship with Themis, takes over a fundamental political function that was traditionally carried out by Zeus himself. In the *Theogony*, it was in fact the Olympian who delimited, after the Titanomachy, the action of each god within specific boundaries (885), rewarding his allies ἡ θέμις ἐστίν (*Theog*. 396) - that is, in accordance with what '*is and has always been right, proper and common practice*'[62]. In the *Prometheus Bound*, instead, Zeus fully depends on Prometheus' spiritual assets. It is the Titan who helps the future ruler outwitting the Titans, it is him who integrates all the gods within the new-established cosmic order. Once the most valuable minister of Zeus, Prometheus is now the victim of his unjustifiable harshness – '*for there is a sickness inherent in tyranny, that of mistrusting friends*' (224-225).

But Prometheus, as the son of Gaia, also appropriates the prophetic knowledge of the goddess, which in Hesiod's poem had helped Zeus not only to overpower the Titans, but also to escape the danger coming from the marriage with Μῆτις (882-888). In this sense, there is a functional equivalence with Themis, who is Gaia's successor on the prophetic throne at Delphi, as we read in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (1-4). In Pindar's eighth *Isthmian Ode*, moreover, it is the '*wise-counselling*' (εὔβουλος, 31) Themis who warns Zeus (and Poseidon) not to

[60] See Groeneboom, 1928:133-134 n. *ad* 209-211; Cerri, 1975:24 and Saïd, 1985:190 n. 24.
[61] As first suggested by Reinhardt, 1991:58-59, 268-272. Cf. Saïd, 1985:189-192.
[62] Solmsen, 1949:35. Cf. *Theog*. 74,885.

marry Thetis, since she would bear '*a son mightier than his father*' (φέρτερον πατέρος, 32). The same dynamic is at work in the drama, where Prometheus announces that Zeus will fall because of a marriage from which a son '*mightier than his father*' (φέρτερον πατρός, 768) will be born[63]. At the beginning of the play, the tragedian seems to be following the Hesiodic pattern of an unequal contest between the invincible ruler and the petty rebel. Such is the meaning of Prometheus' conscious fault (ἑκὼν ἑκὼν ἥμαρτον, 266): his ἁμαρτία has no moral implications, but only indicates the offence toward a stronger adversary[64]. Toward the end of the drama, however, the outcome of the conflict seems no longer self-evident, for Prometheus holds a secret on which the stability of the tyrannical regime depends. His punishment gradually becomes an interrogation, a torture whereby Zeus seeks to extort this information from him. This is where the essence of the deadlock between Zeus and Prometheus lies, in a prophetical knowledge that gradually transforms the Titan's suffering into a symptom of Zeus' vulnerability:

> νέον νέοι κρατεῖτε, καὶ δοκεῖτε δὴ
> ναίειν ἀπενθῆ πέργαμ᾽. οὐκ ἐκ τῶνδ᾽ ἐγὼ
> δισσοὺς τυράννους ἐκπεσόντας ἠσθόμην;[65]

There is no secure power among the Olympians, but only illusory belief (δοκεῖτε). The image of the μητιέτα who knows exactly what is going to happen has made space to a ruler who will fall because of his '*empty-headed decisions*' (κενοφρόνων βουλευμάτων, 762). It is Prometheus who now possesses an insight into the future in virtue of his symbolic relationship with Themis-Gaia: oracular knowledge is the name of a titanic consciousness that cannot be subjugated with the mere force. Is the tyrant stronger than the Titan or vice versa? This is the question in which the very essence of the *Prometheus Bound* lies.

Zeus never appears onstage, but manifests itself through the voices of his devotes Power, Violence and, in the final episode of the drama, Hermes. His adversary, Prometheus, occupies instead the scenic foreground throughout the whole drama. The relationship between the two gods takes the form of an antithesis, of a scission that extends to every aspect of reality - visible and invisible, knowledge and force, Tartarus and Olympus. Only two mutually exclusive solutions are conceded: either Prometheus is released, or Zeus will lose his tyrannical throne[66]. When the drama ends, however, we are still left wondering what choice will Zeus make. Prometheus refuses to reveal his secret and is cast down to Tartarus, while Zeus' fall seems

---

[63] Chronological and textual evidence make Pindar a likely source for the dramatist. Cf. Conacher, 1980:15-16; Saïd, 1985:190 and Reinhardt, 1991:58-60. However, it is also possible that Aeschylus simply re-elaborated the mytheme developed by Hesiod in the episode of Μῆτις (so Bollack, 2006:88 nn. 10-11).

[64] See Saïd, 1978:96-107, 318 ff. Only when pronounced by his enemies Κράτος (9) or Hermes (ἐξαμαρτόντα, 945) does ἁμαρτία entail a moral fault, i.e. the transgression of the established order.

[65] *Prom*. 955-957. 'You just came to power but you think you live in a citadel free from grief. Have I not seen two rulers falling from it?'. Cf. *Prom*. 169-171, 755-756, 907 ff.

[66] *Prom*. 755-756: νῦν δ' οὐδέν ἐστι τέρμα μοι προκείμενον/μόχθων, πρὶν ἂν Ζεὺς ἐκπέσῃ τυραννίδος.

to be imminent. The cosmos itself plunges into a state of primordial chaos (1080-1093), disturbed by a conflict in which both contestants seem doomed to lose.

To be sure, the *Prometheia* will end with the re-conciliation between Zeus and Prometheus. Prometheus himself, in our drama, is sure that '*one day he* [*sc.* Zeus] *will reach a friendly agreement* (ἀρθμὸν…καὶ φιλότητα) *with me, as eager for it as I will be* (σπεύδων σπεύδοντί)'[67]. However large was the compositional freedom they enjoyed, dramatists had to develop their dramas within the limits imposed by the traditional version of the myth in question[68]. In the same way as in the *Theogony*, Prometheus will be released by Heracles and Zeus will keep on ruling over gods and men[69]. And yet this certainty, this Ἀνάγκη that drives gods and mortals toward an established end, only serves to emphasize the feeling of profound instability, political and cosmic at once, that lies at the core of the *Prometheus Bound*.

IV. Prometheus φιλάνθρωπος

In Hesiod's versions of the myth, a strict correlation was established between the punishment of Prometheus and the decadence of mankind. The god transgresses the orders of Zeus and human beings are the beneficiary of such transgression: both must then pay retribution to re-establish a balance within Zeus' order. If Zeus is called the '*father of men and gods*' (πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε)[70], this is because both are subjected to his will and define their existence in relation to it. The same principle, Δίκη, underpins in fact the divine and the human world, and whoever trespasses it will be punished[71]. Thanks to Prometheus men possess fire, but because of him they are also doomed to a life of never-ending hardship: '*therefore it is not possible to escape the mind of Zeus*' (*Theog*. 613; cf. *WD* 105) - this is what we learn from a myth in which Prometheus' punishment and men's decay are the complementary aspects of Zeus' universal justice. No such correlation is drawn by Aeschylus, who rather emphasizes the contrast between what Prometheus has done for human beings and what he has caused to himself by helping them[72].

---

[67] *Prom*. 190-192. Cf. for the expression ἀρθμὸν καὶ φιλότητα, Griffith, 1983:123, n. *ad* 191, 192 and Bollack, 1965-1969 (III:1):230.

[68] Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b 22-23.

[69] On Heracles' intervention, cf. *Prom*. 770-774 and 871-875. Structure and development of the *Prometheia* have been the object of a long discussion. Among the most significant contributions, see Herington, 1970:76-87, 123-126; Lloyd-Jones, 1971:97-102; Griffith, 1977:13-18; Conacher, 1980:98-119 and Reinhardt, 1991:78-83.

[70] *Theog*. 468, 542, 643, 838; *WD* 59.

[71] See Lloyd-Jones, 1971:32-36 and 2003:51-52; Allan, 2006 and Scapin, 2015:24 ff. Cf. *WD* 238-247, 280-285 and Plato, *Protagoras* 322d.

[72] *Prom*. 109-113, 267-268.

The gifts of Prometheus

If the divine world within which the Titan's suffering takes place is affected by Zeus' lawlessness, the human reality conveys instead the manifestation of the goodwill (εὔνοια, 446) that makes Prometheus so different from his opponent. No matter how harsh his punishment is or will be, his benefits to mankind are untouched. For human beings are now in possession of many technical and intellectual skills, and this they owe to Prometheus alone. Once responsible for men's decadence, the god is now the '*common benefactor*' (κοινὸν ὠφέλημα, 613) of mankind. Not only he has '*rescued mortals from going to Ades*' (235-236), he is also responsible for the awakening of their spirit:

> ἀκούσαθ᾽, ὡς σφας νηπίους ὄντας τὸ πρὶν
> ἔννους ἔθηκα καὶ φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους.[73]

At the beginning, i.e. before Prometheus' intervention, men were νήπιοι. Wanderers with no end, condemned to mental infancy (νηπίους) qua unable to understand the surrounding reality. They could not make sense of what they saw and heard, nor they knew anything about the basic skills of human civilization – farming, building, writing, all this was unknown to human beings, who rather lived like beasts, holed up in caves '*like tiny ants*' (452-453), ignoring every form of social organization. They were still relegated to the state of nature, and their life was not different from that of other living creatures. Inherently unjust toward each other, and doomed to disappear because of their feebleness[74]. Zeus, as soon as he sat on the Olympian throne, planned in fact to annihilate and substitute them with a whole new human race (231-233). Aeschylus alludes here to the Hesiodic myth of the five races, where it is said that the present human race is doomed to disappear at Zeus' hands unless they practice justice and work[75]. But the truth is that the tragedian has completely refashioned the traditional story.

Fall and rise of mankind

The legend of the five races was employed by Hesiod to emphasize the general decline of his own times, but also to explain why it is necessary for men to observe justice. Only by respecting the laws of Zeus, it is said, there might be a possibility for men to oppose decadence and escape a gloomy destiny. Unlike other animal species, men can stop harming each other

---

[73] *Prom*. 443-444: 'Listen [sc. to the miseries of mortals], how silly they were before I gave them intelligence and understanding'.

[74] In the Platonic myth of Prometheus, Zeus sends Hermes to bring αἰδώς and δίκη among men, so that they can live in '*civic communities*' (πόλεων κόσμοι, *Prot*. 322c) and protect themselves from the threats posed by other animals (*ibid*.).

[75] *WD* 180: 'But even this race of speech-endowed men Zeus will destroy (ὀλέσει)'.

because they partake of Zeus' δίκη, whence Hesiod's exhortation to Perses: '*but you listen to Justice* […]. *For Justice is not among them* [*sc.* the animals], *but to men Zeus gave Justice, which is by far the best*' (*WD* 275, 278-279). But the violent tyrant of the *Prometheus Bound*, we have seen, has nothing to do with Hesiod's dispenser of Justice. Neither does Prometheus' description of mankind takes the form of a moral reproach (μέμψιν οὔτιν᾽ ἀνθρώποις ἔχων, 445): rather, what the Titan emphasizes is the contrast between man as he once was and man as he has become after his own intervention. Hence, Zeus' plan to destroy mankind cannot be related to men's lawless conduct, as Hesiod did: it was a whim, a demonstration of ruthless and arbitrary power. For men were about to '*be smashed*' (διαρραισθέντας, 236), to be annihilated (ἀιστώσας, 232) like the mighty beings ruling before Zeus (151), victims of a violence that knows no boundaries[76]. Be that as it may, Prometheus, alone among the gods, dares to oppose Zeus' plan, and ensures men's survival. He then proceeds to give them hope and fire, the means whereby they can realise themselves under the tyranny of the new gods:

> ΠΡ. θνητούς γ᾽ ἔπαυσα μὴ προδέρκεσθαι μόρον.
> ΧΟ. τὸ ποῖον εὑρὼν τῆσδε φάρμακον νόσου;
> ΠΡ. τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατῴκισα.
> ΧΟ. μέγ᾽ ὠφέλημα τοῦτ᾽ ἐδωρήσω βροτοῖς.
> ΠΡ. πρὸς τοῖσδε μέντοι πῦρ ἐγώ σφιν ὤπασα
> ΧΟ. καὶ νῦν φλογωπὸν πῦρ ἔχουσ᾽ ἐφήμεροι;
> ΠΡ. ἀφ᾽ οὗ γε πολλὰς ἐκμαθήσονται τέχνας.[77]

Before manifesting the plenitude of his benefits to mankind (442-506), Prometheus does not boast but of two gifts, the blind hopes (τυφλὰς ἐλπίδας) and the flaming fire (φλογωπὸν πῦρ). Here lies, in the inclusion of hope among Prometheus' benefits to mankind, a crowning example of the way in which the tragedian has re-elaborated the Hesiodic material. For in the *Works and Days* Ἐλπίς was given to men by Zeus, through Pandora, in order for them to endure the illnesses (νοῦσοι, 102) befalling them '*in silence* (σιγῇ), *because Zeus took their voice* [*sc.* of the maladies] *away*' (104). Hope stands there at the very end of a process of decadence, it represents its culmination. First came Pandora, who marks the beginning of a precarious and ambiguous existence, then came Hope, defining trait of this condition. The tragedian, instead, ignores Pandora and the jar, and presents hope as a remedy (φάρμακον), as the first great benefit (μέγ᾽ ὠφέλημα) that Prometheus gives to mortals. A beneficent blindness, hope is what keeps men from anticipating death (προδέρκεσθαι μόρον) and despairing of their present life. The Hesiodic Ἐλπὶς, which was strictly associated to the punishment of men, is now translated into a spiritual benefit that coincides with the genesis of civilization. It even

---

[76] *Prom*. 736: 'Don't you think that the tyrant of the gods is equally violent to all (εἰς τὰ πάντα)?'.

[77] *Prom*. 248-254: '*Prom*. I stopped men from seeing their death beforehand. *Chor*. How did you put a remedy to that illness? *Prom*. Blind hopes I planted in them. *Chor*. That is a great benefit you gave to mortals. *Prom*. Besides, I gave them fire. *Chor*. So, these ephemeral creatures now possess flaming fire? *Prom*. Indeed, and from it they will learn many skills'.

precedes fire itself, for no technical nor intellectual progress could be achieved were men not able to ignore the limits inherent in their ephemeral condition. Without hope, the advantages of fire, '*teacher of every craft*' (διδάσκαλος τέχνης πάσης, 110-111) would soon be lost.

The Hesiodic legends on men's fall (the myth of Prometheus and that of the five races) are constantly evoked in the *Prometheus Bound*, and yet the drama presents a radically different image of the impact of Prometheus on human life. The intervention of the Titan coincides in fact with the moment in which men come up from their primitive condition into the state of civilization. In his speech on the arts (442-506), the god offers an astonishing list of all the τέχναι that he has taught to human beings: writing, astronomy, farming, sailing, medicine, divination. Prometheus' benefits to mankind extend to every field of human activity, but it cannot be a mere coincidence that his list culminates with metallurgy. This was, after all, the τέχνη to which Prometheus, along with Hephaestus and Athena, was traditionally associated in the Attic cult[78]. But there is another reason, which relates to the symbolic relationship between this specific activity and Hesiod's world-view as expressed in his two myths on men's decadence. Metallurgy signifies in fact the capacity to uncover '*what is hidden below the earth*' (ἔνερθε δὲ χθονὸς κεκρυμμένα, 500-501), that is, to find out what Hesiod's gods keep hidden away because of Prometheus' transgression (κρύψαντες, *WD* 42)[79]. Besides, metals symbolised, in the *Works and Days*, the successive stages of a moral and material decline, each of them inferior to the preceding one: gold, silver, bronze and finally iron. The defining aspect of the Promethean man is instead this, that each discovery is an improvement of what had been previously achieved:

> χαλκόν, σίδηρον, ἄργυρον χρυσόν τε, τίς
> φήσειεν ἂν πάροιθεν ἐξευρεῖν ἐμοῦ;[80]

Bronze, iron, silver and gold. The list is symmetrically opposed to the Hesiodic succession of metal races, except that bronze, and not iron, stands at its beginning. But even this detail can be put in relationship with the positive image of the human condition elaborated in the speech on the arts. Bronze, in fact, stands generally for the ability to transform a given material into an artefact: it is somehow representative of τέχνη itself, which is why it must precede iron. What bronze embodies is the capacity to apply one's intelligence to gain mastery over the surrounding reality: this is the basis of civilization, this is what enables men to constantly improve their technical and cognitive faculties.

---

[78] See Cerri, 1975:48-49; Griffith, 1983:85 n. *ad* 14; Vernant, 1985:263-265 and Reinhardt, 1991:60-62.

[79] Even the fact that metallurgy is preceded by sacrifice (496-499) can be understood as a reversal of the *Theogony*. Prometheus' sacrifice trick at Mekone (535 ff., see above) caused the ontological differentiation between gods and men, while here the institution of sacrifice is a gift: it enables men to establish a contact with the gods *despite* their ontological distance. Cf. Plato's *Protagoras*, 322a: ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας.

[80] *Prom*. 500-503: 'bronze, iron, silver and gold, who would claim to have discovered them before me?'.

Old questions, new answers

In this chapter, we have observed a process of 'vertical anchoring', whereby a familiar heritage of the past, the Hesiodic myths of Prometheus, is used as a model toward the development of an innovative dramatic project[81]. But at this point, once this heritage has been discussed and related to the *Prometheus Bound*, a further question arises, which touches upon Aeschylus' approach to the traditional material. It is true that Aeschylus engages constantly with the issues raised by the *Theogony* (the relationship between Prometheus and Zeus' power) and the *Works and Days* (the human condition), but his intellectual concerns are foreign to the spirit of Hesiod's poems. What are, then, the notions and critical tools that enabled the tragedian to re-elaborate so radically the traditional myths? The answer lies in his complex engagement with the intellectual movements of fifth century Greece, with those notions, more specifically, that we now group under the label of 'pre-Socratic philosophy'. It is my aim to bring this engagement to light, so to reveal a fundamental dimension of the text that can only be defined as a critical response to the wider cultural context in which the *Prometheus Bound* took shape.

[81] See Sluiter, 2017:21 ff.

Knowledge and civilisation

The *Prometheus Bound* between Hesiod and the pre-Socratics

> *'Considera un poco se la tua sentenza sul genere umano fosse più vera acconciandola in questa forma: cioè dicendo che esso è veramente sommo tra i generi, come tu pensi; ma sommo nell'imperfezione piuttosto che nella perfezione.'*
>
> Leopardi, *La Scommessa di Prometeo*

The long speech on human civilization that occupies the central part of the drama (442-506) is certainly one of the most striking and original features of the *Prometheus Bound*. Such originality has often been taken as the clearest sign that Aeschylus could by no means be the author of the drama[82]. Since a systematic speculation on human civilization only started in the second half of the fifth century, the argument goes, the discourse elaborated by Prometheus must be the product of a late fifth century author more familiar than Aeschylus could possibly be with the Sophists' ideas on progress[83]. For others, on the contrary, '*the speech is decidedly archaic and pretty evidently pre-sophistic*'[84]. The key question, when debating this issue, is the following: can we reduce the character of Prometheus to a merely symbolic function, and thus attribute to the tragedian a rationalistic approach to traditional myth? In other words, can we read the speech on the arts as an allegorical hymn to human intelligence?

I. Is Prometheus a sophist?

The assumption that the central section of the drama elaborates a purely symbolical representation of human intelligence mainly rests on texts other than the *Prometheus Bound*. First of all, on the Prometheus' myth narrated in Plato's *Protagoras*, which seems to preserve ideas elaborated by Protagoras himself (fl. ca. 440 BCE)[85] in a lost treatise *On the State of Things in the Beginning* (Περὶ τῆς ἐν ἀρχῇ καταστάσεως)[86]. Although it is impossible to determine to what extent the contents of Plato's dialogue reflect those of Protagoras' treatise, it can be safely assumed that this thinker expressed, somewhere in the mid fifth century, specific ideas on human progress and civilization[87]. Griffith, an enthusiast advocate of the non-Aeschylean authorship of the *Prometheus*, claims that the tragic poet has been

[82] For an overview on this issue, see Conacher, 1980:82-97 and Saïd, 1985:138-154.
[83] Griffith, 1977:217-221. See also West, 1979:147.
[84] Dodds, 1973a:5. See also Reinhardt, 1991:72; Saïd, 1985:146-152 and Judet de La Combe, 2010:255 n. 31.
[85] For the chronology of the author, see the introduction to Protagoras' fragments in EGP VIII, 31.
[86] EGP VIII, 31, D1.
[87] See Dodds, 1973a:9, Khan, 1981:98 n.11 and Morgan, 2009:132-154.

influenced by this or a similar account on human progress[88], and thus places the drama in the second part of the fifth century. His idea is that the tragedian follows Protagoras in presenting the discourse on human civilization as a display speech (ἐπίδειξις)[89] elaborated in the form of a μύθος whose defining features – the role of fire and Prometheus – are consciously used as a symbolical representation of human intelligence. The symbolical interpretation of the *Prometheus Bound* has also been justified by later usages of the Prometheus' myth, in which the symbolism becomes explicit. Among the *scholia vetera* on the drama, a line has been preserved from a comedy by the poet Plato (5th-4th century) entitled, eloquently enough, *The Sophists*, where it is said that '*Prometheus is in fact the human mind*'[90]. Fire, as another ancient commentator has it, would then signify the 'knowledge acquirable through activity'[91]. It is the same allegorical procedures which Griffith attributes to the author of the *Prometheus Bound*, for whom Prometheus would represent an icon of the new rationalistic culture promoted by the Sophists. The fact that the god is addressed twice as σοφιστής (62, 944) in a derogatory sense – as attested, *inter alia*, in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (331, 1111) - has been taken as a further proof of the influence exerted on the dramatist by the philosophical movements of late fifth century Greece[92]. None of these claims, however, stand up to scrutiny. I will briefly resume here the reasons why this is so.

The speech on the arts: interpretative issues

Let us start by saying that the word σοφιστής does carry, in the *Prometheus Bound*, a pejorative sense (i.e. 'quibbler', 'cheat'). It is then legitimate to consider Prometheus '*the first sophist of Greek literature*'[93], provided we do not attach to this word the connotations it will take up from Plato onwards[94]. The word, in fact, carries a negative overtone because in both instances it is pronounced by the opponents of Prometheus (at 62 by Kratos, at 944 by Hermes), and not because it relates to the historical activity of the thinkers known as 'Sophists': σοφιστής points to the devious cunning attributed by Zeus' agents to Prometheus. He is called 'sophist' not only because he has tricked Zeus, but also because he knows a prophecy that makes the tyrant vulnerable: σοφίσματα are in fact the arts that Prometheus gives to men against Zeus' will[95], σόφισμα is the secret that will one day cause the tyrant to fall[96].

---

[88] Griffith, 1983:4.
[89] See *ibid*.:164 n. *ad* 443-444. Cf. Plato, *Protagoras* 320 c: ἐπιδείξω.
[90] Schol. 120d: Προμηθεὺς γάρ ἐστιν ἀνθρώποις ὁ νοῦς.
[91] Schol. 120c: ἡ γνῶσις διὰ τό δραστήριον.
[92] Griffith, 1983: n. *ad* 62. Cf. also Griffith, 1977:221.
[93] Saïd, 1985:12.
[94] See Groeneboom, 1928:97 n. *ad* 61-62; Cerri, 1975:93 and Adàn, 1999:12-13.
[95] *Prom*. 459, 470.
[96] *Prom*. 1011.

As to the relationship between the *Prometheus Bound* and Plato's *Protagoras*, it has been shown that the distance between the two texts is much more significant than the alleged proximity between them. First, because the tragedian betrays no interests in marking different stages of civilization, as it is instead the case in the *Protagoras* and in other accounts of human progress elaborated in the second half of the fifth century[97]. Only two moments are posited in the drama, a 'before' and an 'after': that is, a '*beginning*' (πρῶτα, 447) going on '*until*' (ἔστε, 457) Prometheus intervened. The speech on the art is, from this point of view, much closer to Hesiod than to the late fifth century discourses. For the intervention of the Titan does not imply a gradual but a sudden change, which is negative in Hesiod, but positive in the *Prometheus Bound*.

Different from 'Protagoras' is also the role assigned to Prometheus himself. In Plato's dialogue, the god acts as an intermediary: he provides men with the resources necessary to their survival, and then disappears. At this point man takes over, and builds civilization through his own rational efforts (321e-322a). The Prometheus of drama, instead, is a πρῶτος εὑρετής, a culture-god who identifies himself with the totality of the arts:

> πᾶσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως.[98]

The dramatist presents as the gifts of Prometheus what Protagoras will present as the gradual achievements of civilized life. The god of the play, like in the Platonic myth, saves mortals and gives them reason (i.e. νοῦς and φρήν, 444), but then also shows[99], reveals[100] and defines[101] every practical application of such reason. An explicit expression of men's own rational effort is nowhere to be found in the drama. Even the claim that men will learn by themselves many arts from fire (254) is an isolated episode within a play in which men systematically appear as the passive recipients of divine actions. After all, the invention that Prometheus describes at greatest length is divination (μαντικὴ, 484-495), the art that more than any other goes beyond the realm of human understanding and power[102]. Divination is not only related to Prometheus' prophetical knowledge, whereby the god blackmails Zeus and teaches men how to know '*what will really happen*' (ἃ χρὴ ὕπαρ γενέσθαι, 485-485). It is also a prophecy that leads Inachus to expel the daughter Io from his house, so to keep his entire family from being destroyed by Zeus' thunder (669-673). What the prophecy emphasizes is, indeed, the human helplessness in front of the divine[103]. In sum, the spirit of the play is quite far from the anthropological views reflected in Plato's *Protagoras* (or, for

---

[97] See Dodds, 1973a:4-10, Saïd, 1985:140-150 and Reinhardt, 1991:71. In the *Protagoras*, the different stages of civilization are signalled by different temporal adverbs: ἐπειδὴ (322 a), πρῶτον (322 a), ἔπειτα (322 a), etc.

[98] *Prom*. 506: 'All the skills of mortals come from Prometheus'.

[99] ἔδειξα 458, 482; ἐγνώρισα 487; ἐξωμμάτωσα, 499.

[100] εὑρίσκειν/ἐξευρίσκειν 460, 468, 469, 475, 503.

[101] ἐστοίχισα, 484; διώρισα; 489.

[102] Cf. Griffith, 1983:173-174 n. *ad* 484-490.

[103] *Prom*. 671-672: ἄκουσαν ἄκων, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπηνάγκαζέ νιν/Διὸς χαλινὸς πρὸς βίαν πράσσειν τάδε.

instance, in the fragments of Archelaus and Democritus[104]) where the emphasis is put on men's intellectual and technical faculties[105].

In fact, we cannot expect to find in the *Prometheus Bound* the clear line between sacred and secular, between divine and human, that is drawn instead in Plato's dialogue. In Greek tragedy, and most markedly in our tragedy, gods and men are part of the same history and constantly interact with each other. Prometheus is bound '*because of his excessive love for mortals*' (διὰ τὴν λίαν φιλότητα βροτῶν, 123), and it is a mortal who will eventually release him: Heracles, who descends from the lineage issued by the union between the mortal Io and Zeus. In this interaction lies the very essence of drama, in the paradoxical situations that the encounter between gods and men produces[106]. It remains, however, that the human beings of the *Prometheus Bound* are never agents, but only instruments whereby Prometheus and Zeus realize their individuality by opposing themselves to each other. The truth, in fact, is that a scission has been declared between the two gods, and this scission becomes universal: it extends into the human reality and gives it a specific shape. Once more, the scheme adopted in our drama is closer to Hesiod than to the Sophists.

There also lies a remarkable distance between the παντέχνου πυρὸς (7) of drama and the τὴν ἔντεχνον σοφίαν σὺν πυρί (321d) of the *Protagoras*. Although fire stands in both works in a symbolic relationship to the τέχναι, the distinction between the materiality of fire and the usage of fire is absent in the first case, but carefully drawn in the latter. The relationship between fire and τέχνη in our drama is not metaphorical (as it is for Plato, where fire clearly stands for something else) but metonymic, in that the instrument overlaps with the arts deriving from it: this type of link between art and instrument, between cause and effect, constitutes a defining trait of the archaic or at least pre-sophistic thought[107]. Moreover, we need not forget that fire, which later authors will identify with human reason, is in our drama a prerogative of the gods, more specifically of Hephaestus[108]. The '*flaming fire*' (φλογωπὸν πῦρ, 253) that Prometheus gives to men stands for a know-how that is essentially divine: man cannot master but with the help of a god. φλογωπὰ σήματα are also the oracular signs of a divine reality, of a reality, in other words, that only the Titan's interpretation can make manifest. All this is to say that Prometheus' speech on the arts cannot be taken as a symbolical representation of human intelligence, because this would forge poetical and intellectual specificities that cannot belong to the author of our play.

---

[104] Cf. Khan, 1981.

[105] Let us also remember that the τέλος of Protagoras' story is the establishment of political life, while our drama explores the consequences of the absence of any form of shared legality. If we assume that the myth narrated in the *Protagoras* is to some extent compliant with the *Prometheus Bound*, it will be for Zeus – once the re-conciliation with Prometheus is achieved - to endow mankind with αἰδώς and δίκη: that is, with the πολιτικὴ τέχνη. See above, n. 74. Cf. also Lloyd-Jones, 1971:102 and Conacher, 1980:92.

[106] Cf. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1972-1986 (II):101-105 and Judet de La Combe, 2010:41-45.

[107] See Saïd, 1985:146-147.

[108] See *Prom*. 7, 30, 252-253.

Philosophy onstage

Protagoras himself, in the Platonic dialogue, draws an equivalence between λόγος and μῦθος (320c) (i.e. between myth and philosophy), inviting his interlocutors to translate in abstract terms the fictional representation of human intelligence. No trace of such distinction can be found in the *Prometheus Bound*, where 'abstract' and 'fictional' are the indivisible aspects of the same dramatic whole. Contrasting significances interlock, contradict and reinforce each other in the drama, and this, in the end, defeats the allegorical intention. Here lies the essential difference between the discourse of Protagoras and the play. The first elaborates, through the figurative language of myth, an objective theory on civilization; the latter explores instead the relationship between theory and the individuals who take part in its dramatic representation. A purely symbolical interpretation of Prometheus' inventions would then keep us from grasping the tension, inherent in tragedy, between the theoretical content, which aims at generalizing, and the characters who appropriate this content to narrate their own story. Prometheus, to whom we owe the elaboration of the discourse on the arts, is only secondarily concerned with the nature of human civilization. His discourse relates in fact to a gone past (ἀκούσατε, 443), and helps shedding a light on the events unfolding now, onstage. The speech on the arts, in other words, provides the Titan with a medium to dramatize his own situation, the aporia provoked by his act of heroism:

> τοιαῦτα μηχανήματ᾽ ἐξευρὼν τάλας
> βροτοῖσιν αὐτὸς οὐκ ἔχω σόφισμ᾽ ὅτῳ
> τῆς νῦν παρούσης πημονῆς ἀπαλλαγῶ.[109]

What emerges from Prometheus' speech on civilization is not a specific picture of human reality, but the paradox implied by this reality, which in the end is the paradox of Prometheus himself. The god who has given such great devices (τοιαῦτα μηχανήματα) to human beings ignores the mean (σόφισμα) whereby he could escape his bonds. He is a sick doctor (472-475), an imprisoned liberator who pays the gift of thought to human beings (φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους, 444) with the loss of his own wits (ἀποσφαλεὶς φρενῶν, 472). Prometheus' affirmation of the power of the arts, in sum, overlaps and clashes with the painful representation of their inherent weakness. In this way, the reflection on human civilization retains its significance while being at the same time questioned by the individual who elaborates this reflection. The abstract notion is in fact part of the heterogeneous cultural material adjusted by the playwright to his own needs of representation. When brought onstage, it becomes an expressive tool. Once this defining feature of Greek drama is recognized, it becomes clear that the task of the interpreter is not to isolate the philosophical concept, but rather to investigate its tragic effects. For there is always a specific

[109] *Prom*. 469-471:' Despite having invented such contrivances for mortals, I myself am wretched, knowing no trick to escape my present agony'.

dramatic context in which the philosophical notion is used, and only within this context its meaning can be fully grasped.

To be sure, it was the author of the *Prometheus Bound* who paved the way for a purely symbolical elaboration of the myth, to the extent that he was the first to credit Prometheus with all the arts of civilization and suggest a functional equivalence between the god (506) and the rational use of fire (254). The speech of Prometheus undoubtedly betrays the engagement with contemporary philosophical ideas, but also reveals an intellectual and artistic attitude that has little in common with the late fifth 7century rationalistic odes to human genius. Rather, it anticipates the Sophists, providing them with a poetical model for their explicit theories on human culture[110].

This means we must look elsewhere for the philosophical sources of our drama. With very few exceptions[111], no attempt has been done to compare the speech on the arts with the material of the pre-Socratics, of which our drama bears an unquestionable mark, conceptual and literary at once. The next pages will be devoted to proving the validity of this claim.

II. Prometheus among the Ionians

Xenophanes (570/560 – 480/470 BCE), the poet-philosopher from Colophon, was the first to articulate in most clear terms the idea of human progress:

> οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ' ὑπέδειξαν,
> ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον.[112]

These verses, based on the opposition between divine disclosures (ὑπέδειξαν) and human inquiry (ζητοῦντες), have long been regarded as a source for Prometheus' speech on the arts[113]: let us consider in more detail the relationship between the two texts.

Myth and Time

One aspect of the continuity between the drama and Xenophanes' fragment should be highlighted at first, namely that both represent an answer to Hesiod's claim that '*the gods keep the resources of life hidden away from men*' (*WD* 42). For the author of the *Works and Days*, as we have seen above, the human condition is the result of a material and moral decline that

[110] Cf. Capizzi, 1982:125 and Judet de La Combe, 2010:255 n.31.
[111] Adàn, 1999 and Irby-Massie, 2008:138-143. Cf. above, n. 27.
[112] EGP III, 8, D53:'Indeed not from the start did the gods indicate all things to mortals, but as they search in time they find something better'.
[113] Dodds, 1973a:4-6 and Kahn, 1981:103-104. For the influence of Xenophanes' monotheism on some of Aeschylus' descriptions of Zeus, cf. Rösler, 1970:14-15 and, more recently, Scapin, 2015:144 ff.

has in the myth of Prometheus and in that of the five races its complementary representations. But his pessimistic picture of the human condition cannot be any longer reconciled with the results yielded by contemporary scientific inquiries, which prove that man does possess the tools to improve his cognitive faculties and consequently his living conditions. Both the tragedian and Xenophanes recognize in fact that men are rising and not falling, that they will discover something better (ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον) and learn many arts (ἐκμαθήσονται, *Prom.* 254). In this way, two forms of public wisdom – philosophy and tragedy – converge, both embodying that critical attitude toward mythology that is a fundamental trait of the early philosophical discussions. What brings the playwright close to Xenophanes, in fact, is not just the content of his drama (i.e. a specific view on civilization), but also the procedure whereby the language of myth is retained but at the same time subjected to a critique that radically changes its original significance[114]. There is obviously a significant difference in tone and scope between Xenophanes' re-elaboration of epic language and images - which aimed at substituting Homer's and Hesiod's authoritative views with his own - and Aeschylus' re-interpretation of the legend of Prometheus, which aimed at producing a powerful tragedy. It is undeniable, nevertheless, that the two authors, as also Parmenides and Empedocles, establish the same relationship with traditional mythology: on the one hand, they explicitly challenge its language and contents with the tools provided by the ongoing philosophical inquiries; on the other, they adopt that very language to anchor their artistic and conceptual innovations.

It is significant, in this sense, that the first invention mentioned by Prometheus is astronomy, the capacity to discern the rising and setting of the stars (ἀντολὰς…ἄστρων…δύσεις, 457-458), to understand the logic underlying their cyclical alternation. The observation of the sky was not just a major trend in Ionian science, but in a broader sense it was one of the founding disciplines of the intellectual tradition that from Ionia - that is, from the researches περὶ φύσεως of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes – gradually spread out into the whole of Greece and questioned the world-views elaborated by the archaic poets[115]. But the tragedian is also describing, by alluding to the cyclical alternation of night and day, what Xenophanes expresses in a single word: χρόνῳ, or the temporal frame within which men's existence unfolds. A whole new conception of human history lies in this compositional gesture, which is based on the positive causal relationship between the regular flow of time and the progressive accumulation of scientific knowledge. By the time when the drama was shaped, the idea of a human history developing linearly had in fact come to coexist with the notion of cyclicity, which figures prominently in the pre-Socratic cosmologies. Anaximander conceived the order of nature as presided over by the immutable ordinance of Time - κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν[116]. In Empedocles' doctrine, similarly, the formula περιπλομένοιο χρόνοιο ('within the circle of time') indicates the

[114] Cf. Mourelatos, 1970:39-41; Cerri, 1999:85-110; Morgan, 2000:46-88; Most, 2007 and Scapin, 2015:15-34.
[115] See Adàn, 1999:13 n. 14; Cerri, 1999:26-32 and Lesher, 2006:225-228. Xenophanes (D8-10) and Heraclitus (D21-D25a) attacked vehemently Homer and Hesiod.
[116] EGP II, 6, D6. See Kahn, 1960:183-193.

eternal cycle of Love and Strife, whose alternation is responsible for the life and death of all mortal beings[117]. The notion of linear temporality that gradually established itself by the side of the cyclical one is rooted in the epistemological assumptions elaborated by such thinkers as Xenophanes, who believed that the natural world lays open to human discovery and will reveal over time (χρόνῳ) its most hidden secrets. Among the sayings attributed by Diogenes Laertius to Thales, the legendary founder of the Ionian intellectual tradition, there is one which runs thus:

> σοφώτατον χρόνος· ἀνευρίσκει γὰρ πάντα.[118]

This sentence does not actually report Thales' *ipsissima verba*, but rather echoes some kind of proverb, a τόπος that we see reappearing in many different literary situations[119]. Prometheus himself, in our drama, answers Hermes with similar words:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἐκδιδάσκει πάνθ᾽ ὁ γηράσκων χρόνος.[120]

In fact, the growing old (γηράσκων) of time refers here to the timeframe of divine history, and to the lesson that Zeus will learn unless Prometheus is freed: the lesson of divine punishment. But this increasing age is also that of man himself, ultimately acquiring some knowledge (ἐκδιδάσκει) he previously lacked. In the *Prometheus Bound*, gods and men are submitted to the same temporal laws, whence the overlap between the time of the cosmos and the temporal frame of human existence. But this need not overshadow the tension, emerging from our drama, between two concurring notions of temporality: on the one hand the cyclical time of Nature (the regular alternation of night and days and the seasons; *Prom*. 454-458), on the other the linear notion of human history, essential feature of an epistemological model based on the progressive acquisition of knowledge.

Such verbs as finding (εὑρίσκειν), searching (ζητεῖν), learning (μανθάνειν) and conjecturing'(τεκμαίρεσθαι), which are normally foreign to the poetic diction but common in philosophical texts from the sixth century onwards, are recurrent in the *Prometheus Bound*: this constitutes a further proof that the tragedian has re-elaborated the views on cultural evolution elaborated in Ionia and circulating in continental Greece during his times[121]. At the origin of such views lies the awareness that the accumulation of knowledge gained through rational inquiry and direct observation (ἱστορίη) is the *conditio* for any progress to

---

[117] EGP V, 22, D73, 260. Cf. D94, 2.

[118] EGP II, 5, P17c:'Time is the wisest thing, for it brings everything to light'.

[119] For some examples, see Groeneboom, 1928:270 n. *ad* 981-985, Kahn, 1960:170 n. 4 and Romilly, 1968:33-58. Cf. also EGP II, 3, T10-13.

[120] *Prom*. 982:'But time, as it grows old, teaches everything'.

[121] See Herington, 1970:96-97 and Khan, 1981:103-105. On the scientific vocabulary of the *Prometheus Bound*, see also Griffith, 1977:217-221 and Saïd, 1985:83-86.

take place. Prometheus, whom Hesiod held responsible for men's fall, is now an advocate of the Ionian intellectual revolution.

The aim of knowledge

What we do not find in the *Prometheus Bound*, on the other hand, is Xenophanes' explicit and precise distinction between the divine and the human sphere. The poet-philosopher rejected the notion of divine revelation (οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ' ὑπέδειξαν), as well as the idea that gods communicate with men through a variety of signs[122]: divination was for him among the religious practices which keep mortals from achieving a rational perception of reality[123]. Whatever men discover, Xenophanes claimed, must be the result of their own investigation of the natural world. In the drama, each of these discoveries, including divination, is instead presented as a gift of Prometheus. This choice is surely due to a specific artistic purpose, since the playwright re-elaborated certain ideas on civilization, as seen above, to define the dramatic character of Prometheus and his relationship with both men and Zeus. But the difference between the two authors does not only depend on the structural and poetic specificities of their respective works. Such difference, I argue, is mainly epistemological. It is in fact clear that the author of the *Prometheus Bound* is tackling, with the medium of his own dramatic language, a question laying at the heart of pre-Socratic inquiries: what is the object of knowledge? And how can it be attained? It is equally clear, as we shall see, that the ideas emerging from the play draw the dramatist much closer to Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles than to Xenophanes.

III. The solitude of the philosopher

Unlike later pre-Socratics, who believed they had discerned the ultimate principle of the physical world, Xenophanes denied the possibility for man to know the transcendent. He stood firm in his empiricism, claiming that whatever lies beyond the range of the senses cannot be made the object of objective knowledge (τὸ σαφὲς). For experience alone is reliable. Anything else is and will always be a mere conjecture (δόκος), a speculation with no proven validity[124]. Heraclitus harshly criticized this view, and devaluated the realm of experience to the advantage of the supernatural dimension that encloses and governs it[125]. To the πολυμαθίη of the empiricists the Ephesian opposed the power of νοῦς, assigning the negative pole of the opposition ignorance/knowledge to the realm of physical beings. Opinion is for him what rules over the sensible world. Parmenides radicalized this opposition,

[122] See Lesher, 1992:154-155.
[123] EGP III, 8, D15a-b. Cf. D39.
[124] EGP III, 8, D49. See Fränkel, 1974:127-131 and Lesher, 1992:155-169.
[125] EGP III, 9, D20.

elaborating an ontological differentiation between the objective reality of Being and the transitory world of coming-to-be, which is never equal to itself and therefore does not exist. Understanding the cosmic order depends on κρίσις, on a rational discrimination between what is and what is not - ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν[126]. With these two thinkers, a different philosophical approach emerges, which differentiates itself from Ionian ἱστορίη and aims at grasping the invisible principle immanent in the visible order of things[127]. For Heraclitus, the sensible world cannot reveal τὸ σαφὲς, but only signs of a transcendent reality. Philosophy must then involve the understanding of these signs. Just like an oracle, that the philosopher must interpret to bridge the gap between the here and the beyond:

> ὁ ἄναξ οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.[128]

The oracular word (σημαίνει), which Xenophanes considered the hallmark of irrational religious practices, is transformed by Heraclitus into the utterance of an intelligible power – the λόγος - that manifests itself in the processes of the natural world. Similarly, Parmenides put forth his doctrine as the revelation of a goddess who leads his pupil through the rational interpretation of σήματα, the clues that bring '*the man who knows*' (εἰδότα φῶτα·, D1, 3) beyond the realm of human existence and put him in front of Being[129]. Mystical initiation and rational intuition: these are to some extent the equivalent paths toward a truth that is at once human and divine, individual and universal[130].

These are, as well, the paths of knowledge merging in the personality of Prometheus, divine being who stands in between the prophet who knows all things in advance (πάντα προυξεπίσταμαι, 101) and the wise who recognizes through rational intuition (γιγνώσκοντα, 104) the cosmic intentionality by which the whole of reality is governed:

> τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔστ᾽ ἀδήριτον σθένος.[131]

Far from resembling an empiricist like Xenophanes or a σοφιστής *à la* Protagoras, the enchained god incarnates the defining traits of the pre-Socratic intellectual, of the σοφός who knows, he alone, the unescapable (α-διδράσκω) force that binds the individual to the totality of things[132]. The speech on the arts, which has erroneously been regarded as an exaltation of human intelligence, sheds light on a type of knowledge, embodied by

---

[126] See EGP V, 19, D8, 20 ff.

[127] Cf. Scapin, 2015:137-139 n.452.

[128] EGP III, 9, D41:'The lord whose oracle is in Delphi does not say nor hides, but gives signs'.

[129] Cf. EGP, V, 19, D8, 7-8. Parmenides' σήματα have raised different interpretations. For Coxon (2009:314-317) they represent the predicates of Being. For Cerri (1999:214,219; cf. Mourelatos, 1970:21,25 n.40), with whom my reading agrees, σήματα are instead the compelling argumentations about the nature of Being.

[130] Cf. Vlastos, 1952:97 ff.

[131] *Prom*. 105:'The force of Necessity is unescapable'.

[132] Cf. Adàn, 1999:16-18. Cf. *Prom*. 936: οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὴν Ἀδράστειαν σοφοί.

Prometheus himself, that clearly transcends the limitations of human understanding. The gift of different theoretical and practical abilities (e.g. astronomy, mathematics, farming, cavalry, sailing, medicine) is in fact followed by the art of divination (484-495), art that Prometheus himself possesses qua son of Themis-Gaia. It is the Titan who teaches to men how to communicate with the divine and observe it in its real essence:

> […] φλογωπὰ σήματα
> ἐξωμμάτωσα πρόσθεν ὄντ᾽ ἐπάργεμα.[133]

The traditional practice of divination is here presented as an act of spiritual cognition (ἐξωμμάτωσα) whereby what is obscure (ἐπάργεμα) becomes manifest. The art of interpreting σήματα enables in fact to distinguish (ἔκρινα, 485) and discriminate (διώρισα, 489) what is real from what is not, what will happen from what will not. A deductive science, it implies knowledge of the future through the present and the past, of the invisible through the visible. In this sense, it forms a diptych with medicine, an art which Prometheus places right before divination (479-483)[134]. The cognitive process implied by divination and medicine is enacted in the dialogue between Io and Prometheus, between the suffering human being and the foresighted doctor. The son of Themis-Gaia narrates to Io her past and future wanderings, proving her (σημεῖά σοι τάδ᾽ ἐστὶ, 842) that his φρήν, his intellect '*sees more than what is manifest*' (δέρκεται πλέον τι τοῦ πεφασμένου, 843). But Prometheus' prophecy is also a medical prognosis, whereby Io can know in advance the afflictions awaiting her. The language of the gods, which before was '*darkly obscure*' (ἀσήμους δυσκρίτως, 662), finally acquires its significance and thus becomes a remedy against the sickness of human existence:

> λέγ᾽, ἐκδίδασκε· τοῖς νοσοῦσί τοι γλυκὺ
> τὸ λοιπὸν ἄλγος προυξεπίστασθαι τορῶς.[135]

In the encounter with the divine, the human condition is surpassed, and the possibility is given to the individual to partake, despite his mortality, of a supernatural truth about what is unknown to the common man. Knowledge, or the power to attain it, is in fact the remedy against the maladies inherent in human existence[136].

---

[133] *Prom*. 499-500:'I opened their eyes to the signs of flame, which before were obscure'.

[134] Cf. EGP VI, 29, T14 (= Hippocrates, *Regimen* I, 12):'Such is divination: it recognizes the invisible in the visible, and the visible in the invisible, and what will be in what is'. See also Saïd, 1985:192-195.

[135] *Prom*. 698-699:'Speak, teach me everything! For it is pleasant, for the sick ones, to have a clear knowledge of the affliction that remains to be suffered'.

[136] An interesting parallel is the thaumaturgical doctrine of Empedocles, as presented in EGP V, 22, D43, 1-2: 'The remedies for evils (φάρμακα…κακῶν), as many as there are, and cure against old age, these you will learn, since for you alone I will accomplish all this'. Cf. *Prom*. 476-482, and Irby-Massie, 2008:140-141.

IV. Thought and sensations

The very first gifts of Prometheus to mankind are not practical skills, but νοῦς and φρήν (ἔννους ἔθηκα καὶ φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους, 444), the cognitive faculties that enable men to understand the surrounding world. The same terms had already been brought together by Heraclitus (*fl*. 510-490 BC)[137] a few decades before the dramatist, to show the lack of understanding - τίς αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν;[138] - of those who perpetuate ignorance by taking the poets (i.e. Homer and Hesiod) and the mass as their leaders. Neither the tragedian nor Heraclitus seem to be drawing a sharp semantic distinction between the two terms[139]. The function of the juxtaposition of νοῦς and φρήν is for both mainly emphatic. In Heraclitus' fragment it stresses what men lack, in the *Prometheus Bound* what they possess thanks to Prometheus, namely the faculty of thought, the fundamental instrument to grasp the essence of things. The Titan himself describes his intervention as producing a shift from mental infancy (νηπίους, 443) to rational thinking (φρονεῖν/νοεῖν)[140]. This is precisely what the pre-Socratics – not only Heraclitus, but also Parmenides and Empedocles - aimed to achieve, presenting their doctrines as the remedy against men's lack of insight. Like these thinkers, Prometheus teaches to men the capacity to re-elaborate rationally (νόῳ) the manifold manifestations of reality, which at first were unintelligible to them:

> οἳ πρῶτα μὲν βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην,
> κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον, ἀλλ᾽ ὀνειράτων
> ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον
> ἔφυρον εἰκῇ πάντα […].[141]

At first, men used to behave irrationally, as if caught in a perennial oneiric state (ὀνειράτων ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι), unable of elaborating coherent thoughts because of their failure in the exercise of the senses. Now, the tragedian's description of human ignorance in terms of blindness and deafness is not an isolated episode in the literature of the early fifth century, but is prepared and reiterated by previous and near-contemporary philosophical voices. The first is that of Heraclitus, who described men's lack of understanding with words that are strikingly similar to those of Prometheus:

---

[137] See Kahn, 1979:1-3. The resemblances between Heraclitus and Aeschylus have long been noticed: cf. Reinhardt, 1991:250; Adàn, 1999; 19 ff.; Seaford, 2012; Judet de La Combe, 2010:254-255, 268; Irby-Massie, 2008:151-157 and Scapin, 2015.

[138] EGP III, 9, D10.

[139] For Heraclitus, see Kahn, 1979:175 and Diano, 2001:169-170.

[140] For the contrast between mental infancy and rationality, cf. Empedocles (EGP V, 22, D51).

[141] *Prom*. 447-450:'At the beginning they looked but saw in vain, they listened but could not hear, but for the length of their lives they did everything at random, just like the figures of dreams'.

> τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὕδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται.
>
> ἀξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσιν ἐοίκασι […].[142]

The relationship that the god establishes between himself and human beings in the drama is the same as the one established by Heraclitus with other men (τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους) whom he regards as sleepwalkers: he observes men's aimless (εἰκῇ, 450) wandering, and points to their perceptual ineffectiveness. Prometheus' and Heraclitus' descriptions of human life are in fact the voices of the σοφὸς who alienates himself from the mass and is thus able to give a universal tone to his negative characterization of human behaviour. The dramatic solitude of Prometheus, in other words, is also a symbol of the distance between the individual who knows things as they really are and the common man who is precluded from such a knowledge. As the metaphysical travel of Parmenides will bring the Eleatic on a road that is '*removed from the path of men*' (ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου, D4, 27), so is the Titan bound at the end of the world in '*a wilderness without men*' (ἄβροτον εἰς ἐρημίαν, 2; cf. τῷδ᾽ ἀπανθρώπῳ πάγῳ, 20). What Pausanias will learn from Empedocles, similarly, will endow him with a superhuman knowledge about the constitutive powers of the cosmos: '*never has human intelligence elevated itself further*' (οὐ πλεῖόν γε βροτείη μῆτις ὄρωρεν, D42, 9). In the drama as in these passages, the physical isolation is synonym, *inter alia*, with the epistemic distance that separates the privileged individual from the rest of mankind.

In fact, Prometheus describes human life in epistemic terms, in terms of a failure to grasp the essential relationship between the sensible world and its underlying structure. Pre-Promethean men were deaf (κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον) and blind (βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην) because they lacked νοῦς and thus could not grasp the invisible yet rational principle that manifests itself as a universal pattern of experience:

> κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὦτα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων.[143]

In order for perception to become cognition, Heraclitus says here, men need not have barbarian souls (βαρβάρους ψυχὰς). This means they must be able to understand the relevant language, i.e. the λόγος that nature speaks to them. In other words, the information gained in sense perception, through sight (ὀφθαλμοὶ) and hearing (ὦτα), cannot alone provide the means to understand the cosmos: it requires to be 'translated' in rational, non-

[142] EGP III, 9, D1:'But other men forget what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do when asleep'. EGP III, 9, D4:'They hear but do not understand, similar to deaf'.
[143] EGP III, 9, D33:'Bad witnesses are for men the eyes and ears of those who possess barbarian souls'.

referential terms[144]. Parmenides echoes Heraclitus when he has the goddess labelling his contemporaries as '*deaf and blind alike, bewildered, people without judgment*' (κωφοὶ ὁμῶς τυφλοί τε, τεθηπότες, ἄκριτα φῦλα)[145], polemic allusion to those who rely on their senses alone. For this approach, which aims at the accumulation of empirical knowledge (ἔθος πολύπειρον, D8, 3), leads inevitably to fallacious conclusions: to believe that 'what is not' can be - εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα (D8, 1): such is the *communis opinio* of mortals. Or, even worse, it can lead to a third way, namely to suppose that the one and same thing can both be and not be what it is, as maintained by certain schools of thought[146]. The exhortation of the goddess to the Eleatic thinker goes exactly in the opposite direction, toward the way of investigation (ὁδὸς διζήσιος, D6, 2) that alone is thinkable, the one that 'is', and that can only be understood through mental reasoning (κρῖναι δὲ λόγῳ, D8, 5). Similarly, the first of Prometheus' inventions following the gift of thought is the capacity to understand a physical phenomenon (i.e. the rising and setting of the stars) that is '*difficult to discern*' (δυσκρίτους, 458) because it requires an interpretation that must not involve positing two contradicting causes. For this is how men, as we read in Parmenides' fragment, '*have gone astray*' (πεπλανημένοι εἰσίν, D8, 59), by dividing (ἐκρίναντο, *ibid*. 60) light and darkness, which are in fact the same phenomenon, into opposite ontological figures. Human error lies in the purely perceptual interpretation of reality, which leads the mind astray (πλαγκτὸν νόον, D7, 6)[147] by inducing it to separate physical entities from their real essence.

In the same way, pre-Promethean men lived randomly and '*did everything without any set purpose*' (ἄτερ γνώμης, 456)[148], for they had no concept of time nor any '*reliable indication*' (τέκμαρ…βέβαιον) of the rhythm of the seasons (454-458). In other words, they were unable to understand the principle ordering the cyclical alternation of night and day and, in a broader sense, the regularity of the cosmos. Attention should be drawn here to the presence of the adjective βέβαιος, which conveys the idea of stability, trustworthiness and objectivity[149]. The earliest occurrence of any form of this word is found in Parmenides[150]:

---

[144] On the substantial difference between sensation and knowledge, see Alcmaeon (EGP V, 23, D11): […] ὡς ἕτερον ὂν τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι […]; cf. also the following line of Epicharmus (mentioned in the scholia to the *Prometheus Bound*, 439a, 447 = EGP IX, 43, T2): νοῦς ὁρᾑ καὶ νοῦς ἀκούει· τἄλλα κωφὰ καὶ τυφλά.

[145] EGP V, 19, D7, 7. Cf. Empedocles' exhortation to his disciple (EGP V, 22, D73, 252: τὴν [sc. φιλότητα] σὺ νόῳ δέρκευ, μηδ᾽ ὄμμασιν ἧσο τεθηπώς).

[146] EGP V, 19, D7, 8-9: οἷς τὸ πέλειν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶναι ταὐτὸν νενόμισται/κοὐ ταὐτόν. This passage is specifically directed against Heraclitus and his followers, see Cerri, 1999:205-209. On the relationship between the two thinkers, see Mourelatos, 1970:240, 260-261; Cerri, 1999:40-49 and Coxon, 2009:18-20.

[147] Capizzi, 1982:125-127 has observed that the adjective πλαγκτός with the meaning of 'wandering' appears for the first time in Aeschylus' *Persae* (277) – cf. *Prom*. θαλασσόπλαγκτα, 467; τηλέπλαγκτοι, 575. Parmenides' πλαγκτὸν might derive from the dramatist: if anything, this parallelism represents a resonance of the poetical and intellectual milieu shared by the two poets.

[148] Cf. EGP III, 9, D74: ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει.

[149] Cf. also *Prom*. 297.

[150] Coxon, 2009:306.

λεῦσσε δ' ὅμως ἀπεόντα νόῳ παρεόντα βεβαίως.[151]

The implicit contrast is again between perceptual and intellectual (νόῳ) vision. The first focuses on what is erroneously believed to be present. The latter, on the contrary, gives an immediate and objective (βεβαίως) awareness of the absent things (ἀπεόντα): it brings them before us as if they were present (παρεόντα). Likewise, Prometheus presents the shift toward rational thinking in the form of an opposition between random action and capacity to live in accordance with objective principles of reality.

Parmenides contrasts intellectual power with the '*eye that does not see*' (ἄσκοπον ὄμμα, D8, 4) and the '*deafened ear*' (ἠχήεσσαν ἀκουήν, *ibid*.). These are in fact the symbols of a research that, being focused on the ever-changing reality of sensible objects, is constantly deprived of the identity with its supposed referent: it is likely that Xenophanes, whose empiricism was already criticised by Heraclitus, is among Parmenides' polemical targets[152]. What is implied by these thinkers, however, is not that the senses are valueless, but rather that they are only useful as an adjunct to the mind. Human beings cannot escape the spatio-temporal frame in which their existence unfolds, but the correct exercise of νοῦς will enable them to reduce the plurality of physical beings to an objective principle of unity. Empedocles, who insisted at greater length than his predecessors on the fundamental coordination between sensible perception and intellectual intuition[153], advises his disciple Pausanias (and us) on this epistemological principle:

ἀλλ' ἄγ' ἄθρει πάσῃ παλάμῃ, πῇ δῆλον ἕκαστον,
μήτε τιν' ὄψιν ἔχων πίστει πλέον ἢ κατ' ἀκουήν
ἢ ἀκοὴν ἐρίδουπον ὑπὲρ τρανώματα γλώσσης,
μήτε τι τῶν ἄλλων, ὁπόση πόρος ἐστὶ νοῆσαι,
γυίων πίστιν ἔρυκε, νόει θ' ᾗ δῆλον ἕκαστον.[154]

Through a progression carefully built on symmetry, the poet describes the process wherein the sensorial act (ἄθρει…πῇ δῆλον ἕκαστον) becomes an act of cognition (νόει θ' ᾗ δῆλον ἕκαστον)[155]. The idea underlying this fragment is that the body can be an instrument of knowledge, provided that all its perceptual faculties (πάσῃ παλάμῃ) are coordinated to each other in a synesthetic effort. In fact, the exhortation to 'observe' (ἄθρει) the physical reality encompasses, under the privileged faculty of vision, the sensorial experience in all its

[151] EGP V, 19, D10, 1:'Gaze on absent yet present things with your mind, steadily'.
[152] Coxon, 2009:305.
[153] See Iribarren, 2017:111-116.
[154] EGP V, 22, D44:'But come, observe with every palm how each thing appears, without holding more trust in a visual than in an auditory perception, nor preferring a resonating sound over the utterances of the tongue. Do no withhold your trust from any of the other limbs, however narrow is the path they afford to intelligence, but know in whatever way each evident thing'.
[155] The same progression from senses to thought appears in D42, 7-8: οὕτως οὔτ' ἐπιδερκτὰ τάδ' ἀνδράσιν οὔτ' ἐπακουστά/οὔτε νόῳ περιληπτά.

different aspects: sight (ὄψιν), hearing (ἀκουήν) and every other sense (τι τῶν ἄλλων…γυίων) must come together to provide the intelligence (νοῆσαι) with a clear (δῆλον) vision of the essential constitution of each (ἕκαστον) thing. In this way, the different manifestations of reality can be gathered in thought into a single objective whole.

V. Conclusion: drama against philosophy

Each of the different conceptions of knowledge elaborated by the pre-Socratics finds its place in Prometheus' speech on the arts: empirical observation of reality (Xenophanes), correct exercise of the senses (Empedocles), rational and intellectual intuition (Heraclitus and Parmenides). This is the miracle claimed by the Titan, to have elevated mortals above their inherent impuissance (cf. 248-251), enabling them to understand reality in both its empirical and transcendent dimension. And yet such claim is immediately contradicted by the scenic reality, for the image imposed by the dramatist is that of a doctor who cannot cure himself (472-475) and cannot receive any help from his patients. The victim of his own knowledge, Prometheus can only realize that his effort on behalf of man has proved useless. His personal drama, the Oceanids observe, is the drama of human life itself:

> τίς ἐφαμερίων ἄρηξις; οὐδ᾽ ἐδέρχθης
> ὀλιγοδρανίαν ἄκικυν ἰσόνειρον, ᾗ τὸ φωτῶν
> ἀλαὸν γένος ἐμπεποδισμένον; οὔποτε
> τὰν Διὸς ἁρμονίαν θνατῶν παρεξίασι βουλαί.[156]

While the speech on the arts illustrates the power of Prometheus' τέχνη through the re-elaboration of pre-Socratic ideas and images, the choral song that follows presents, in a voluntarily archaic language, a picture of the human condition that emphasizes its radical imperfection. The paradox of Prometheus, torn between his spiritual assets and his powerlessness, first asserts itself as the result of a tension between the language of contemporary philosophy, which he himself represents, and that of traditional mythology adopted by the Chorus, whose despairing words reminds us of Hesiod's version of the Promethean myth[157]. Unflinching faith in the virtues of Prometheus' gift to mankind coexists and clashes with the dramatic representation of its limits. The Titan believes in fact to have freed men from a dream-like existence (448-449) with his 'philosophical' knowledge, but the Oceanids invite him to observe their dream-like helplessness (ὀλιγοδρανίαν…ἰσόνειρον) recurring to a notion, that of ephemerality (ἐφαμερίων)[158], which often occurs in archaic poetry to connote the transitory nature of human existence - both in existential (short-liveness)

[156] Prom. 547-551:'What help from creatures of a day? Did you not realize the weak, dream-like feebleness that binds the blind race of men? Never will the plans of mortals go past the order of Zeus'.
[157] Cf. especially *Prom*. 551 with *Theog*. 613 and *WD* 105.
[158] Cf. *Prom*. 83, 253, 945.

and cognitive (short-sightedness) terms[159]. No matter if the Titan has opened their eyes (ἐξωμμάτωσα, 499) and freed them from annihilation (ἐξελυσάμην, 235), human beings are still blind (ἀλαὸν; cf. τυφλὰς ἐλπίδας, 250) and hammered (ἐμπεποδισμένον) within the limits of their finitude. The encounter with Prometheus endows mankind with a superhuman knowledge, with a cure against afflictions, but at the same time reveals the essential gulf between immortals and mortals, between what man is and what he is not. The aimless wanderings of Io, the only mortal appearing onstage, are the epitome of man's paradoxical existence.

[159] Cf. Scapin, 2015:141-142.

The language of constraint

Prometheus as a cosmological thinker

One thing alone, what is wise, wants and does
not want to be called by the name of Zeus

Heraclitus

The tragic paradox of Prometheus may be represented as the oscillation between two opposite ways of envisioning his interaction with mankind. Human beings are in fact the object of his past deeds, but his present is what he must suffer at Zeus' hands because of the transgression on man's behalf. And his is a suffering, besides, from which mortals cannot save him, '*for he who will relieve your pain* [*sc*. Heracles] *is not yet born*' (27) – to quote Hephaestus' words. Within the divine world, the theft of fire is not a gift but a crime, and the τέχνη of the Titan – which among human beings is the name of a great intellectual and technical gift (506) – can by no means help him escape the dire consequences of his gesture. But such consequences, as we have seen in the first chapter, do not concern Prometheus alone. They extend to the divine community in its entirety, in that they gradually put into question the order of Zeus and the very fundaments of his universal power. Both the guilt and the punishment of the Titan, in brief, are actions with cosmic implications. The purpose of this chapter is to explore these implications, and to situate the *Prometheus Bound* within a wider intellectual debate on the structure of the universe and the powers and rules responsible for its working.

I. Myth, tragedy and cosmology

The *Prometheus Bound* lends itself with seductive ease to incorporating ideas and issues of cosmological interest. In fact, our drama stands on a different level than every other extant Attic tragedy, in that the gods, who normally constitute the background against which human action resonates, are here the main characters and form the centrepiece of the scene[160]. Even the *Oresteia*, which has important structural and thematic analogues with our drama[161], differs on a point as fundamental as this: whereas the deities materialise in the last chapter of the trilogy, the *Eumenides*, because the human struggle has reached too serious proportions, the action of the *Prometheia* – of which the *Prometheus Bound* constitutes the first act - opens with a divine struggle and centres on it throughout. In both works the divine world, the very universe, is divided against itself, but very different is the way how the breach is respectively brought about. In the *Oresteia*, it is due to the chain of crime and vengeance taking place within the boundaries of the Atreid family. In the *Prometheia* it is the gods themselves who provoke

[160] Cf. Herington, 1970:76 ff. and Griffith, 1983:17-19.
[161] See n. 3.

the rupture: the tension of the divine against itself is not seen as the consequence of human action, but constitutes the very core of the dramatic narrative. For even if the destiny of human beings lies at the origin of this tension and emerges as a prominent concern of the playwright, man plays no active role in the intra-divine struggle: rather, it is an instrument for the gods' self-assertion within a larger cosmic plan[162]. This is in keeping not only with the Hesiodic myth upon which the distinctive subject-matter of the *Prometheus Bound* rests, but also with pre-Socratic cosmology: the place of human beings in the world is the result of a process that transcends their will, and that unfolds in agreement with an all-embracing logic of necessity. In fact, in such a mythological framework talking about the order of the gods implies talking about the order of the universe itself[163].

Prometheus' theft of fire acquires from the very start of the drama a specific political significance: it is an ἁμαρτία (9, 945), an ἀμπλάκημα (112), in sum, an offence towards the Olympians and their establishment. It is in these terms that Power legitimates the frightful punishment of the Titan: such is the retribution that he must pay (δοῦναι δίκην, 9) for his transgression. What the early scenes of the play suggest is that everything takes place in accordance with Zeus' binding and unifying will. Everything, just like in the myth narrated in the *Theogony*, seems fixed from the start. By forcing Prometheus into '*unbreakable fetters of adamantine bonds*' (ἀδαμαντίνων δεσμῶν ἐν ἀρρήκτοις πέδαις, 6), the Olympians stop the course of things, and posit their new-established political order as the new law by which the whole universe is steered (νέοι γὰρ οἰακονόμοι κρατοῦσ᾽ Ὀλύμπου, 149). But unlike every other Aeschylean tragedy, where human politics are considered as an extension of divine law[164], the political agents of our drama are themselves divine, and this means that there may be other forces above them determining the outcome of the action in which they are involved. In the search of these forces and its catastrophic result lies, as we shall see, an essential element of the action of the *Prometheus Bound*. In the previous chapter we have pointed out an undeniable continuity between the intellectual profile of Prometheus and that of such thinkers as Heraclitus or Parmenides. It is now time to ask what significance do the contents of Prometheus' knowledge acquire within the dramatic context in which they are produced.

On the politics of the cosmos

To the suggestion of the Chorus that Prometheus may someday be freed and be no less powerful than Zeus if he ceases to side with mankind (507-510), the bounded god answers:

οὐ ταῦτα ταύτῃ μοῖρά πω τελεσφόρος

[162] See above, pp.19-20.

[163] See Cerri, 1998:25-28, Algra, 1999:46 ff., and Scapin, 2015:31-34.

[164] Cf. Lloyd-Jones, 1971:93 ff. The same idea was expressed, though in different terms, by Heraclitus (EGP III 9, D105): […] τρέφονται γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἀνθρώπειοι νόμοι ὑπὸ ἑνὸς τοῦ θείου […]. For the Ephesian, it is the law which best exemplifies the necessity to posit a single principle in which all the opposites can be reduced.

κρᾶναι πέπρωται, μυρίαις δὲ πημοναῖς
δύαις τε καμφθεὶς ὧδε δεσμὰ φυγγάνω·
τέχνη δ᾽ ἀνάγκης ἀσθενεστέρα μακρῷ.[165]

Here we have, as Bollack once observed, '*a veritable lesson in active theology*'[166]. By means of reflection, Prometheus posits a universal principle from which the meaning of his suffering can be deduced and placed within a perspective vaster than that of the Olympian order. The image of the god in chains takes on a meaning unknown to the Hesiodic myth: rather than illustrating Zeus' wisdom and justice, it says the radical impuissance of τέχνη in front of that form of coercion called by the name of ἀνάγκη. Not only the art which he himself embodies but also the bonds (δεσμὰ) forged by Hephaestus' savoir-faire (τέχνη, 87), though themselves an unsolvable constraint (ἀνάγκαις, 108), are in fact powerless in themselves when compared to the unescapable force of Necessity[167]. With his cognitive faculties, the Titan sets himself above the actual political struggle, so to grasp the causal patterning whereby everything is as it is - ταῦτα ταύτη. His language sounds almost tautologous here: the present asserts its existence merely in terms of itself, the future being already inherent in the events unfolding onstage – and in those which have taken place in the past. If Prometheus associates ἀνάγκη with the Moira τελεσφόρος, it is because he identifies her with the immanent force which underlies the flow of divine history, which actualizes and connects its different moments into a single whole. From the dethronement of Kronos, through the present of his punishment, till a distant future where he will be released and Justice established: each of these actions occurs in full accord with its own nature, which has been allotted by Destiny. The word which describes them can only state their inevitability, since whatever happens is all there can be.

In fact, Moira and Necessity are also the alternative names of the logico-metaphysical principle which, in Parmenides' poem, holds Being fast '*within the limits of its great chains*' (μεγάλων ἐν πείρασι δεσμῶν, D8, 31): here is a clear allusion to the captivity of Prometheus, the mythological paradigm which the Eleatic adjusted to his conceptual and poetical needs[168]. His description of Being closely resembles that of a bounded god who cannot, because of his immortality[169], escape a torment which has been decreed to be eternally present:

[…] οὐδὲν γὰρ <ἢ> ἔστιν ἢ ἔσται
ἄλλο πάρεξ τοῦ ἐόντος, ἐπεὶ τό γε Μοῖρ᾽ ἐπέδησεν
οὖλον ἀκίνητόν τ᾽ ἔμεναι· […].[170]

---

[165] *Prom*. 511-514: 'All-ordering Moira has not been fated yet to accomplish these things in such a way, but only after being bent by countless woes and torments I will escape the bonds. For Art is far weaker than Necessity'.
[166] Bollack, 2006:81.
[167] Cf. Hephaestus words at *Prom*. 16, 72.
[168] Cf. Mourelatos, 1970:27; Cerri, 1999:229 ff., and Coxon, 2009:327-328. The model is Hesiod: cf. *Theog*. 615-616: […] ἀλλ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης/καὶ πολύιδριν ἐόντα μέγας κατὰ δεσμὸς ἐρύκει.
[169] *Prom*. 933: […] θανεῖν οὐ μόρσιμον. Cf. also 93-100 and 1053: πάντως ἐμέ γ᾽ οὐ θανατώσει.
[170] EGP V, 19, D8, 41-43:'For nothing other than *what is* is or will exist, since Destiny has bounded it to be whole, motionless'.

Moira – or '*mighty Necessity*' (κρατερὴ Ἀνάγκη, D8, 35) - as the force which binds Being (τὸ ἐόν) to be an absolute Totality (οὖλον), a concluded and changeless system: it is the same force which holds Prometheus in '*indissoluble fetters*' (δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις, 155). Ἀνάγκη is a word for the omnipotence of Fate, which is one with the inviolable law of the universe itself.

Constraint and savoir-faire, the poles of the opposition between the tyrant and the sophist, become then part of a universal question that involves understanding one's lot (αἶσα, 104) within the necessary course of events. Neither Prometheus' punishment nor his release, at this point, depend any longer on the decisions of Zeus. For he alone is free among the gods (50) and rules '*with laws of his own making*' (ἰδίοις νόμοις, 403), but even the political constriction deriving from his authority is subject to a more remote form of ineluctability:

> ΧΟ. τίς οὖν ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν οἰακοστρόφος;
> ΠΡ. Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ᾽ Ἐρινύες.
> ΧΟ. τούτων ἄρα Ζεύς ἐστιν ἀσθενέστερος;
> ΠΡ. οὔκουν ἂν ἐκφύγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην.
> ΧΟ. τί γὰρ πέπρωται Ζηνὶ πλὴν αἰεὶ κρατεῖν;
> ΠΡ. τοῦτ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ ἂν πύθοιο· μηδὲ λιπάρει.[171]

This exchange is the turning point of the dramatic action, as the concern for Prometheus' liberation is skilfully converted into the question of the limitations of Zeus' power. The world which the Titan describes, in fact, is not the one presupposed by the traditional theology: it is not Zeus who orders the universe and holds control of Necessity, as the Oceanids seem to believe, but the Moirai and the Erinyes[172]. It is them who steer (οἰακοστρόφος), accomplish (κρᾶναι, 512) and delimit the destiny of each individual within boundaries not to be overstepped. No less than Prometheus can Zeus escape their inexorable verdict (τὴν πεπρωμένην), and this is what levels the power gap between the two gods. Whether the tyrant will lose his throne or not, whether the curse spelled by Kronos will be '*utterly accomplished*' (παντελῶς κρανθήσεται, 911), what really matters is that Zeus will need Prometheus in order to find out, since the Titan alone knows the secret of his ever-lasting sovereignty. In this way, Prometheus reveals the working of an objective law of reality, which supports the idea of a rational and immutable world, and at the same time produces, by conveying this very truth, the possibility for an unexpected action to take place. At this point of the drama, and after having weighed in all the forces involved in the situation, it is in fact the fate of the ruler that is suddenly put at stake.

---

[171] *Prom*. 515-520:'*Chor.* But then, who is the ruler of Necessity? *Prom*. The three Fates and the unforgetting Erinyes. *Chor*. Is Zeus weaker than these? *Prom*. Well, he could certainly not escape his fate. *Chor*. In fact, what has been fated for Zeus if not to rule forever? *Prom*. You could not learn this, not even if you persist in asking'

[172] Here is another significant innovation on Hesiod. In the *Theogony*, the Moirai have a double genealogy: first they are daughters of Night (*Theog*. 217-218), then they appear as Zeus' progeny (901 ff.), i.e. as powers indissociably linked to his regime of justice and order. Cf. Saïd, 1985:279 n. 103.

As so often in Greek tragedy, the expression of understanding - in this case Prometheus' theological revelation - raises doubts rather than providing answers. For despite the suggested explanatory logic of events, the passage between the present and the end of the narrative – which in the *Prometheus Bound* corresponds to the τέλος of divine history itself - remains hidden from Prometheus' interlocutors. Iit is a holy and imposing mystery (σεμνόν, 521), and it is around this mystery that the dramatic action is now doomed to revolve. The gods of our tragedy, it is true, act in accordance with a teleology which endows their story with a specific meaning: the destiny of Prometheus and Zeus is already written in the plot of the Hesiodic myth, it does not depend on the singular events befalling them onstage. But this destiny - and here lies the essential difference with the *Theogony* and the Homeric narratives - is not posited nor announced *a priori*. On the contrary, it is obscured. It is a λόγος, to use Prometheus' words, that '*must be kept concealed*' (συγκαλυπτέος, 522). Only retrospectively, '*in due time*' (καιρὸς, 523), it will be possible for the other tragic characters to elucidate it, based on the experiences which the dramatist imposes or will impose on them. In Greek drama, as said in the previous chapter, the theoretical truth is in fact universal and individual, abstract and expressive at the same time. It cannot, in other words, be dissociated from the history of the individual who articulates it, and this is why everyone fails to understand Prometheus' evasive λόγος. The idea of a Totality defined by specific causal laws can only be valid for those who are confronted with – and can grasp - the concrete working of these laws[173]. For the Oceanids, whose experience and mindset differ radically from those of Prometheus, the reality speaks otherwise: divine rationality is to them identical with the will of Zeus, however arbitrary this may look. The mystery to which the Titan alludes, then, raises an apparently insoluble contradiction, which implies the conjunction between two opposite and mutually exclusive theological conceptions: how would it be possible for Zeus, '*disposer of all things*' (ὁ πάντα νέμων, 526), to hold an unlimited power and be subject to other powers at the same time? Once more, the dialogue between the Chorus and Prometheus leads to a dilemma, and one which is built upon the tension between two modes of thought: on the one hand stands the belief inherited from the traditional myth, which builds a universe wherein all things occur in accordance with Zeus' ordinance. On the other stands Prometheus, prophet-philosopher who knows not only the τέλος to which divine history aims (i.e. Zeus' sovereignty), but also the basic principles of reality by which such τέλος can and must be achieved. It remains to understand the exact connotations of these basic principles, and the reason why Prometheus describes them in this form and not others.

II. Prometheus among the Ionians (part two)

By placing the governance of ἀνάγκη in the hands of the Moirai and the Erinyes, traditional symbols of vengeance against moral transgression, Prometheus states that the

[173] Cf. Judet de La Combe, 2010:220-221.

universe is governed by that very law which we find already expressed in the *Coephori*: the law of the δράσαντι παθεῖν (313), whereby every action is followed by reciprocal reaction and every punishment represents an exact reversal of the crime that has caused it[174]. This is true for Prometheus. It is in fact by following this logic that the dramatist shows the inventor of all the arts yoked into an unsolvable constraint that is itself '*a work of art*' (τέχνη, 87), as Power calls ironically the chains forged by Hephaestus[175]. It is by this very logic that Prometheus, after having taught man how to discern the alternation of night and day (454-458), is forced, though a god, to experience the temporal laws of human existence. For the regular flow of Time is not only the essential condition for human history to begin. It is also the magistrate who determines what Prometheus' retribution shall be:

> […] σταθευτὸς δ᾽ ἡλίου φοιβῆ φλογὶ
> χροιᾶς ἀμείψεις ἄνθος· ἀσμένῳ δέ σοι
> ἡ ποικιλείμων νὺξ ἀποκρύψει φάος,
> πάχνην θ᾽ ἑῴαν ἥλιος σκεδᾷ πάλιν·[176]

The Titan's agony, articulated by the ever-lasting cyclicity (πάλιν) of light and darkness, represents the resurgence of a past that bears a specific juridical obligation: the ancient fault must be paid back and determines itself the nature of the compensation. The Erinyes are in fact '*unforgetting*' (μνήμονές, 516), which implies that there exists a relationship of strict causality between action and consequence, between crime and punishment.

From this point of view, Prometheus' revelation about the nature of Necessity is not new, since the working of retributive justice, as various scholars have observed, can be already found in Homer and Hesiod[177]. We have seen, however, that the Necessity of which Prometheus speaks is not merely an external force – which the archaic poetic tradition usually identifies with Zeus - bringing punishment on the guilty ones. It is instead immanent in the reality of things, and imposes the same justice on every being within it. Retribution, accordingly, does not relate to the violation of a norm, but is itself the norm, the alternative description of an all-embracing principle of order. This notion, as will be shortly shown, has fundamental analogues with the cosmological models of the early Ionians. It was them who first turned the legalistic notion of justice into a cosmic law of measure, thereby opening a whole new view on the structure of the universe and the role of the traditional gods within it. We will see that this speculative dimension, which rests on the correspondence between the

---

[174] Cf. Romilly, 1968: 60 ff., and Saïd, 1985:212-220.

[175] Saïd, 1985:156-164 has analysed in detail the functioning of this logic in the *Prometheus Bound*. See also, on the notion of reversal, Vernant and Vidal Naquet, 1972-1986 (I):99-131.

[176] *Prom.* 22-25:'You will change the bloom of your skin, when burnt by the bright sunray. And you will be glad when the starry night hides the light, but also when the sun disperses again the early morning frost'.

[177] Cf. Lloyd-Jones, 1971:1-55; Saïd, 1985:233-283, Allan, 2006:9-16 and Scapin, 2015:18-31.

normative and the cosmic aspects of the notion of justice[178], is discernible as well in Prometheus' personified Ἀνάγκη.

Temporality and the necessity of reciprocity

Like Heraclitus' Erinyes, who keep the sun from exceeding his measures (μέτρα, D89c), the main function of the figures evoked by Prometheus is to fulfil the natural order of things: the performance of retribution is part of their role as cosmic guarantees. Heraclitus associates the Erinyes with Justice (Δίκης ἐπίκουροι) while Prometheus makes them the agents of Necessity, but there is no real difference between them in functional terms. In the incipient Ionian intellectual tradition, Justice and Necessity coexist as hypostases of the physical law which steers all things and binds them to each other, in accordance with a conception which sees the processes of transformation as a conflict of elemental powers within an order recognised as intrinsically just – that is, a κόσμος[179]. When Heraclitus identifies justice with strife (εἰδέναι χρὴ […] ἐόντα […] δίκην ἔριν, D63), the underlying idea is in fact that of a world governed by a universal pattern of which crime and penalty are the necessary complements. The conception of the cosmos as governed by a principle of order and reciprocity was first articulated, around the mid-sixth century, by Anaximander (between quotations marks is the section which presumably reports his original words[180]):

> ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσίς 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".[181]

Although the 'ultimate meaning' of the fragment is uncertain and controversial[182], the outline of the cosmological doctrine herein developed can be easily inferred and neared to the one articulated by Prometheus. In Anaximander's view, the cosmos is a harmonious realm in which the coming-to-be (γένεσίς) and dissolution (φθορά) of beings (τὰ ὄντα) corresponds to a relentless chain of mutual offence and compensation. This is what the phrase διδόναι δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις means, namely that the natural powers constantly render compensation to one another to avoid every individual prevarication and thereby preserve the equilibrium of all things. For whatever comes into existence does so to the detriment of another power: it is, by necessity, ἀδικία, and by necessity it needs to be paid back. Thus, the first law of nature is an inexorable *lex talionis*. It is in fact determined by τὸ χρεών – that is,

[178] On the legalistic terminology adopted by the pre-Socratics, see Vlastos, 1947; Kahn, 1960:183 ff., 219-230; Cerri, 1999:104-105; Sassi, 2006:8 ff., and Scapin, 2015:84 ff.
[179] Cf. Vlastos, 1947:156, Kahn, 1960:219-230 and Cerri, 1999:104-105.
[180] See Kahn, 1960:166-183.
[181] EGP II, D6:'From these things birth comes about for beings, and into these things their destruction occurs "*by necessity. For they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the ordinance of time*"'.
[182] A comprehensive overview of the main issues at stake in the fragment can be found in Scapin, 2015:88-97.

'*the most impersonal Greek formula for Fate*'[183] - which in turn accomplishes the binding ordinance (τάξις, i.e. the amount of the punishment) which Time lays down[184].

In Prometheus' view, similarly, the divine world is affected by an apparently endless series of political successions, for there stands behind the gods an impersonal principle of compulsion which forces them to pay for their injustice when the hour is full[185]. And indeed, such a notion fits well the dramatic context of the *Prometheus Bound*. Within a universe where Zeus' Justice has not been established yet, the relationship between individuals cannot be conceived but as a self-perpetrating chain of injustice and redressing – or 'paying back' (διδόναι δίκην, cf. *Prom*. 9) – of injustice. By applying the phrase ποινάς τίνειν ('make amend') to both Prometheus' binding (112) and to Zeus' future fall (176), the dramatist says exactly this, that the two gods are equal in front of the law which steers the whole universe. In the same way as Prometheus is serving the sentence for his injustice toward the Olympians, so Zeus will have someday to pay the compensation for the outrage inflicted on the Titan and the older gods. To put it in Anaximander's terms, Prometheus and Zeus are doomed to pay retribution to each other (ἀλλήλοις) in accordance with a law which is absolutely necessary, immanent in the order of all things: just like Prometheus' suffering, the fall of Zeus will take place κατὰ τὸ χρεών, because it must[186]. And it will be for Time, as in the case of Prometheus (see above), to determine the exact penalty of the wrongdoer. For Time is the mean through which justice is achieved and equality re-established, and ἀνάγκη, the equivalent of Anaximander's τὸ χρεών, is the name of the cosmic agent which enforces its dispositions. The Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound* does not stand for the Law which assigns to gods and men their due lot, but for a force that tries to replace this Law while being nevertheless its subject. Hence, Prometheus says, '*I care less than nothing about Zeus*' (938). To Power and Force, tangible symbols of Zeus' political domination, the Titan opposes the insight of the philosopher, who alone can go beyond what is manifest and recognize the gathering of all things into the immutable unity of the Divine.

III. From philosophy to myth: Zeus and the Totality

In a recent article, Sassi has shown, based on a solid epigraphic evidence, that Anaximander conceived the rational order of the universe in terms drawn from the conflicts of the contemporary polis, and in terms that could transform the dynamic equilibrium of the cosmos into a legislative model[187]. The philosophical operation carried out by Aeschylus stands to Anaximander in a relationship of inversion: it is the cosmological notion which is

---

[183] Kahn, 1960:180. Cf. also Sassi, 2006:13.

[184] For the formula κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν, I follow Sassi, 2006:15-16, who makes χρόνου an objective genitive – i.e. 'in accordance with the ordinance of Time', 'in due time'.

[185] Cf. *Prom*. 981 and above, pp. 30-32.

[186] *Prom*. 995-996: γνάμψει γὰρ οὐδὲν τῶνδέ μ᾽ ὥστε καὶ φράσαι/πρὸς οὗ χρεών νιν ἐκπεσεῖν τυραννίδος.

[187] Sassi, 2006:20-22.

re-elaborated to explore a political process. The universe itself, in the *Prometheus Bound*, is consciously presented as analogous to the society of the day, as a *comparans* for the turmoil agitating it. The divine characters of our drama speak in fact the normative language of contemporary Greece, and yet their actions unfold neither in the polis nor in a royal palace or a temple, but in the cosmos itself. The very first words uttered by Prometheus, when his agony has just begun, thematise this cosmic dimension, they give it a concrete shape:

> ὦ δῖος αἰθὴρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί,
> ποταμῶν τε πηγαί, ποντίων τε κυμάτων
> ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, παμμήτωρ τε γῆ,
> καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ·
> ἴδεσθέ μ᾽ οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός.[188]

The call for witnesses (ἴδεσθε), which is in accordance with Athenian legal procedure, is here exceptionally addressed to the four personified Elements[189] and articulated by the elemental province that each of them occupies: the αἰθὴρ (air), the rivers and the sea (water), the earth, and the sun (fire). It is a 'cosmological' cry, whereby Prometheus embraces the whole of reality in its well-defined organisation, contemplating it, as it were, from the perspective of the natural philosopher. But this Totality, as said above, is also the normative context in which the dramatic action unfolds. Transposed onstage, the natural world becomes in fact representative, by analogy, of that ordered system which Prometheus himself – qua son of Θέμις – has contributed to define, and which Zeus transgresses by inflicting him an '*outrage*' (αἰκία, 93). At the very end of the drama, and because of this very transgression, the four elements re-appear in a state of cosmic disarray (1080-1093), taking on an antithetical symbolical value. *Earth*quakes (χθὼν, 1081), *fiery* (ζάπυροι, 1084) twists of lightning, *air* (αἰθὴρ) blending with *sea* (πόντῳ, 1088): such is the concrete (ἔργῳ, 1080)[190] representation of the all-encompassing yet destructive force of Zeus' thunder (βροντή, 1083)[191].

Now, these two passages are as majestic as they are puzzling, in that neither the invocation to the four elements as a group nor their chaotic representation at the end of the tragedy has parallels in Greek drama. This has led to an interpretative dichotomy: do these verses reflect a popular or a philosophical, maybe Empedoclean, belief?[192] In truth, the two options are not mutually exclusive but complementary. The ideology of the four elements had been operating

---

[188] *Prom*. 88-92: 'O bright sky and swift-winged winds, and river-springs and countless smile of the sea-waves, and earth, mother of all, and I call upon the all-seeing orb of the sun too: behold me, what I suffer at the hands of the gods though being myself a god'.

[189] As already observed by the scholiasts (schol. 88b): μεγαλοφυῶς δὲ τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα ἐπικαλεῖται.

[190] 'Concrete', because it fulfils the provocative words pronounced earlier (1043-1052) by Prometheus himself.

[191] Once more, the model is Hesiod, namely his description of the cosmic reversal following the battle between Zeus and the Titans (*Theog*. 687 ff.). See the relative comments of Iribarren, 2017:82-84.

[192] The two extremes, as is often the case in debates over the *Prometheus Bound*, are represented by Griffith, 1978:113-116., who denies any philosophical influence, and Herington, 1963:190 ff., who affirms the influence of Empedocles' four-elements doctrine. Irby-Massie, 2008:144-148 adds very little to the debate.

long before the pre-Socratics and deeply influenced their thought, but this need not overshadow the process of conceptual re-elaboration to which these thinkers subjected it[193]. In sum, it is only by drawing attention to the philosophical innovation of the time *and* to their anchoring in previous traditions that we can understand the tragedian's surprising choice.

A brief history of the four elements

The tendency toward the identification of the primary elements, those very elements that the pre-Socratics will later theorize, is well rooted in the cultural traditions of archaic Greece[194]. The Homeric poems, for instance, present different divine and human characters invoking the elements as μάρτυροι of their oath[195]. The invocation of Prometheus, who calls upon air, water earth and the all-seeing sun (πανόπτην, 91) recalls the passage (*Il*. 3, 276-280) where Agamemnon summons as guarantors of his promise Zeus (i.e. sky), the sun '*who sees and listens all things*' (ὃς πάντ᾽ ἐφορᾷς καὶ πάντ᾽ ἐπακούεις, 277), rivers (water) and earth. The invocation motif, the same we find in the *Prometheus Bound*, was re-elaborated by Empedocles, who invites his disciple Pausanias to take the four elements as a confirmation (ἐπιμάρτυρα, D77, 1) of the veracity of his physical doctrine. Sun (fire), air, rain (water) and earth (3-6) are the eternal forces which, being driven by the alternating action of Love and Strife, create the phenomenological world, which at last will be reduced in the immutable unity of the Σφαῖρος (cf. D87-D93). That is, the first phase of the cosmic cycle, wherein the four elements are blended into a single, indistinguishable whole[196]. Empedocles transposes the traditional four elements on a cosmogonic level, to account for the principle underpinning the cyclical processes of the natural world. The similarity with our drama is in this case purely formal, in that the two authors re-elaborate the same motif, but their purposes are radically different. The Sicilian thinker describes the universe we observe: the Homeric and Promethean all-seeing sun is for him '*warm to see*' (θερμὸν ὁρᾶν, D77, 3), an object of contemplation rather than a measure against violation. Prometheus' calling, on the other hand, involves not the ritual oath but the transgression of the political space which the four elements themselves delimit and define.

Other passages of archaic literature attest the four-elements doctrine outside the limits of the ritual convention, with a more explicit cosmological intent. We might recall Achilles' shield, on which Hephaestus recreates the world in its four zones (*Il*. 18, 483-485):

> He moulded the earth (γαῖαν) on it, and the sky (οὐρανόν) and the sea (θάλασσαν), and the tireless sun (ἠέλιόν) and the full moon (σελήνην),

[193] Empedocles was surely the most famous exponent of the four-elements doctrine, but traces of the idea can be found elsewhere in pre-Socratic literature, e.g. Heraclitus, D86 or Anaximenes, D3.
[194] See Cerri, 1998.
[195] E.g. *Il*. 3, 103-107; 14, 271-280; 15, 36-38 (= *Od*. 5, 184-186); 19, 257-265.
[196] See Bollack, 1965-1969 (I):33 ff.; Cerri, 1998:21 ff. and Iribarren, 2017:116-119.

and all the constellations (τὰ τείρεα) by which the sky is crowned.

We find here the same elements and elemental provinces of the *Prometheus Bound*: earth, sky (i.e. air), sea and fire, this latter embodied by all the heavenly bodies that man can observe.

Fundamental for our analysis, in virtue of its cosmo-political resonances, is the Homeric description of the repartition (δασμός) of the world in different regions (*Il*. 15, 187-195), each of them corresponding to the τιμή (189) attributed to the three sons of Uranus: Zeus inherits the sky and the αἰθὴρ (i.e. fire), Ades the '*cloudy darkness*' (ζόφον ἠερόεντα, 191; i.e. air) and Poseidon the sea. To these three areas the earth is added as the domain shared by all of them (193). The hereditary division of the world is in four parts, and each of them represents, as in the *Prometheus Bound*, a specific elemental province. The descending order – from sky to Underworld - is here representative of the Olympian hierarchy: Zeus occupies the highest region because he is '*much stronger in might*' (βίῃ πολὺ φέρτερος, 165) and '*elder in birth*' (γενεῇ πρότερος, 166). The same assumption underlies the *Theogony*, where it is Zeus himself who performs - as seen in the first chapter - the repartition of honours among the gods. Although Hesiod presents this action in political rather than cosmological terms, it remains that Zeus' power is uppermost in the divine world. The assimilation between divine and cosmic puissance, which implicitly lurks in the Homeric text, was made fully explicit by Empedocles, and not without consequences on the traditional Pantheon:

> τέσσαρα γὰρ πάντων ῥιζώματα πρῶτον ἄκουε·
> Ζεὺς ἀργὴς Ἥρη τε φερέσβιος ἠδ' Ἀϊδωνεύς
> Νῆστίς θ', ἣ δακρύοις τέγγει κρούνωμα βρότειον.[197]

Here the four roots (ῥιζώματα) are associated with the divine entities of myth: Zeus is fire, Hera is earth, Aidoneus is air and Nestis is water[198]. The attribution of specific honours and spheres of influence to each of them - τιμῆς δ᾽ ἄλλης ἄλλο μέδει (D73, 259) – recalls the traditional theme of the δασμός (see above), except that the divine name is now consciously associated with the cosmic entities underpinning the order of the natural world. The four elements are in fact strictly equal among themselves in terms of age and power (D73, 258), and this is what ensures a perpetual balance under the reciprocal work of Νεῖκος and Φιλότης, themselves equal to each other and to the elements[199]. With his symbolical re-elaboration, Empedocles somehow levels the traditional Olympian hierarchy, wherein an indisputable superiority was accorded to Zeus. Unlike the divine realm of Hesiod and Homer, the world conceived by Empedocles is a unity whose balance depends on the proportional distribution of powers among its components. This assumption underlies Alcmaeon's notion of the health of human body as the '*equal distribution of powers*' (ἰσονομίαν τῶν δυνάμεων,

[197] EGP V, 22, D57: 'Hear at first the four roots of all things: lightening Zeus, and life-giving Hera and Aidoneus, and Nestis, who moistens with tears the mortal spring'.
[198] For the correct identification of god and element, see Cerri, 1998:17-21.
[199] Cf. Vlastos, 1947:158-161 and Bollack, 1965-1969 (III):72-73.

D30), its sickness being the '*domination of one*' (μοναρχίαν, *ibid*.). It is on this very assumption that Prometheus seeks throughout the play to make his interlocutors conscious of the limits inherent in Zeus' power. The universe which he contemplates (88-92) is in fact the one which the pre-Socratics – starting with Anaximander - had theorized. It is an ordered system in which opposing powers hold each other in check: whoever gets to dominate will eventually be dominated, whoever oversteps the right measure will eventually recede to the place which Destiny has assigned him. The cosmic reversal provoked at the end of the drama indicates the disruption of such order. It signifies the return to a primordial state of the universe from which a new world and a new political order will emerge. Zeus will not fall, but will take off the mask of the tyrant: his destiny is to become one with the Divine, the universal dispenser of Justice.

Conclusion: tragedy and the cosmos

The shift from a hierarchical to a homogenous distribution of powers is among the essential differences between the cosmos of the epic tradition and the κόσμος of the pre-Socratics: the first is based on Zeus' undisputable supremacy, the latter on the cyclical equilibrium of its conflicting parts[200]. In the *Prometheus Bound*, we have seen, the opposition between the two models is explicit. The clash between Prometheus and Zeus is one which affects the universe in its entirety, and which leads to an irreversible transformation of its inner structure. In fact, Herington was right in observing that in the *Prometheus Bound* we have '*a new and very transitory art form, one that both destroys and constructs the universe*'[201]. To be sure, the primary purpose of the dramatist is not to describe the origin and processes of the cosmos. What we observe onstage, rather, is their symbolic re-enactment. At the heart of our tragedy lies in fact a conflict between two different normative systems, the Titanic (ἰσονομία) and the Olympian one (μοναρχία), but a conflict articulated by the coming-to-be and dissolution of the physical world. Prometheus and Zeus are the craftsmen of this spectacle. Like Love and Strife, the cosmic powers of Empedocles' philosophy, they exert alternately their control on the elemental deities, acting with a complicity which undoes and yet complements each other's work. It is their reciprocal action which makes it possible for a new cosmos to arise.

[200] Cf. Vlastos, 1947; Kahn, 1960:186 ff., 222-230 and Scapin, 2015:86 ff.
[201] Herington, 1970:87.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I endeavoured to investigate the relationship between Attic tragedy and pre-Socratic philosophy. Modern scholarship has often kept these two intellectual practices apart because of an alleged incompatibility between tragic performance and philosophical discourse. We are now in a better position to advocate an alternative approach. One of the essential traits of early Greek culture is the dialogue between μῦθος and λόγος, between mythopoeic and theoretical modes of enunciation. In fact, this very dialogue constitutes the animating force of the *Prometheus Bound*. Our drama consists of a series of vignettes in which Prometheus ponders with different interlocutors the meaning of his situation. He comments upon the myth to deduce its logic, and in so doing he questions its theological and ethical foundations. We have approached the play as a document recording some of the intellectual debates of the day. It has emerged that such debates are not merely recorded, but re-enacted. The *Prometheus Bound* has often been mistaken for a product of late-fifth century Sophistic movements: on the contrary, it represents an invaluable mirror of the dynamic state of early fifth century Greek culture.

As a work of art centred on the enactment of a mythological saga, our drama is largely indebted to the material of the archaic, mostly Hesiodic, poetic tradition. The themes and conceptual issues addressed by the dramatist are in fact the ones on which the author of the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* had already focused. By narrating the vicissitudes of Prometheus, his relationship with Zeus and mankind, Hesiod expressed a specific vision of the world and of human history: the myth was his instrument to rationalise and interpret the surrounding reality. The play's indebtedness to these poems relates not only to specific characters and images, but also to the values and beliefs therein deposited. The challenge, for the tragedian, was to re-elaborate this complex material in accordance with his artistic needs and with the modes of thought of his days. It is the same challenge which the pre-Socratics had to face when adopting old mythemes in order to elaborate new doctrines in and through them. In fact, the Prometheus of our drama resembles the early Greek thinkers in two significant ways. The first concerns the comprehensive aspiration of his knowledge. Prometheus is he who describes, like a theologian or a natural philosopher, the law which steers the Totality of things. His relegation to a distant desert is part of the punishment imposed on him, but might also be understood as a symbol of the epistemic distance between himself and the other characters of the play. The ambiguity and uncertainty pervading the drama are the result of this distance, which opposes the insight of the philosopher to the notions inherited from the archaic tradition. The second essential feature which brings Prometheus close to the pre-Socratics is precisely the critical approach toward these notions. It is on this approach - which aims at unravelling the limits inherent in the old picture of divine and human nature - that the action of the *Prometheus Bound* rests. In the *Theogony*, τέχνη (or μῆτις) – i.e. savoir-faire or ruse – is the mean through which divine history can advance toward its established end. The same is true for the *Prometheus Bound*. Except that τέχνη stands here for a purely epistemological rather than practical asset. It is synonym with knowledge itself, and implies realizing that every event of the world, even Zeus' sovereignty, is produced by the unescapable decree of Necessity.

Bibliography

Adán, Ó. (1999) 'Prometeo, pensador de la "necessidad" en Esquilo'. *Estudios Clasicos* 115: 7-28.

Algra, K. (1999) 'The beginnings of cosmology', in: Long, A.A. (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to early Greek philosophy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 45-65.

Allan, W. (2006) 'Divine justice and cosmic order in early Greek epic'. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 126: 1-35.

- (2005) 'Tragedy and the early Greek philosophical tradition', in: Gregory, J. (ed.). *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Malden, Blackwell Publishing: 71-82.

Bollack, J. (2006) '*Prometheus Bound*: drama and enactment', in: Cairns D.L. and Liapis, V. (eds.). *Dionysalexandros*: *essays on Aeschylus and his fellow tragedians in honour of Alexander F. Garvie*. Swansea, The Classical Press of Wales: 79-89.

- (1965-1969) *Empédocle*. *Edition critique*. 3 vols. Paris, Editions de Minuit.

Cairns, D. (2013) 'Introduction: archaic thought and tragic interpretation', in: Cairns, D. (ed.) *Tragedy and the Archaic Greek Thought*. Swansea, The Classical Press of Wales: ix-liv.

Calabrese de Feo, M.F. (1995) 'La duplice fisionomia di Pandora in Esiodo', in: Arrighetti, G. (ed.) *Poesia Greca* (Ricerche di Filologia Classica, IV). Pisa, Giardini Editori e Stampatori: 101-121.

Capizzi, A. (1982) 'Eschilo e Parmenide. Del circolo poetico siracusano e anche dei compartimenti stagni tra genere letterari'. *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 12: 117-133.

Cerri, G. (1999) *Parmenide*. *Poema sulla natura*. Milano, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli.

- (1998) 'L'ideologia arcaica dei quattro elementi da Omero ai presocratici'. *AION*, *Sez. filol.-lett.*, 20: 5-58.
- (1975) *Il linguaggio politico nel Prometeo di Eschilo. Saggio di semantica.* Roma, Edizioni dell'Ateneo.

Conacher, D.J. (1980) *Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound*. *A literary commentary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

Coxon, A.H. (2009) *The fragments of Parmenides*. Las Vegas – Zurich – Athens, Parmenides Publishing.

Detienne, M. and Vernant, J.P. (1974) *Les ruses de l'intelligence.* Paris, Flammarion.

Diano, C. and Serra, G. (2001) *Eraclito, I frammenti e le testimonianze*. Milano, Mondadori Editore.

Dodds, E.R. (1973a) 'The ancient concept of progress', in: *The ancient concept of progress and other essays on Greek literature and belief*. Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1-25.

Fränkel, H. (1974) 'Xenophanes' empiricism and his critique of knowledge', in: Mourelatos, A.P.D. *The pre-Socratics*. *A collection of critical essays*. Princeton, Princeton University Press: 118-134.

Griffith, M. (2009) 'The poetry of Aeschylus (in its traditional context)', in: Jouanna, J., Montanari, F. and Hernández, A.P. (eds.) (2009) *Eschyle à l'aube du théâtre occidental*. Vandœuvres-Genève, Fondation Hardt: 1-55.

- (1983) *Aeschylus*. *Prometheus Bound*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- (1978) 'Aeschylus, Sicily and Prometheus', in Dawe, R.D., Diggle, J. and Easterling, P.E. (eds). *Dionysiaca: nine studies in Greek poetry by former pupils, Presented to Denis Page on his seventieth birthday*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 105-139.
- (1977) *The authenticity of 'Prometheus Bound'*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Groeneboom, P. (1928) *Aeschylus' Prometheus*. Groningen – Den Haag, Wolters.

Hall, E. (2010) *Greek Tragedy*: *suffering under the sun*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Herington, C.J. (1972) *The older scholia on the Prometheus Bound*. Leiden, Brill.

- (1970) *The author of the Prometheus Bound*. Austin-London, University of Texas Press.
- (1963) 'A study in the Prometheia. Part I. The elements in the trilogy'. *Phoenix* 17 (3): 180-197.

Irby-Massie, G.L. (2008) 'Prometheus Bound and contemporary trends in Greek natural philosophy'. *Greek, Roman and Byzantine studies* 48 (2): 133-57.

Iribarren, L. (2017) *Fabriquer le monde: technique et cosmogonie dans la poésie grecque archaïque*. Paris, Classiques Garnier.

Judet de La Combe, P. (2010) *Les tragédies Grecques sont-elles tragiques?* Montrouge Cedex, Bayard.

- (1996) 'La dernière ruse: Pandore dans la *Théogonie*', in: Blaise, F., Judet de La Combe, P. and Rousseau, P. *Le métier du mythe*. *Lectures d'Hésiode*. Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires de Septentrion : 263-299.

Kahn, C.H. (1981) 'The origins of social contract theory', in: Kerferd, G. (ed.) *The Sophists and their legacy*. Wiesbaden, Steiner: 92-108.

- (1979) *The art and thought of Heraclitus*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- (1960) *Anaximander and the origins of Greek cosmology*. New York, Columbia University Press.

Laks, A. and Most, G.W. (eds.) (2016) *Early Greek Philosophy*. 9 vols. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press.

Lesher, J.H. (2006) 'Early interest in knowledge' in: Long, A.A. (ed.) (2007) *The Cambridge companion to early Greek philosophy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 225-249.

- (1992) *Xenophanes of Colophon*. *Fragments, a text and translation with commentary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

Lloyd-Jones, H. (2003) 'Zeus, Prometheus, and Greek ethics'. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 101: 49-72.

- (1971) *The Justice of Zeus*. Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Morgan, K.A. (2006) *Myth and philosophy from the pre-Socratics to Plato*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Most, G. (2007) 'ἄλλος δ'ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται. Pre-Socratic philosophy and traditional Greek epic', in: A. Bierl, R. Lammle and K. Wesselmann (eds.) *Literatur und Religion* I, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter: 271-302.

- (2006) *Hesiod*. *Theogony*. *Works and Days*. *Testimonia*. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press.

Reinhardt, K. (1991) *Eschyle*. *Euripide* (fr. trans.). Paris, Gallimard.

Romilly, J. de (1968) *Time in Greek tragedy*. Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press.

Rösler, W. (1970) *Reflexe vorsokratischen Denkens bei Aischylos.* Meisenheim an Glan, Anton Hain.

Saïd, S. (1985) *Sophiste et tyran ou le problème du Prométhée enchainé*. Paris, Klincksieck.

- (1978) *La faute tragique*. Paris, Maspero.

Sassi, M.M. (2006) 'Anassimandro e la scrittura della legge cosmica', in: Sassi, M.M. (ed.) *La costruzione del discorso filosofico nell'età dei Presocratici*. Pisa, Edizioni della Normale: 3-26.

Scapin, N. (2015) '*The Flower of Suffering*'. *A study of Aeschylus'* Oresteia *in the light of pre-Socratic ideas*. St Andrews.

Seaford, R. (2012) 'Aeschylus and Herakleitos', in: *Cosmology and the Polis*: *the social construction of space and time in the tragedies of Aeschylus*. Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press: 240-257.

- (1986) 'Immortality, Salvation and the Elements'. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90: 1-26.

Sluiter, I. (2017) 'Anchoring innovation: a classical research agenda', *European Review* 25 (1): 20-38.

Solmsen, F. (1949) *Hesiod and Aeschylus*. Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press.

Strauss Clay, J. (2003) *Hesiod's cosmos*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Vernant, J.-P. (1985) 'Prométhée et la fonction technique', in: *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*. Paris, Maspero: 263-273.

- (1974) 'Le mythe Prométhéen chez Hésiode', in: *Mythe et société en Grèce Ancienne*. Paris, Maspero: 177-194.

Vernant, J.-P. and Vidal-Naquet, P. (1972-1986) *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce Ancienne*. 2 vols. Paris, Maspero.

Vlastos, G. (1952) 'Theology and philosophy in early Greek thought'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (7): 97-123.

- (1947) 'Equality and Justice in early Greek cosmologies'. *Classical Philology* 42 (3): 156-178.

West, M. L. (1979) 'The Prometheus trilogy'. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 99: 130-148.

- (1978) *Hesiod*: *Works and Days*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- (1966) *Hesiod*: *Theogony*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.