

NATURE AND CULTURAL PROGRESS IN *PROMETHEUS BOUND*

An ecocritical analysis of the role of the non-human world in relation to the human condition

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INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries, *Prometheus Bound* has sparked the interest of many readers due to its fundamental concern with the origins of human culture and the progress of humanity towards civilization. The protagonist Prometheus is famously punished by Zeus for stealing the divine element fire and bringing it to mankind, which enabled humans to develop all sorts of tools and technologies in order to make cultural advancements. Prometheus taught mankind the skills of housebuilding, agriculture, medicine, seafaring, divination and so on. In a word: *πάσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως*, ‘all the skills that mortals have come from Prometheus’, as he himself claims in a speech at the heart of the play.¹

Prometheus Bound thereby reflects upon man’s unique position in the world: on the one hand human beings have a share in the divine, being gifted with intellectual and technological capacities to control their environment. On the other, human existence is firmly rooted in the natural realm because human beings are mortal, like all other natural beings. Unquestionably, the presence of nature is central to our sense of being human.² The play offers unique insights in this complex relationship between the human and non-human world. As Oudemans and Lardinois phrase it: the “the interconnectedness of nature and civilization becomes tragically ambiguous when we are confronted with tragic heroes”.³ Prometheus, a culture-hero chained to a cliff in the remote regions of Scythia, suffering from the forces of nature, provides an outstanding example of this tension. Yet the prominent presence of the non-human world in this tragedy has thus far not received proper scholarly attention in its own right. As I will argue, nature does far more than providing only the background to cultural processes.⁴ This thesis therefore considers nature as an important agent in the play and explores the various ‘roles’ of nature, by raising the central question: *how can a re-evaluation of the roles of the non-human world in Prometheus Bound shed new light on the conflict between Prometheus and Zeus and the future of humanity?*

After a summary of the plot of the tragedy and an overview of the scholarly debate, I will clarify the underlying theoretical framework of my approach to *Prometheus Bound*. Finally, I provide an outline of the following chapters.

¹ A. *Pr.* 506. Greek citations from *Prometheus Bound* (henceforth abbreviated as *Pr.* in accordance with the LSJ) follow the Teubner edition by West 1990a. Translations of *Pr.* are by Sommerstein 2008a, with adaptations indicated.

² Schliephake 2017, 2.

³ Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 92.

⁴ Schliephake 2017, 1.

Synopsis of the play

The play opens by depicting how Zeus' servants, Might (Κράτος) and Violence (Βία) chain Prometheus to the rocks in Scythia, a region far away from human civilization. In this play, Zeus is characterized as a tyrannical and impetuous despot, who had the intention to destroy the human species. Out of concern for the future of humanity Prometheus decided to steal fire from the gods and give it to mankind. This would, he believed, secure their survival, for the control of fire enabled mankind to develop all sorts of new skills. However, for this act against the will of Zeus, Prometheus was severely punished.

After the opening scene, the enchained Prometheus laments to nature about his undeserved suffering, with the words: "O bright sky, and swift-winged winds, and river-springs, and countless twinkling waves of the sea, and earth mother of all, and the all-seeing circle of the sun, behold what I as a god am suffering at the hands of gods".⁵ He begs the natural world to have pity for his fate. Then, the chorus of daughters of Oceanus enter and sympathize with him. Despite his suffering, Prometheus tells them he holds hope, because his mother Themis gave him the talent to foresee the future. He knows that eventually he will be released, but not without enduring Zeus' tyranny for generations. Next, Oceanus comes by to offer help. He suggests Prometheus should be moderate and give in to Zeus' will. Prometheus, however, remains stubborn and disregards his piece of advice. Instead, Prometheus emphasizes his role as a heroic saviour of humanity and boasts about his numerous benefactions to mankind. This speech is known as the 'catalogue of inventions' and describes how from a bestial way of life, mankind was able to make all sorts of material and technological advancements.

However, the play does not straight-forwardly celebrate human achievements, but also draws attention to the limits of Promethean technological insight. Under Zeus' malevolent reign, humans are oppressed by natural forces and society cannot flourish. This is exemplified by Io, the only human being on stage. Io had been transformed into a cow because of Zeus' lust and Hera's jealousy. In a desperate state of mind she encounters Prometheus and asks him to tell her about her future journeys. He predicts long wanderings through an uncivilized world, until she will eventually be restored to her human shape. In the last episode, Prometheus is again consulted for his prophetic skills, this time by Hermes, a messenger from Zeus. Prometheus has secret knowledge of a union that will threaten the reign of Zeus. But when Hermes informs about the name of the woman in question, Prometheus refuses to answer. Abruptly, the tragedy ends with a startling natural catastrophe.

⁵ A. Pr. 88-92: ὦ διος αἰθῆρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί / ποταμῶν τε πηγαὶ ποντίων τε κυμάτων / ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα παμμήτωρ τε γῆ, / καὶ τὸν πανόπτῃν κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ· / ἴδεσθέ μ' οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός, translation adapted.

Status of the scholarly debate

This tragedy has evoked the interest of classical scholars throughout the ages for numerous reasons. One of the main issues is the authenticity of the drama and its possible place within a trilogy. In contrast to ancient sources, in modern scholarship, the authorship and date of *Prometheus Bound* have become a matter of debate.⁶ The unusual depiction of Zeus as a tyrant,⁷ stylometric peculiarities,⁸ and signs of considerable influence of the sophistic movement⁹ have given rise to serious doubts on the authenticity. Sommerstein recently stated that “at present it would probably be true to say that a majority of scholars would regard it as being by a slightly later hand”.¹⁰ Still, many remain in favour of the authenticity.¹¹ In my view, no decisive judgement on the authenticity can be reached based on the present evidence. Fortunately, the argument of this thesis does not hinge on the authorship by Aeschylus, since the role of nature can be studied independently. Below I will refer to the poet as Aeschylus, without implying a position in the debate.

Hand in hand with the question of authenticity, there is scholarly discussion concerning the date of production.¹² For the present analysis, it is sufficient to assume that it was written in the middle of the 5th century BC, by a dramatist who was well acquainted with philosophical themes discussed in the intellectual circles of his

⁶ For an overview of the debate, see among others, Conacher 1980, 142-174; Griffith 1983, 31-35; Lloyd-Jones 2003, 52-54; Irby-Massie 2008, 135-138; Sommerstein 2008a, 432-434; Sommerstein 2010, 228-234; Ruffel 2012, 13-18.

⁷ The uncommon characterization of Zeus, known as the ‘Zeus problem’ (Picariello & Saxonhouse 2015, 277-278), was advanced as a reason to doubt the authenticity by Schmid 1929. Already before, Rossbach & Westphal 1856 called the Aeschylean authorship of *Pr.* into question. Manousakis 2017 directs attention to doubt expressed by the Byzantine Michael Psellos as early as the 11th century AD.

⁸ Most importantly the thorough analysis by Griffith 1977 (and 1984 on vocabulary). However, stylometric analysis can only provide limited evidence, as Irby-Massie 2008, 136 n.13 explains: “it is an extraordinary thing to take as statistical proof stylometric comparisons of seven extant tragedies form a corpus which had originally contained up to ninety plays”.

⁹ Sommerstein 2002, 36 clarifies that Aeschylean authorship is doubted “because the intellectual concerns of the play seem closer to those of the 430s than those of Aeschylus’ lifetime”. For Prometheus’ sophistic traits, see most strongly Schmid 1929 and Marzullo 1993. Bees 1993, however, argues we should not overstate the possible influence of sophistic debates because, for instance, in Herodotus and Sophocles similar themes are addressed. Saïd 1985 too denies any signs of sophistic rationalistic optimism and places the play at the end of archaic thought (cf. Segal 1963, 33).

¹⁰ Sommerstein 2008a, 433. West 1979 identifies Aeschylus’ son Euphorion as the author, who could have passed it off as written by his father, which would explain the lack of doubt in ancient sources. Others either doubting or arguing against authenticity include Page 1972; Bees 1993; Cairns 2013; Glauthier 2018, 257 n.11.

¹¹ In favour of Aeschylean authorship are, for instance, Groeneboom 1928; Reinhardt 1949; Herington 1970; Conacher 1980; Saïd 1985; Pattoni 1987; Podlecki 2005.

¹² The reference to the eruption of the Aetna in 479 BC in verses 363-372 is commonly taken as a *terminus post quem*. Furthermore, *Pr.* was probably written later than the *Suppliants* because at *Pr.* 857 a reference to *Supp.* 223-224 can be traced (Sommerstein 2008a, 433). Based on mockery in Athenian comedy (in the *Ploutoi* by Cratinus in 429 BC and in several comedies by Aristophanes, on which see Flintoff 1983), the latest possible date of production is 430 BC. Flintoff 1986 adheres to a very early date, even doubting 479 BC as a *terminus post quem* (91). Tsantsanoglou 2020 dates the play at 472 BC, contemporary with the *Persae*, based on a reference in Sophocles’ *Inachos* fr. 269c.16024. Sutton 1983 proposes a performance date between 460-450 BC, which Maehler 2000, based on visual representations of Io, supports; West 1979, esp. 138 and 146-148 argues for 440 BC or shortly after.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the play was performed during one of Aeschylus’ visits to Sicily (for instance: Focke 1930; Méautis 1960; Herington 1967 and 1970). However, this ‘Sicilian interpretation’ no longer finds support in scholarship (see for arguments *contra* Griffith 1978).

day. It is therefore a crucial source to improve our understanding of the perceived relation between humankind and the non-human world at that time.

Apart from *Prometheus Bound*, the titles of two other tragedies on Prometheus are transmitted: *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*. Much attention has been given to reconstructions of the trilogy as a whole and the possible order of the individual plays.¹³ The most likely order, in my view, is that Prometheus' theft of fire from the gods (the ἀμαρτία, or tragic wrongdoing) is narrated in *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*, followed by the punishment in *Prometheus Bound*, and finally the release, including the killing of the eagle by Heracles and a reconciliation with Zeus, in *Prometheus Unbound*. The last play may have ended with an aetiology of cult festivities for Prometheus in Athens.¹⁴ Although many interpretations of *Prometheus Bound* depend on speculative reconstructions of the contents of the rest of the trilogy, this kind of circularity is avoided here. Moreover, caution remains necessary when assessing the moral undertones apparent in the tragedy, without knowing how the other two plays may have put this into perspective.

Furthermore, scholars have traditionally approached *Prometheus Bound* as a 'reworking' of the earlier version of the Prometheus-myth in Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* and the intertextual links between these texts have been studied extensively.¹⁵ However, the widespread popularity of the Prometheus-myth indicates that multiple versions may have existed. Thus, we need not assume that Hesiod provided the single standard account from which all later authors necessarily departed.¹⁶ Aeschylus certainly was well acquainted with the Hesiodic version, but differences in the *Prometheus Bound* should not immediately be considered as deliberate changes to his predecessor. Therefore, here I refrain from comparison with the Hesiodic 'model' and rather treat the story of *Prometheus Bound* in its own right.

In this tragedy the antagonism between Zeus and Prometheus is central. Unsurprisingly, ample research has focused on the ambivalent roles of the main characters. The exceptional depiction of Zeus as a harsh

¹³ For the fragments, see Radt 1985, 302-329 (*TrGF* Vol. III); Sommerstein 2008b, 194-221; Griffith 1983, 283-305.

¹⁴ This outline follows West 1979, 142-146 and Griffith 1983, 283. The ending would provide a parallel to the aetiology of the court of the Areopagus at the end of the *Oresteia* (A. *Eum.* 778-1047), see Hall 2010, 224-227 and Griffith 1983, 283 n.6. However, according to some, we cannot take this reconstruction of the trilogy for granted. Mainly because the play *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* could be identical to a satyr-play titled *Prometheus the Fire-Kindler*, performed together with the *Persians* in 472 BC (Brown 1990 and Sommerstein 2008a, 439), as the resemblance of name and subject suggests. However, the similarity of the titles need not be decisive, as explained by Taplin 1975, who describes how such epiclesis were invented and attributed by Alexandrian scholars. Murray 1940, 88 argued that *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* was the last play rather than the first (see *contra* Sommerstein 2008b, 212). Lloyd-Jones 1983, 101-102 tentatively identifies the fragmentary tragedy *Women of Aetna* as the third play of the sequence (see also Lloyd-Jones 2003, 68-69). Bees 1993 argues that *Prometheus Bound* was a so-called 'monodrama' responding to an earlier *Prometheus Unbound*. See too Yoon 2016, arguing that *Pr.* was an independent play.

¹⁵ On Hesiod and *Pr.*, see for instance Vandvik 1943; Solmson 1949; Griffith 1983 too adopts this perspective; Ruffel 2012, 64-65 even speaks of "the obvious rewriting of Hesiod".

¹⁶ The myth of Prometheus was treated by Sappho, as Servius, the 4th century AD commentator to Virgil, indicates in his commentary to V. *Ecl.* 6.42 (= Sappho fr. 207). Moreover, we have plenty of material evidence from the 6th to 5th century BC in the form of vase-paintings which attests that the story was well-known (see esp. De Vries 1993; Williams 2008).

tyrannical ruler has led many interpreters to believe that his brutal attitude must have changed at some point in the trilogy, since otherwise the tragedy's theology would have clashed with contemporary religious beliefs of the audience.¹⁷ This has become known as an 'evolutionary theory' of Zeus.¹⁸ Explanations of the character of Prometheus vary from a prototypical tragic hero, or a symbol for human reason, to an arrogant sophistic charlatan.¹⁹ Recently, the significance of Io's role both as a victim of divine rage and the future ancestress of the Greeks, which had long been marginalized, found new appreciation.²⁰ In most studies, a deeper understanding of the roles of Zeus, Prometheus, and Io has been considered the key to resolving the play's ambiguous views on power and knowledge, tyranny and sophistry, on natural forces and human progress. And indeed, Vidal-Naquet adequately phrases it when stating that "the questions that this play raises – questions concerning the relations between power and knowledge and between the political and the technological functions – are ones that never cease to be problematic".²¹ However, scholarly approaches engaging with the theological, political, and ethical implications of the tragedy are limited, in the sense that they mostly adopt an anthropocentric viewpoint.²² In other words, most interpretations manifest an exclusively human-centred interest in this tragedy.

A striking yet often underestimated feature of this tragedy is the prominent role of nature, or the 'non-human world'. Arguably, in no other tragedy, the relation of human beings to their natural environment is so forcefully dramatized.²³ As the above cited lamentation of Prometheus to nature illustrates, the natural world is of crucial importance in *Prometheus Bound*. Winnington-Ingram wrote: "no play has broader horizons. The whole world is embraced".²⁴ Indeed, the remote natural setting in Scythia, the geographical descriptions of Io's journey, the prominence of all four natural elements (fire, water, earth and sky), the relationship between

¹⁷ For instance Murray 1940, 110: "The world power that he [i.e. Aeschylus] calls Zeus learns and grows".

¹⁸ The term 'evolutionary theory of Zeus' comes from Golden 1962, 21, who argues against it. Lloyd-Jones 1956 holds that Zeus' depiction was in line with archaic theology and that the play does not require a change of character. On the notion that Zeus evolves over time, see furthermore Dodds 1973, 40-44; Saïd 1985, 326-344; Swanson 1995, 217; Podlecki 2005, 34-37. According to White 2001, Zeus was just all along. For the theology of *Pr.*, see Reinhardt 1949; Yu 1971; Rader 2013.

¹⁹ His ambiguous role is summarized by Griffith 1983, 9: "he arouses in his friends, as in the audience, mixed emotions of revulsion and sympathy, horror and admiration". On Prometheus self-representation as the inventor of all arts Conacher 1977. On Prometheus' arrogance and sophistic traits, see Podlecki 2005, 3. Some even tried to identify Prometheus with the sophist Protagoras, as for instance Davison 1949. The idea that perhaps the audience ought not to fully sympathize with Prometheus is gaining popularity, as White 2001; Rader 2013; and Glauthier 2018 argue.

²⁰ As testified by Adams 1933, 99: "she is not an agent but an instrument". Swanson 1995, 220 comments on this bias in research: "none of the theories explaining the purpose of Io gives her philosophically political weight independent of Prometheus". Recently, see Green 2015 on the political role of Io; Gagarin 2014 on the role of women in *Pr.* regarding the absence of Pandora, who in Hesiod formed the source of misery for man; Gakopoulou 2020 on Io from the perspective of gender theory. For a more extensive overview of literature on Io, see below page 28-29 with notes 131-135.

²¹ Vernant & Vidal-Naquet 1996, 272.

²² Anthropocentrism is here understood as the view that the interests of humans are of higher priority than those of nonhumans (Buell 2005, 134; Marland 2013, 860).

²³ However, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* too is a fine example of a tragedy in which nature and the human condition are of central importance (cf. Segal 1963, 38-39; Segal 1981, 292-361; Rose 1976; Roy 1996, 102).

²⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1985, 289.

humans and animals, and even natural disasters, such as volcanic eruptions, whirlwinds, and earthquakes, have a large share in the development of the plot. This gives rise to questions concerning the significance of this omnipresent natural world in a play that deals with the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus and the cultural progress of humanity.

Up to now, the role of nature in *Prometheus Bound* has mostly been interpreted as being in line with a new scientific and materialistic interest in the natural world in 5th-century BC natural philosophy.²⁵ As a result, scholarship concentrated on questions regarding the tragedian's sources: what intellectual debate of natural philosophers and/or Sophists did the author take part in?²⁶ How does his treatment of natural elements reflect knowledge of Presocratic theories? To what extent can underlying philosophical ideas on cosmology and epistemology be traced in the drama? Such approaches first and foremost aim to better understand contemporary intellectual discourses about the natural world. In this way, scholars took no real interest in the agency of nature *within* the tragedy itself.

At most, the natural world is simply taken as a foil for civilization. Thereby, scholarship bought into traditional dualistic interpretations of civilization versus wilderness, of culture versus nature, and of man versus animal. However, this dichotomy shall prove be untenable as the tragedy conveys a multi-layered perception of the relationship between the divine, human, and non-human. Therefore, I am convinced that the role of the non-human world both as a reflection upon the human condition and as a crucial agent in the drama has not yet been properly understood. Hence, it is important to shift the scholarly focus to the complex dynamics of the interrelations between the divine, the human, and the non-human world. In other words, it is time that this tragedy is studied from a so-called 'earth-centred' perspective.

Theoretical framework: ecocriticism

The relevance of this focus on the non-human world, apart from the remarkable lack of attention for nature as an important agent in *Prometheus Bound* in scholarship thus far, lies in the conviction that ancient texts can put modern views on the relationship between humanity and nature into perspective. This theoretical assumption is largely informed by the upcoming interdisciplinary field of 'ecocriticism' or 'environmental

²⁵ See Ruffel 2012, 65-71.

²⁶ On the role of the elements and presocratic influence: Adams 1933, who connects the elemental setting with a "throwback to magic ritual" (100); Gladigow 1962, on Heraclitean parallels; Herington 1963, who analysed the personifications of the elements in order to reconstruct the course of the trilogy and connects this with Empedoclean theory (*contra* Conacher 1980, 116-119); Rösler 1970 on connections with esp. Xenophanes and Anaxagoras; O'Brien 1985; Irby-Massie 2008; Bettegazzi 2017. See Glauthier 2018 on the author's display of knowledge of contemporary volcanic discourse. See also Seaford 1986, arguing that the *Pr.* has more in common with mystic doctrines than natural philosophy (and Seaford 2012, 276 and 283). What many of these approaches have in common, is that they try to fit natural phenomena in the play into a ready-made scheme, provided by presocratic predecessors, and thereby become insensitive to the play's reflection on the diversity of roles of the non-human world.

humanities'. Though precise definitions are still hotly debated, the fundamental premise of ecocriticism, in the words of Glotfelty, is "that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture".²⁷ At the heart of this academic approach lies the conviction that the analysis of the connections between literature and the physical environment is important in understanding contemporary ecological biases – the ways in which we perceive our relationship to nature.²⁸

In the 21st century, humanity has come to regard nature primarily as a resource for human interests. As a result, we are witness to worldwide global warming, ecological disturbance, large-scale pollution, mass extinction of species and increasing occurrence of environmental catastrophes. For this reason, the era we live in is sometimes informally called the 'Anthropocene', which indicates that in this period human behaviour has come to change life on earth drastically.²⁹ By considering ourselves as the species that stands 'above nature' we have come to destruct the very world we are part of. The current ecological and environmental challenges are so urgent as to necessitate a redirection in literary studies as well; as Love states: "the most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world".³⁰ With this thesis, I aim to offer a contribution to this undertaking: humanities and sciences should maintain a conversation about our planet.

In several 'waves', ecocriticism has since the 1960's developed into a well-established academic field.³¹ However, this literary approach has only relatively recently been adopted in classical scholarship, perhaps because "classic disciplines are suspicious of new approaches and will dismiss them as flimsy".³² A productive dialogue between ecocritical theory and the classical tradition was first established by Schliephake, showing the promising potential of ecocritical approaches to ancient literature.³³ He emphasizes the importance of

²⁷ Glotfelty & Fromm 1996, xix.

²⁸ Key publications in the field of ecocriticism include Meeker 1972; Buell 1995; Glotfelty & Fromm 1996; Plumwood 2002; Buell 2005; Slovic 2010; Zapf 2016. For a useful overview of the history of this literary discipline, see Marland 2013.

²⁹ See Oppermann & Iovino 2017; Dürbeck 2019, 271.

³⁰ Love 1990, 213. Note that much ecocritical research rest on an explicit commitment to political activism. In line with this view ecologists, politicians and academics should work together in order to face current ecological challenges.

³¹ Buell 2005, 17, who originally coined the metaphor of waves, believes the metaphor of a 'palimpsest' is more apt to describe how different branches of ecocriticism build upon earlier concepts and approaches.

³² Howarth 1996, 77. This late adoption of ecocritical terminology can partly be attributed to a traditional interest in human relationships to nature in the field of Classics, especially in natural philosophy or pastoral literature, concepts like 'the elements', the distinction between *nomos* and *physis*, or *hybris* as a transgression against (divine) nature have always been prominent. Even so, explicit ecocritical readings of *Prometheus Bound* have not yet been published and as the value of an ecocritical approach lies first and foremost in the shift from an anthropocentric interest, toward a recognition of the 'human' as being part of nature, and consequently, nature as an important object of analysis in its own right, there is ample room to shed new light on the role of nature in *Prometheus Bound* by adopting an ecocritical approach.

³³ Schliephake 2017. Other examples of recent interest in 'ecology in classics' include Saunders 2008 on pastoral literature; Zekavat 2014 on ecocriticism and the invention of fire in Greek and Persian myth; Sluiter & McNery 2016 on the value of landscapes; Codovana & Chiai 2017 on environmental pollution in Antiquity; Chemchuru 2017 on ancient environmental

considering nature as an active partaker in ancient texts: “instead of imposing modern conceptions of ecology all too uncritically on ancient thought, it would be worthwhile to reread the ancient texts from a perspective that re-evaluates the presence of the non-human as an *actant* in its own right”, which is precisely the point of view adopted in this thesis.³⁴

Before turning to the key concepts from ecocriticism that will be used, it is important to clarify what I take ‘nature’ to mean. I understand ‘nature’, or the ‘non-human-world’ in a wide-ranging sense. First, nature has a spatial connotation. One can think of landscapes such as the ocean, rivers, caves or mountains. Moreover, the concept of nature includes the natural elements, such as fire, water, earth and the skies, as well as weather phenomena and natural disasters. Note that in this tragedy, natural aspects are frequently personified, for instance by the characters of Oceanus (water) and Gaia (earth). In addition, the concept of ‘nature’ includes non-human animals, both other living species and fantastic animals. Moreover, nature can be understood in a temporal sense: all things natural undergo a process of birth, growth and decay. As such nature is continuously in flux. This broad take on the concept of nature is in line with the idea of ‘multinaturalism’, which argues, as opposed to mononaturalism (the conception that nature is uniform), that in order to overcome the current distorted relationship to nature, it is essential to recognize the variety and diversity in nature, and thereby to acknowledge its intrinsic value.³⁵

In ecocritical approaches to literature different views on the roots of current ecological destruction are present. An important distinction should be made between ‘deep ecology’ and ‘social ecology’. ‘**Deep ecology**’ is most prominent in the environmental philosophy of Naess, who emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings.³⁶ Deep ecologists believe that human-centeredness is the cause of current environmental decline. Deep ecology instead proposes a holistic worldview that assumes a thorough identification of the human and the non-human. This calls for a fundamental reconsideration of our hierarchical relation to nature and a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism: human interests should no longer be considered superior to those of other living beings. Instead, humanity has a moral responsibility to make a symbiosis of all life-forms possible.³⁷

‘**Dark ecology**’, a concept introduced by the ecocritical scholar Morton, follows deep ecology in its assumption that human life is inextricably connected to the natural world. However, dark ecology underscores the negative implications of this entanglement of the categories of human and non-human: it stresses the struggles of human interaction with the environment.³⁸ A point clarified by Brockliss: “our interactions with

ethics; Brockliss 2018 on ‘dark ecology’ in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*; Martelli 2020 on ‘naturecultures’ in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

³⁴ Schliephake 2017, 9 (my emphasis).

³⁵ Schliephake 2017, x; Rigby 2002, 126.

³⁶ Naess 1973 and 2002.

³⁷ Marland 2013, 856.

³⁸ Morton 2016.

such [i.e. difficult] environments disrupt the comfortable illusion that we are the masters of our surroundings”.³⁹ As a consequence, there is a pessimistic aesthetic to mankind’s ‘naturalness’.

The type of ecological thought advanced by deep ecologists is often contrasted with ‘**social ecology**’: the conviction that our hierarchical attitude towards nature stems from domination of humans among one another.⁴⁰ According to social ecologists, literary studies can help to improve our “understanding of the way in which nature has been constructed and deployed to reinforce dominant ideologies of gender, class and race”.⁴¹ As a result, literary reflections on nature can be part of a discourse of ‘othering’ in order to establish supremacy of one group over others.

An important branch within social ecology is ‘**ecofeminism**’. Ecofeminism has been defined by Gaard as follows: “ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature”.⁴² Both the oppression of nature and the oppression of women can function as a tool to gain or demonstrate power. According to Gruen, “the categories “women” and “animal” serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive “other” (...) has sustained human male dominance”.⁴³ For instance, in antiquity too, fertile women were often compared to an arable field.⁴⁴ The link between harassment of women and the earth can also be detected in the body of both as the “site of shared damage”.⁴⁵ Taken together, ecofeminism investigates and challenges dualistic and hierarchic notions of male-culture versus female-nature.

Beyond deep ecology, dark ecology and social ecology, ecocriticism turned its direction to posthumanism; the idea of ‘the human’ as a construct opened the way for reconsidering humanity in relation to nature and technology.⁴⁶ Thus, the boundaries between man, animal and machine were blurred, as were the concepts of nature and culture. Ecocritical scholars like Haraway and Latour argue we should not speak of nature and culture as opposites, but rather emphasize their inseparability by introducing the term ‘**natureculture**’, which considers the relationship between humans and the non-human environment a “circulating system”.⁴⁷

³⁹ Brockliss 2018, 1.

⁴⁰ Bookchin was the first to draw attention to connection between social issues and environmental destruction by human domination (Bookchin 1982, 1995).

⁴¹ Marland 2013, 852. See also Rigby 2002, 136.

⁴² Gaard 1993, 1. See also Plumwood 1993.

⁴³ Gruen 1993, 61.

⁴⁴ Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 91.

⁴⁵ Marland 2013, 852.

⁴⁶ On so-called ‘material ecocriticism’ and the interrelations between matter, humans and texts, see Iovino 2012.

⁴⁷ Oppermann & Iovino 2012, 545. The concept of ‘natureculture’ was introduced by ecofeminist scholar Haraway 2003, 5-6, 25-32 and elaborated by, among others, Latour 2017. Merrick 2017, 103 usefully explains the concept as follows: “Haraway uses naturecultures to foreground the impossibility of thinking of nature, realism or ‘reality’ in isolation. From this perspective, everything is a natural-technical system; nothing can be (or ever was) a separate, pristine ‘nature’ or ‘culture’”.

This includes the idea that nature and matter have agency, for instance in the form of a creative power. The notion that “the space of agency is not restricted to the possibilities for human action”, i.e. that (natural) ‘things’ are capable of meaning-making too, is a central assumption of ‘**ecosemiotics**’.⁴⁸

Here, I will not commit to one single ecocritical subdivision. Instead, I will demonstrate that the variety of ecological perspectives allows us to gain new insight in the complicated relationship between the human and non-human world in *Prometheus Bound*.

Roles of nature

In this thesis, I adhere to the view that “other-than-human entities are no longer the passive recipients of human interventions and projections, but active participants in the formation and transformation of human culture and society”.⁴⁹ I subscribe to a broad notion of agency. This makes it possible to explore the diverse roles attributed to nature in this tragedy. The following provides a general overview of the ‘roles of nature’ to which I draw attention in this thesis.⁵⁰

First of all, nature is the place of all habitation. It is home to humans and animals alike. Mankind literally owes its life to the crops of the earth and springs of water. Thus, nature is a **valuable resource**. Not for nothing, nature is often referred to as ‘mother earth’.⁵¹ The metaphor of motherhood is understandable, considering the lifegiving qualities of the earth. This role of nature is in line with views from ‘deep ecology’, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life-forms.

Along this line of reasoning, nature need not be opposed to culture, but can actively contribute to generating culture, by acting as a **guide or teacher**. Nature can inspire cultural advancement and technological inventions. Democritus, for instance, shows in his history of civilization how human beings learned many skills from nature: the skill of weaving through imitation of a spider, housebuilding from the swallow, and singing from birds.⁵² Mankind is thus able to acquire skills or create new tools by investigation of and cooperation with nature. This role of nature challenges the binary opposition between nature and culture, because according to this scenario, nature generates culture and there is a continuity rather than a radical break. The concept of ‘naturecultures’ fits well with the role of nature as a guide or inspiration: culture is itself rooted in nature and there can be a productive and continuous interaction between humans and their environment. The non-human

⁴⁸ Barad 2007, 178; Rigby 2002, 138 explains: “contemporary biosemioticians (...) also testify to the abundance of signifying systems in the natural world”,

⁴⁹ Rigby 2002, 129.

⁵⁰ I formulated this as a concise set of ‘parameters’ of my research, not a comprehensive list of conceptions of nature in ancient Greek thought.

⁵¹ In the play, the goddess Gaia figures both as mother earth and, somewhat unusually, as Prometheus’ mother, identical with Themis, the embodiment of order, law and justice (Cf. *A. Pr.* 209-210). On her role, see below pages 51-52.

⁵² Democritus (D203 = DK B154, transmitted in *Plu. Soll. Anim.* 20 947A).

world is full of signs (as argued in ‘ecosemiotics’), and through this ability of meaning-making, nature has important agency in the development of culture.

However, there is an ambiguity in the abovementioned human conceptualisation of nature as a resource, since gratefulness to nature for sustaining all life of earth frequently makes place for a violent and exploitative attitude towards nature’s resources. Often, nature is perceived merely instrumentally, and the earth and non-human species are utilized for human profit. The use of the non-human world becomes an important factor in the establishment and display of power hierarchies. Humans adopt an aggressive attitude towards their environment and aim to be in full control of the non-human world, forgetting that they are part of nature themselves. As a consequence, nature suffers under human domination. Thus, nature can also take the role of **the oppressed**. An example of nature suffering under mankind’s violent attitude is provided by the first stasimon of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, where the human is said to aggressively ‘exhaust’ the earth (ἀποτρύεται, *S. Ant.* 339) and forcefully dominates over other species with his inventions.⁵³ The role of nature as the oppressed is connected to views from ‘social ecology’.

The fourth role I distinguish is nature as **a threat** to human survival. Nature has a frightening and dangerous potential. For instance, because humans run the risk of being attacked by other animals. Moreover, humans are exposed to extreme cold, heat, and other weather phenomena. In other words, nature can be a violent ‘enemy’ to humanity. It is important to note that nature need not be inherently threatening. Rather, the hostile features of nature are often employed as a tool by malevolent deities to punish mankind. One can think of Zeus’ frightening thunderbolt, or storms at sea or plagues sent by deities. The perception of nature as a threat is in line with ‘dark ecology’, which emphasises the human struggle in engaging with harsh environments. The presentation of nature as a threat can for instance be found in narratives on early human life as a bestial and harsh condition from which mankind needs to free itself.⁵⁴

The fifth role is nature as **‘the other’**. The process of ‘othering’ serves to make a distinction between insiders and outsiders. Thereby, certain characterisations of ‘the other’ contribute to the construction of a shared identity among the in-group. Depicting nature as ‘the other’ thus primarily provides a means of self-definition.⁵⁵ The boundaries of ‘civilization’ are marked off by emphasizing the differences between the natural and the cultural world and especially underlining the prevalence of culture over nature. Attributing this role to nature

⁵³ *S. Ant.* 332-364 (‘Ode to man’). Note that the verb ἀποτρύεται (‘wearing out’) in the passive form can also be deployed in context of (sexual) harassment (LSJ s.v. ἀποτρύω). The exploitation of the earth is put on the same level with transgressions of sexual nature, which is interesting from an ecofeminist perspective.

⁵⁴ For instance in *Pl. Prt.* 320d–322c humans lack all skills necessary for survival and are unequipped for life on earth. There is a constant threat from dangerous animals (322a-b), weather phenomena and harsh natural conditions (321c).

⁵⁵ On the image of ‘the other’ (or the Barbarian) in order to establish a shared identity among Greeks in tragedy, see Hall 1989. See also Rehm 2002, 236-269 on the spatial element in defining ‘the other’ in tragedy.

is therefore an example of the endorsement of the binary opposition of nature and culture. The process of 'othering' is also central to perspectives from 'social ecology'.

The last role of nature I distinguish is nature as a **moral agent**. Natural phenomena can be driving forces steering towards a form of universal justice, in accordance with Necessity or Fate. Especially when a distortion of a universal order has taken place (for instance by a certain transgression), natural forces can guarantee the persistence of this cosmic order. Thus, nature and Necessity are closely related. Moreover, natural phenomena can function as moral exempla. Nature (often through personification) can thus function as a physical embodiment of moral concepts such as moderation, pity or justice.

By revealing these various roles of nature in *Prometheus Bound*, I hope to investigate, nuance and perhaps unsettle binary categories such as culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, self/other, reason/matter, in ancient Greek tragic discourse.⁵⁶ In addition, since I consider ecocriticism as a heuristic model that allows scholars to read ancient texts differently, I aim to further explore the relevance of a dialogue between ecocritical theory and ancient texts. Thereby, I contribute to evaluating and complementing the existing theoretical framework of ecocriticism.

Chapter outline

The next three chapters provide a close reading of *Prometheus Bound* through an ecocritical lens. The chapters generally follow the order of the episodes in the tragedy. Each chapter starts by situating the passage of interest within the broader context of the play. Then I explain how my analysis ties in with existing research on the specific passage, before offering a thorough ecocritical close reading.

The first chapter studies the role of nature in Prometheus' central speech on human progress, considering the similarity and differences between non-human animals and humans ('deep ecology'), as well as the ways in which the non-human world and human culture are connected in the process of rapid technological developments. What role does nature play in the emergence of culture? To what extent is there a productive cooperation between nature and humanity ('natureculture')? And what are the limits of technology to control our environment? As I will show, the role of the non-human world in Prometheus' own suffering by Zeus's malevolence is key to fully understanding the significance of this speech.

Throughout the play, it becomes clear how under the tyrannical reign of Zeus, the harmful rather than the useful potential of nature is foregrounded. The hostile forces of nature drive the plot of the play in new directions. Most notably in the case of the only mortal on stage; the cow-horned Io. In the second chapter, I will investigate from an ecocritical perspective how the Io-scene reflects upon the human-animal boundary and the

⁵⁶ For this list, I draw on Marland 2013, 852.

demarcation of 'nature' and 'civilization'. First, I examine the passage on Io from an ecofeminist perspective and explore the role of nature as the oppressed. Then the concept of 'dark ecology' will be adopted to explain Io's relationship to her harsh natural surroundings. At the same time, the natural environment plays the role of 'the other' in contrast to the civilized world. This prompts the question, what the necessary constituents of a civilized society are.

The final chapter of this thesis addresses this question, by exploring the role of nature in the climactic ending of the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus. The possible resolution between the two protagonists is closely linked to the future of humanity. I investigate how a natural disaster is used to convey a theological, political, and ethical message. Before turning to the roles of nature in the finale, I consider how this catastrophe is triggered, by a brief investigation of the concept 'Necessity' in the play. Next, an ecocritical reading draws attention to the weaknesses of tyranny, but also to the limits of Promethean faith in knowledge. The conflict between both inflexible characters, ultimately leading to large-scale cosmic disorder, may seem irresolvable. Therefore, I raise the questions: what is nature's role in the resolution of the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus? To what extent does this natural catastrophe act as a moral agent and a driving force towards universal justice? And can nature contribute to the establishment of a proper, civilized society?

1. NATURE IN PROMETHEUS' SPEECH ON CULTURAL PROGRESS

At the heart of *Prometheus Bound* is a vivid description of the cultural progress of humanity from a primitive towards a more advanced mode of living through inventions of for instance housebuilding, agriculture, seafaring, medicine, and divination. This 'catalogue of inventions', a longer monologue (445-504) by the protagonist, with a brief interruption by the chorus (472-476), contains some rhetorical features typical of sophistic display speeches (ἐπίδειξις).⁵⁷ Moreover, research has concentrated on its engagement with the Hesiod's Golden Age myth and the 'reversal' of the view of history, notably from decline to progress.⁵⁸ In addition, the relationship to other texts on cultural progress (*Kulturenstehungslehre*) in the 5th century BC is the topic of much scholarly attention.⁵⁹ Interestingly, it shows both features of an evolutionary account of human history, in which innovations gradually follow one another, and characteristics of a 'culture hero' type of narrative.⁶⁰

The list of benefactions itself also gave rise to interpretative problems. It has been topic of debate whether there is an organizing principle behind the order of Prometheus' gifts. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the one discovery with which Prometheus was traditionally associated most, namely fire, is not explicitly mentioned. The question arises: are the other discoveries a consequence of the ability to control fire, or are they intended as separate gifts? I will consider these issues in more detail below. Besides, Prometheus' claim that 'all τέχνηαι for mortals came from Prometheus',⁶¹ soon led to allegorical interpretations of the figure of Prometheus as a symbol for human reason, a faculty which was able to invent virtually anything and free mankind from the threats of nature.⁶² However, I agree with Rader that "Prometheus (...) is not an abstraction. As much as he 'represents', or his name signifies, Foreknowledge, he is not himself an abstract embodiment of it".⁶³ Thus, we cannot reduce this speech to a rationalist celebration of human reason over the non-human world. Instead, a

⁵⁷ Griffith 1983, 28 traces a "concern for the tidy articulation of speeches, which may owe something to developments in rhetorical prose under the influence of the Sophists".

⁵⁸ For some reservations regarding this approach, see page 4 above.

⁵⁹ On esp. the connections between this text, Plato's *Protagoras*, Sophocles' *Antigone* (332-375), and Euripides' *Suppliants* 201-218 see Conacher 1977, 196-206; Utzinger 2003 and Sano 2014. It has been argued that the 'anthropological turn' of interest in human history started with Archelaus or Democritus (Kahn 1981, 102; Podlecki 2005, 18-19 and Betegh 2016). General publications on progress and primitivism in Greek thought include Lovejoy & Boas 1935; Guthrie 1957; Cole 1967; Edelstein 1967; Dodds 1973; Blundell 1986. On the concept of 'first inventors' (πρῶτοι εὐρεταί), see Kleingünther 1933. For a comparison of Prometheus and other culture heroes, such as Palamedes, see Gera 2003, 120-127.

⁶⁰ As argued by Conacher 1977. See also Griffith 1983, 167: "Prometheus' account here combines elements of the πρῶτος εὐρετής *topos* with the more rationalistic analysis characteristic of the Presocratics and Sophists".

⁶¹ A. Pr. 506: πᾶσαι τέχνηαι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως.

⁶² Taking Promethean fire as a symbol for human reason is line with other 'secular' accounts of the history of civilization, as famously offered by presocratic philosopher Xenophanes, in fragment DK B18: 'The gods have not indicated all things to mortals from the beginning, but in time, by searching, they find something more that is better' (tr. Laks & Most 2016, 57), see O'Brien 1985, 264 and Swanson 1995, 215 on Prometheus' alleged rational humanism and notes 9 and 19 above.

⁶³ Rader 2013, 162. Guthrie 1957, 82-83 adds that his suffering is only meaningful if Prometheus is a living, divine person instead of a pure symbol for human reason.

reconsideration of this speech on technological developments is useful. What can be learned if we do not simply take this speech as a confident celebration of human progress in the face of the forces of nature, but instead thoroughly analyse the full complexity of the roles of nature?

1.1. State of nature: ‘deep ecology’

Prometheus’ speech on human progress is a fine example of deliberate self-presentation on the side of the protagonist. When the chorus expresses sympathy in the preceding stasimon, he remains silent. But he is careful not to come across as unmoved or stubborn, out of pride (χλιδή, 436) or arrogance (αὐθαδία, 436).⁶⁴ Instead, he emphasizes his goodwill (εὐνοία, 446); the wrongdoing against Zeus was purely in the interest of mortals.

To underline his role as a selfless benefactor of humanity, he illustrates what early human life was like, by describing their miseries (πήματα, 442). He characterizes humans at this early stage as infantile (νηπίους, 443) and ignorant (without νοῦς, 444). Commonly, the πήματα of humans are interpreted as the hardships they suffer in nature.⁶⁵ However, on closer inspection, the role of nature here is not that of a threat, but of a resource and guide. The misery is not nature itself, but rather mankind’s lack of insight in its useful mechanisms. Moreover, from this depiction of the ‘state of nature’ the firm natural roots of human existence and the interconnectedness of all beings becomes clear, which can be explained in line with ‘deep ecology’.

In the beginning, human beings are thoroughly part of nature. They perceive their natural environment without, however, fully understanding its workings (447-457):

οἱ πρῶτα μὲν βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην,
κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον, ἀλλ’ ὄνειράτων
ἀλίγκιοι μορφῆσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον
ἔφυρον εἰκῆ πάντα, κοῦτε πλινθυφεῖς 450
δόμους προσείλους ἦσαν, οὐ ξυλουργίαν,
κατωρύχες δ’ ἔναιον ὥστ’ ἀήσυροι
μύρμηκες ἀντρῶν ἐν μυχοῖς ἀνηλίους.
ἦν δ’ οὐδὲν αὐτοῖς οὔτε χείματος τέκμαρ
οὔτ’ ἀνθεμῶδους ἦρος οὔτε καρπίμου 455
θέρους βέβαιον, ἀλλ’ ἄτερ γνώμης τὸ πᾶν
ἔπρασσον.

In the beginning, though looking around, they only saw in vain, while hearing, they understood nothing, like dream-figures they lived a long life, acting all instinctively. They knew nothing of brick-built houses,

⁶⁴ These are key moral concepts in the play: αὐθαδία appears at 964, 1012, 1034, 1037; χλιδή, which has the connotation of ‘wantonness’ or ‘insolence’, appears again at 466 (see below page 25) and at 971-972, cf. Groeneboom 1928, 174.

⁶⁵ For instance, Murray 1940, 88: “life is hard and always under the shadow of death”; Conacher 1980, 49 calling this “a description of man’s *state of need*”; and Irby-Massie 2008, 138 stating that humans needed “to overcome the capricious forces of the natural world”.

warmed by the sun, nor of wooden construction, they dwelt underground, like tiny ants, in the sunless inside of caves. Nor had they any reliable indicator of winter, or of flowery spring, or of fruitful summer, but they acted completely free from insight.⁶⁶

In this description, early human life shares important characteristics with animal life. Both humans and non-human beings have sensations, such as sound-perception and visual capacities. However, despite this ability to see and hear, these faculties are not deployed to rationally make sense of their natural surroundings. This is underlined by the imperfect forms ἔβλεπον (447) and ἤκουον (448), indicating that the seeing and hearing is not fully accomplished. In this respect, the slight difference between the verbs κλύω ('to hear') and ἀκούω ('to hearken' or 'understand') is important too.⁶⁷ Prometheus states that human beings looked around 'in vain' (μάτην, 447) and 'hearing they did not *truly* understand'. As a result, humans continuously lived in a dreamlike mode (ὄνειράτων / ἀλίγκιοι μορφῆσι, 448-449).⁶⁸ Moreover, humans act 'at random', without planning (εἰκῆ, 450). In my view, what is meant here is that humans lived 'instinctively',⁶⁹ they do not manifest rational faculties, self-consciousness, or anticipation, that distinguish them from non-human beings.

In lines 450-453 the role of nature as a potential guide or inspiration comes into play. Prometheus' next remark concerns the dwelling of humans. Living in holes in the earth like ants, humans did not make use of the materials provided in nature to make houses of bricks and wood. One of the advantages of building houses is that by directing them towards the sun (προσείλους, 451) its warmth can be captured, a technique not yet discovered. According to Podlecki, housebuilding is a solution to "the first and most pressing need to find shelter and a protection against the elements".⁷⁰ Humans who lack this skill are in great danger. He thus reads into this passage a kind of 'dark ecology', attributing a threatening role to nature à la the opening of the myth Plato's *Protagoras*,⁷¹ where indeed the human condition is so dangerous that it is untenable. Utzinger offers a similar view: "Die Not der Menschen war Auslöser für die Gabe der τέχνη, die als physische Notwendigkeit das Überleben zu sichern haben".⁷² However, in my interpretation, the natural surroundings do not per se form an obstacle to human survival. Weather phenomena and the elements are rather depicted as beneficial forces. The sun is a collaborative power, providing warmth. Moreover, all the materials human beings need for building are already available in nature. The fact that this is not recognized by unconscious man, does not make nature itself

⁶⁶ Translation adapted, consistent with my interpretation of the terms: εἰκῆ (455) and γνώμη (456).

⁶⁷ Cf. A. Ch. 5, where the verbs κλύειν, ἀκοῦσαι, spoken by Orestes at the tomb of his father, have a clear distinctive meaning as well, indicating respectively 'hearing' and 'understanding'.

⁶⁸ Note the parallel with the philosophical aphorisms of Heraclitus D1 (= DK B1) and D4 (= DK B34) on imagery of sleep, blindness, and levels of consciousness (Laks & Most 2016, 138-139). Cf. Groeneboom 1928, 177 and Irby-Massie 2008, 139.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, at A. Pr. 885 the word εἰκῆ is used for Io too, where her words are described as falling out of her mouth 'at random'. On the case of Io as and her animalistic confusion in connection with the 'state of nature' see below page 33.

⁷⁰ Podlecki 2005, 176.

⁷¹ Pl. *Pr.* 320d-322c.

⁷² Utzinger 2003, 223.

dangerous. An additional reason for disagreeing with Podlecki is that humans are not really lacking protection against the elements, since they live in caves (ἄντρων ἐν μυχοῖς, 453) for precisely this reason.

In addition, lines 450-453 develop an image of interconnectedness between early humans and nature. In my reading, the parallel with ants offers quite a positive valuation of this state of nature. The first association may be that ants are primitive animals, and the alleged similarity thus goes against the idea of ‘psychological exceptionalism’.⁷³ However, in comparison to the *Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus*, where early humans ‘used to live in caves in the mountains like wild beast’ (ἄντροις ναιετάασκον ἐν οὐρεσιν ἢ τε θῆρες, *Hom. Hymn* 20.4),⁷⁴ the image of ants (μύρμηκες, 453), generally known for their ability to work together in a well-functioning system,⁷⁵ here is evidently far more positive.⁷⁶ Thus, the resemblances with other natural beings are emphasized, instead of the differences. This perceived connection between early humans and non-human beings is in line with the conviction of ‘deep ecology’ that all life on earth is fundamentally interconnected.

The notion of interconnectedness between the human and non-human is also apparent in other passages in the play. I wish to briefly draw attention to an illustrative remark, in which the early human race is not compared to another species of animals, but even regarded as a kind of ‘vegetation’ by Zeus. Prometheus says the tyrant ‘wanted to obliterate the race altogether and sow another new one’ (ἄϊστώσας γένος / τὸ πᾶν ἔχρηζεν ἄλλο φιλῦσαι νέον, 232-233).⁷⁷ The verb φιλῦσαι ‘sow’ evokes a strong agricultural metaphor, which puts the human species on a par with plants or crops sown in the earth. In short, early human existence is firmly rooted in nature.

The last feature of primitive human life is the lacking awareness of the regular passing of time and seasonal change. As Prometheus explains, there was no ‘reliable indicator’ for human beings of winter, spring, or summer: ἦν δ’ οὐδὲν αὐτοῖς οὔτε χειμάτος τέκμαρ / οὔτ’ ἀνθεμώδους ἦρος οὔτε καρπίμου / θέρους βέβαιον (454-456). Underscored by the adjective ‘fruitful’ (καρπίμου, 456) the importance of this remark lies in the necessity of understanding the alternation of the seasons for sowing and harvesting of crops, in order to use nature’s full potential for nourishment.⁷⁸ Nature is thus not opposite to agriculture. Instead, as is indicated by

⁷³ That is to say, the belief that humans are much different than other, non-human beings (see Brockliss 2018, 1).

⁷⁴ Ed. and tr. by West 2003 (adapted regarding θῆρες).

⁷⁵ Perhaps the audience was reminded of the fearsome elite army fighting with Achilles in the *Iliad* called the Myrmidones, or the ‘ant-people’, who had the reputation of a loyal, well-organised and hard-working group, just as the animals they are related to (see Sears 2010).

⁷⁶ Conacher 1977, 196-197 notes the connection with the *H. Heph.* 20.3-7, but does not discuss the important difference between the connotations of μύρμηκες and θῆρες.

⁷⁷ Translation adapted with respect to φιλῦσαι, to underline its more literal meaning. Groeneboom 1928, 138 ad *loc.* notes a parallel with Hesiod fr.96 Rz; White 2001, 124 refers to *A. Supp.* 312.

⁷⁸ The lack of agriculture in the state of nature may remind us of Golden Age stories, in which the earth ‘automatically’ nourishes mankind, without the land being cultivated. On Golden Age myths as ‘ecological myths’, see Preus 1997, 11-12. See also fr.196 of *Prometheus Unbound*, where Prometheus describes a certain people called ‘the Gabians’ in his instruction to Heracles: Γαβίους, ἴν’ οὔτ’ ἄροτρον οὔτε γατόμος / τέμνει δίκελλ’ ἄρουραν, ἀλλ’ αὐτόσποροι / γυαί φέρουσι βίσιον

‘they acted completely free from insight’ (ἀλλ’ ἄτερ γνώμης τὸ πᾶν / ἔπρασσον, 456-457) a possible development towards cultivation of the land lies in understanding nature’s potential. This can be understood as ‘natureculture’, the idea that nature and culture are not mutually exclusive but inextricably linked in a circulating system. Moreover, nature’s regularity can even be considered a kind of language, full of meaningful signs (τέκμαρ) and thus having ‘ecosemiotic agency’. In other words, material and technological progress is possible if humans learn nature’s language.

The role of nature in this Promethean depiction of early human life can be summarized as follows: the concept of nature is all-encompassing, i.e. mankind is not differentiated from other beings but part of a ‘deep ecology’. The second role of nature we encountered lies in its potential for culture. Though man is unaware of it, the fundamental natural resources for later developments are already there. The idea that nature can generate culture should be seen as a form of ‘natureculture’: culture encompasses the human sphere *and* the non-human world. Moreover, I have pointed out how nature produces meaningful signs and has ‘ecosemiotic agency’. Notably, nothing negative is said about the role of nature. Life may be primitive, but it is not inherently dangerous. Nature, thus, does not play the role of the enemy in early human life. The true ‘miseries’ (πήματα, 442) are not caused by a harsh or threatening natural environment. Admittedly, life in the state of nature is mere survival. As we will see, this can be improved by a technological insight in nature’s beneficial qualities.

1.2. Cultural progress: nature generating culture

After the description of the state of nature, the proper ‘catalogue of inventions’ of Prometheus starts with the discovery of the regular movements of celestial bodies, followed by numbers, the letters of the alphabet and memory. Only after those ‘intellectual’ discoveries are made, technical skills such as agriculture, seafaring, medicine, divination and metallurgy are mentioned. This section will provide an ecocritical analysis of the role of nature in this process of intellectual, technological, and material advancement.

The first phenomenon for which Prometheus opened man’s eyes is the regular movement the stars.⁷⁹ He emphasizes how difficult it is to grasp these celestial movements. Nature actively produces valuable signs (keep in mind the previous τέκμαρ... βέβαιον, 454...456) and it is the task of mankind to recognize the regular course of events. Knowing where and when stars rise and set is crucial for orientation and navigation. Moreover, such understanding of natural phenomena through empirical observation allows human beings to enter a new

ἄφθονον βροτοῖς, ‘the Gabians, among whom neither the plough nor the earth-cutting mattock cleaves the soil, but self-sown fields yield men an ample livelihood’ (tr. Sommerstein 2008b, 207).

⁷⁹ A. Pr. 457-458: ἔστε δὴ σφιν ἀντολὰς ἐγὼ / ἄστρων ἔδειξα τὰς τε δυσκρίτους δύσεις (‘until I showed them the hard-to-discern risings and settings of stars’).

stage, for now they develop an idea of temporality, in opposition to the unintentional life they used to live.⁸⁰ Thus, nature is able to assist men in the process of new discoveries and inventions. However, as Prometheus underlines, unravelling the patterns of the stars is not an easy task δυσκρίτους (458).⁸¹ Nature acts as a guide but its ‘language’ is hard to pick up.

From an ecocritical point of view, Prometheus’ subsequent description of the domestication of animals (462-466) is especially interesting:⁸²

κάζευξα πρώτος ἐν ζυγοῖσι κνώδαλα,
ζεύγλησι δουλεύοντα σώμασιν θ’ ὄπως
θνητοῖς μεγίστων διάδοχοι μοχθημάτων
γένοινθ’· ὕφ’ ἄρμά τ’ ἤγαγον φιληνίους 465
ἵππους, ἄγαλμα τῆς ὑπερπλοῦτου χλιδῆς·

And I was the first to bring beasts under the yoke as slaves to the yoke-strap and the pack-saddle, so that they might relieve humans of their greatest labours; and I brought horses to love the rein and pull chariots, as a showpiece of exceeding luxury.⁸³

An ecocritical analysis of this passage reveals a twofold role of animals in the process of material and cultural development. The role of nature shifts back and forth between a cooperative companion and the oppressed victim. There is a tension between harmony with and domination over nature. On the one hand, there seems to be a notion of ‘interspecies collaboration’,⁸⁴ in the sense that animals help alleviate the greatest labours of humans. As Romer says, based on the adjective φιληνίους (465): “the reins of the horse both are welcome to the animal and also mark what is imagined as its willing cooperation”.⁸⁵ Haraway too underlines that we should not consider the effect of the emergence of agriculture as differentiated, i.e. biological for the animals, and cultural for humans, but rather consider this as a process of co-evolution.⁸⁶ For this reason, she considers the term ‘natureculture’ most apt, a view supported by the Promethean text. The development of human culture is

⁸⁰ See also Irby-Massie 2008, 138: “Through this understanding of nature and the resultant control over the forces of nature, fear of the unknown can be abolished”. In this development, she traces Heraclitean influence. In my view, indeed understanding nature’s working can improve life, however, that does not imply humans previously ‘feared the unknown’.

⁸¹ Prometheus uses the same adjective regarding interpretation of dreams (δυσκρίτους, 486) and for interpreting signs in sacrificial rituals (δυστέκμαρτον, 497). It seems, that this is used for skills mastered by only a few.

⁸² See also fr. 189a (of which it is uncertain whether it belongs to *Prometheus Unbound* or is a corrupt transmission of the passage in our tragedy): ἵππων ὄνων τ’ ὄχεϊα καὶ ταύρων γονὰς / δοὺς ἀντίδουλα καὶ πόνων ἐκδέκτορα, ‘giving to them the offspring of horses and asses, and the children of bulls, to take over their labours and be the equivalent of slaves’ (tr. Sommerstein 2008b, 196-197), see also the discussion of this fragment’s precise meaning in Romer 2000.

⁸³ Translation adapted with respect to ἄγαλμα τῆς ὑπερπλοῦτου χλιδῆς (466).

⁸⁴ In an ecocritical analysis, Hutchins 2017 also signals the tension between harmony (interspecies collaboration) and domination (exploitation of non-human animals) in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*.

⁸⁵ Romer 2000, 75.

⁸⁶ Haraway 2003, 31.

essentially natural; agriculture is a fine example of the way in which the non-human world has important agency in this process.

On the other hand, the comparison between animals and slaves at 463 (δουλεύοντα) suggests a form of oppression rather than harmonious cooperation. The freedom of animals is taken away by the yoke. It is difficult to decide what this tells us about the common views on slavery or versus those on animal ethics. Perhaps they go hand in hand, which is in line with the premises of ‘social ecology’, namely that the oppression of nature is related to issues of social inequality. In the process of cultural development, nature thus also plays the role of the oppressed and the non-human world is viewed as instrumental.

The passage furthermore displays the notion of a certain hierarchy among animals, from ‘wild creatures’ to the more delicate horses. Oudemans and Lardinois explain that “with domestic animals we return to interconnectedness, though these animals belong to civilized space, some of them remain wild”.⁸⁷ Groeneboom rightly notes that the word κνώδαλα (462), has a negative association.⁸⁸ The animals meant are probably oxen and mules, but the word usually has the sense of ‘monster’. Calling the animals κνώδαλα, creates a distance, which may serve as a justification for the aggressive domination. Moreover, it highlights the power hierarchy coming with the new human ability to control even the most dangerous beings.

When considering the next invention, namely seafaring (467-468), yet another role of nature emerges. In later literature, seafaring often has a dangerous and potentially harmful connotation,⁸⁹ but nothing of that sentiment is present in this statement:

θαλασσόπλαγκτα δ' οὔτις ἄλλος ἀντ' ἐμοῦ 467
λινόπτερ' ἤϊρε ναυτίλων ὀχήματα.

And it was no one other than me that invented the linen-winged vehicles in which sailors roam the seas.

The invention of ships is described poetically. The use of the adjective λινόπτερος – the only instance of this word in Greek literature – is striking.⁹⁰ The combination of ‘linen’ and ‘wings’ is a unique zoomorphic description of sailing ships. The image is particularly strong because it is self-explanatory: the invention of building ships with sails is inspired by the wings of birds. Both make use of the power of the wind to drive them forth. It is only with the proper technical insight that humans can make advantage of this ubiquitous natural element. The same applies to the sea: technical insight turns it from something impassable into a medium for

⁸⁷ Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 90.

⁸⁸ Groeneboom 1928, 181: “vaak is het woord verbonden met het idee van minachting of afkeer”.

⁸⁹ Groeneboom 1928, 182.

⁹⁰ Later, in E. *Hipp.* 752, we find in a similar vein the compound adjective λευκόπτερε. See also A. *Pers.* 559, where the ships of the Persians are said to be ὀμόπτεροι ‘with similar feathers’. Sommerstein 2008a, 75 n.87 *ad loc.* notes that ‘feathers’ refer to the oars. However, that cannot be the case in our instance since linen is certainly used for the sails.

transportation. Thereby, man-made ships can have a share in the swiftness of birds. A human design is attributed specifically zoomorphic qualities.⁹¹ In this important step in cultural progress, nature thus guides humans both in innovation (by the birds' wings) and in ways of transportation (through winds and sea). Taken together, this evokes the image of a unique synergy between humans, animals, and the elements.

The invention of seafaring forms the climax of the first part of Prometheus' speech. Prometheus then proceeds by lamenting his fate and his inability to come up with any invention (σόφισμα, 470) to free himself from his suffering, in contrast to his inventions for humanity (470-471). The chorus responds agreeingly with a medical simile (472-475) to underline the fact that Prometheus cannot cure himself (σεαυτὸν οὐκ ἔχεις / εὐρεῖν ὁποίοις φαρμάκοις ἰάσιμος, 474-475).⁹² This leads Prometheus directly to his next invention, the art of medicine:

τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, εἴ τις εἰς νόσον πέσοι,
οὐκ ἦν ἀλέξημι' οὐδέν, οὔτε βρώσιμον,
οὐ χρίστον, οὐδὲ πῖστον, ἀλλὰ φαρμάκων 480
χρεῖαι κατεσκεύλλοντο, πρὶν γ' ἐγὼ σφισιν
ἔδειξα κράσεις ἠπίων ἀκεσμάτων
αἷς τὰς ἀπάσας ἐξαμύνονται νόσους.

The greatest was this. If anyone fell sick, there was no means of aiding them, neither by food, nor ointment, nor potion: they withered and decayed for want of remedies, until I showed them how to mix gentle curative drugs, with which they can now defend themselves against all kinds of diseases.

Before Prometheus offered the gift of medical art, people died horribly from all kinds of diseases, without being able to cure themselves. This was part of the natural life cycle. Medical skills changed human life considerably for humans gained some control over life, health and death. The crucial factor in the invention of medicine was not creating something new, but rather understanding what is already there in nature. This is hinted at by the word κράσεις (482), which indicates a mixture or blending process. Instead of looking for a single cure, the medical skill is to combine the right drinkable or edible remedies or ointments, which one can find in nature. Nature plays the important role of a resource, in providing the ingredients for medicinal remedies.

Finally, after discussing different kinds of omens, Prometheus narrates the discovery of metals. Prometheus explains bronze, iron, silver, and gold were once 'hidden beneath the earth' (ἔνερθε δὲ χθονός / κεκρυμμένα, 500-501). The generative power is evident: the earth contains the metals as valuable resources for

⁹¹ See Atkins 2009, 97-98 on zoomorphic qualities of ships and their portrayal as animate objects in Greek epic literature.

⁹² Tr. 'you are unable to discover by what remedies your own condition is curable'. On the use of medical imagery in the play, see Fowler 1957; Petrounias 1976, 98-107; Inoue & Cohen 1978, 28. To my knowledge, the connections between the *Kulturstehungslehre* from the Hippocratic corpus, *On ancient medicine* 3.20-30 and *Prometheus Bound* have not yet been studied in detail (see only briefly Fowler 1957, 176; Irby-Massie 2008, 142-143; Ruffel 2012, 69-70).

humans. Their discovery had major impact on human life because it enabled mankind to make tools. This beneficial use is made explicit at 501: ἀνθρώποισιν ὠφελήματα ('things that benefit humanity'). The earth brings forth the raw materials, while Prometheus provides mankind with the knowledge on how to forge tools out of them. Ending with the discovery of metals also serves as an implicit but therefore all the more powerful reminder of Prometheus' most important gift – the gift of fire –, which is at first glance curiously absent in the list of his benefits to humanity.

Not only was Prometheus traditionally so closely connected to the theft of fire, as to make explicit mention superfluous, but the crucial relevance of fire for other developments is made clear throughout the play. The power of the natural element fire as a generative force for cultural advancement is repeatedly illustrated. For instance, fire is called παντέχνου (7): 'the gleam of fire that makes all skills attainable'.⁹³ At verses 110-111 fire is again mentioned as a διδάσκαλος, from which all other crafts can be learned (ἡ διδάσκαλος τέχνης / πάσης). Likewise, at 253-254 it is stated that from fire mankind will learn many skills (ἀφ' οὗ [i.e. πυρός] γε πολλὰς ἐκμαθήσονται τέχναι, 254). This notion of fire as the catalyst of all inventions is even implicitly worked into Prometheus' 'catalogue of inventions' through metaphors of light and darkness. Early humans lived in 'sunless' (ἀνηλίοις, 453) caves, but by the end of the speech Prometheus has 'opened their eyes to the signs the flames gave, which till then had been dark to them'.⁹⁴ Fire clearly is the driving force of all other discoveries.⁹⁵

Thus far, several aspects of nature were shown to be powerful agents in bringing forth culture. That is to say, nature has the potential to 'nurture' cultural progress. The element of fire is the ultimate embodiment of this far-reaching agency of the natural world in the human sphere, initiating change and transformation.⁹⁶ The language of 'learning' evidently indicates nature's role as a guide or teacher. With fire and technological insight, tools can be made for ploughing, yokes can be made to domesticate animals and medicines can be prepared through cooking. This power of fire also has its downside: it can be a destructive force, especially in the hands of malevolent deities. As Oudemans and Lardinois state "good and evil aspects of natural power are irremediably intermingled",⁹⁷ and the element of fire provides a perfect example. The remainder of this chapter will elucidate this ambiguity in the role of nature, which will prove central to the play.

⁹³ A. Pr. 7: παντέχνου πυρός σέλας.

⁹⁴ A. Pr. 498-499: φλογωπὰ σήματα / ἔξωμμάτωσα πρόσθεν ὄντ' ἐπάργεμα (ἐπάργεμος meaning 'dim', 'obscure').

⁹⁵ Herington 1970, 196 (among others) believes "fire can be identified with intelligence itself". In my view, fire as a gift of Prometheus covers both *actual* fire and indeed a certain practical or technological insight in nature. Throughout the tragedy, however, fire will be shown to play many roles in the hands of other characters.

⁹⁶ Here, I disagree with Zekavat 2014, who in a comparative study of Greek and Persian mythology argues that in Greek myths on the discovery of fire, this element is merely used to modify nature toward one's own ends is therefore a form of domination that upholds the binary opposition between culture and nature. However, this study does not take actual Greek passages into consideration, from instance from this tragedy, in which fire clearly *also* plays the role of a διδάσκαλος and thus supports a continuity between nature and culture.

⁹⁷ Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 62.

1.3. Limits of technology

Prometheus' speech may be exceedingly positive about the effects of his gifts to mankind, the spectacle on stage tells a whole different story. There is a dramatic irony to the optimistic narrative of progress voiced by a chained culture hero in the desolate mountains. Prometheus pointed out to man nature's ability to generate culture, but this is sharply contrasted by Zeus' tyrannical use of nature as a tool for his punishment. Griffith justly remarks: "Nobody in this play denies that Prometheus' gifts are indeed benefits: the only question is whether mankind should have been granted them against Zeus' will".⁹⁸ Just as Zeus aims to immobilize Prometheus through chains, under his reign progress is prevented. Instead, his oppressive regime aims at permanence and stability.⁹⁹ Moreover, cultural progress, is not only hindered by external forces (primarily Zeus' malevolence), but also by the overestimation of intellectual and technological knowledge itself. The question should be raised whether Promethean gifts really suffice to make human society flourish. In White's phrasing: "his speech suggests by both emphasis and omission, that our admiration should not be unreserved".¹⁰⁰ A closer analysis of the role of nature will highlight both the external and internal limits of Prometheus' so-called technological optimism.

Nature as a tool for the tyrant

The tension between Prometheus' own suffering and the gifts he offers to mankind has long been recognized.¹⁰¹ On the one hand, this is the price he pays for his φιλανθρωπία against the will of Zeus, but on the other, it causes suspicion regarding his optimism. In his own narrative, the value of nature as a resource and guide was emphasized. Yet a more detailed examination of Prometheus' own situation reveals the role of nature as a threat and likens Prometheus to the oppressed animals.

Prometheus first described the skill of housebuilding. Despite leading primitive humans out of their caves to more advanced dwellings, he himself is now chained to a rock, the exact environment humans left. Prometheus' isolation and the absence of any humans is emphasized throughout: ἄβροτον...ἐρημίαν (2); ἀπανθρώπων (20); θερμόνιον...πάγον (117); ἀγείτονος (270).¹⁰² Moreover, Prometheus explains that he suffers

⁹⁸ Griffith 1983, 176.

⁹⁹ On concept of time, as experienced differently by Zeus, Prometheus and mortals, see Loney 2021. Cf. Rehm 2002, 157: "by binding Prometheus to the rock, Zeus attempts to petrify the rebellious Titan".

¹⁰⁰ White 2001, 112. I adhere to his view at 109 that "an Attic audience thus had reason to harbour doubts about Prometheus' claims from the outset, and to suspect that his accounts of events both past and future are imperfect and incomplete at best". My interpretation, however, strongly differs from White, since he argues for Zeus' ultimate benevolence and role as an arbiter of justice. However, it is not easy to explain away the numerous references to Zeus' injustice (which are more than I can list here), nor the fact that Io's god-inflicted suffering is undeserved. Moreover, although the other characters at times express themselves critically towards Prometheus, his true benefactions should not be disregarded.

¹⁰¹ For instance Griffith 1983, 171, who notes the "pointed contrast between his [i.e. Prometheus'] resourcefulness in helping mortals and his inability to help himself".

¹⁰² See Rehm 2002, 114 and 156 on Prometheus' isolation, who at 114 explains this as 'eremitic space', i.e. a wilderness without people, comparable to the setting of the *Philoctetes*. See also Hall 1989, 113-114 on the 'translation' of the

from the violent blows of winds.¹⁰³ Thus, the natural characteristics of the region add to his harsh punishment. In addition, he taught humans to use the regular passing of time and seasonal change to their advantage, but his own suffering is exacerbated by regularity in nature: during the day, the heat of the sun tortures him, only to be alternated by the cold at night (cf. 23-25).¹⁰⁴ Shortly, for Prometheus nature has become a remote, uncivilized, hostile place.

The gift of domesticating animals is even more ironic in the light of Prometheus' own animal-like captivity. His chained condition is a vivid illustration of the downside of his own discoveries and of Zeus' attempt to reduce his opponent to a mere animal. The vocabulary used for captivating Prometheus evokes the image of capturing, taming, and harnessing animals.¹⁰⁵ As Saïd phrases it: "Prométhée est présenté, de manière très systématique, comme un dompteur dompté".¹⁰⁶ For instance, at verse 81, when Hephaestus, Might and Violence have almost finished binding Prometheus, he is said to be captured in a ἀμφίβληστρον, a word commonly used for 'fishing net'.¹⁰⁷ The audience watches the protagonist, who proudly narrates the invention of agriculture, captured in 'his own' nets.¹⁰⁸ Mossman rightly remarks that in the speech the domestication of animals "is one of Prometheus' benefactions, used to the benefit of civilization, but in the metaphor it represents Zeus' outrages".¹⁰⁹

Prometheus' enchained status also puts the discovery of metals in a tragic perspective. Throughout the tragedy, the audience learns over and over how 'unbreakable' his bonds are, by the adjectives ἀρρήκτοις (6), δυσλύτοις (19) and ἀλύτοις (155). It becomes clear that earth provides valuable resources for tools, but that those tools can be used for better and worse purposes. New discoveries from nature can be both useful and harmful.

Virtually every step in the cultural progress of human beings is linked to Prometheus' own suffering from the threats of nature (as steered by Zeus). The hard scenic reality shows both the injustice of Zeus' tyranny

Prometheus-myth to the most northern edges of the world, which she explains as "dependent upon the popular ethnographic opposition of Scythia and Egypt" (114), where Io's journey ends.

¹⁰³ Cf. A. Pr. 158-159: νῦν δ' αἰθέριον κίνυγμ' ὀ τάλας / ἐχθροῖς ἐπίχαρτα πέπονθα, 'now I wretchedly endure the buffeting of the winds high up, to my enemies' delight'.

¹⁰⁴ Moreover, at 1021-1025 Hermes predicts the attack of the eagle, who will come by every other day to eat his liver. This adds to the negative implication of regular passing of time for Prometheus.

¹⁰⁵ Griffith 1983, 82: "images of yoking, taming, etc. are common in this play (...) as Zeus tries to break Prometheus' unruly spirit". For instance: ὀχμάσαι (subduing horses, 5); μασχαλιστήρας (a binding around a horse's shoulders, 71); ἀνάγκαις...ἐνέζευμαι (yoke, 108). For a detailed examination of the imagery see Fowler 1957, 181-183; Petrounias 1976, 108-113; Mossman 1996, 62ff.

¹⁰⁶ Saïd 1985, 162.

¹⁰⁷ Sommerstein 2008a, 455.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. 1078-1079, where Hermes describes how Prometheus is caught up (again as animal) in a 'net of disaster' (δίκτυον ἄτης, 1078) by his own 'foolishness' (ἀνοΐας, 1079).

¹⁰⁹ Mossman 1996, 63.

and the inadequacy of knowledge and technology to ‘overcome’ his predestined punishment.¹¹⁰ The final scene of the tragedy, the topic of the third chapter, even more forcefully underlines the inferiority of Promethean skills to natural forces, when a dazzling natural catastrophe rages in the theatre and sweeps him off stage.

Ethics, technology, and society

Zeus’ malevolent use of nature is not the only obstacle to cultural progress, Promethean technological insight in how to ‘make use’ of nature for skills and tools has its own limits as well. Obviously, a limit to progress is posed by the inevitability of death. The description of early human life explicitly drew attention to natural roots of human existence. In line with ‘deep ecology’, the interconnectedness between humans and non-human beings, such as the ant, was emphasized. One of the strongest resemblances between the human and other species is mortality.¹¹¹ Death can be rightly called the “ultimate intrusion of nature into culture”.¹¹² Promethean gifts are unable to overcome this limit of a ‘natural being’.¹¹³

Moreover, the Promethean story implicitly reveals the ethical limits to technological insight. This can be gleaned from the ascending order of the inventions, from the basic necessities to the superfluous, or as White puts it: “from subsistence to surplus”.¹¹⁴ When people lived in caves, they had all the shelter they needed. Developing more advanced dwellings, was beyond what was necessary. This applies to the domestication and oppression of animals too. That the human attitude towards animals was to some extent morally doubtful is made clear in line 466: ἄγαλμα τῆς ὑπερπλοῦτου χλιδῆς, which states that horses and chariot riding are considered a symbol of exceeding luxury. As Griffith explains: “horses were expensive to buy and keep in Greece and were regarded as marks of wealth and status”.¹¹⁵ Whereas the work-animals (κνώδαλα) still serve a useful purpose, the possession of horses is an example of abundance. The use of the word χλιδή at 466 certainly reminded the audience of Prometheus’ previous mention at 435. In his introduction to the ‘catalogue of inventions’, he stated that he would not be stubborn, arrogant and too full of pride, using the key words χλιδή and αὐθαδία (435). Now human beings have exactly become what Prometheus himself promised not to be.

¹¹⁰ On the notion of Necessity, see below page 41.

¹¹¹ White 2001, 112-113 analyses the words used to indicate ‘humans’ in Prometheus’ speech and signals a tendency to focus on mortality. However, since this covers a relatively small group (humans, 2x; mortals 5x), I find this not too convincing.

¹¹² Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 63.

¹¹³ Prometheus does not explicitly treat death as a limitation to human inventions, as is the case in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, where the inescapability of death as a limitation to human progress is explicitly acknowledged (S. *Ant.* 361-362: Ἄϊδα μόνον / φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπεύξεταί, ‘only from Hades it is impossible to boast about an escape’, ed. Dawe 1985, my translation).

¹¹⁴ White 2001, 113. See also Conacher 1980, 48-40.

¹¹⁵ Griffith 1983, 170-171. See also Romer 2000, 75: “horses, a sign of great wealth but not regularly employed in heavy dragging or carrying and typically kept for military service, ceremonial display, and racing-cars”.

Moreover, the word ἄγαλμα is commonly used to describe divine statues. When humans are said to ‘religiously’ care for riches and display of possessions, this should surely be interpreted as moral criticism.¹¹⁶

The same can be said with respect to the invention of the metals. The order of their discovery contains important symbolic implications. The order is often taken as a reversal of the Hesiodic model of decline from the Golden to the Iron race.¹¹⁷ In my view, Prometheus’ account, usually considered progressive, at the same time hints at the limits of this material progress. First, the metals bronze and iron were discovered. These are famous for their usefulness in making strong, long-lasting tools. However, silver and gold are rather precious metals, valued for their scarcity. Silver and gold symbolize that human culture progressed from the necessary to the superfluous.¹¹⁸ I believe that hereby Prometheus indirectly touches upon the ethical limits of technological progress and domination over nature: one should not transgress the right amount and not use more than needed. Yet the virtue of moderation was obviously not included in the Promethean gift-package.

The last way in which the inadequacy of technological skills for progress becomes evident, is through an argument from silence. As Utzinger remarks: “Alle Gaben des Prometheus sind praktische Gaben”.¹¹⁹ The lack of the development of civic virtues, and the absence of social, political or religious institutions must have been noticed by a Greek audience.¹²⁰ Moreover, the society of Prometheus is fully male: there are no women, nor marriage, etc. In addition, there is no mention of children getting born and raised nor of any traditionally feminine functions around the οἶκος (household chores, weaving or cooking).¹²¹ People may have acquired means to survive, but do they know how to live *together*? The obvious answer is no: technological insight is a necessary but not a sufficient requirement for human society. Without moral knowledge of how to direct technology towards just ends, a proper civilization cannot be established. Promethean insight in nature’s usefulness puts mankind “on the road to civilization” to borrow Griffith’s expression, but he cannot equip them with the necessary social, political, and moral skills.¹²²

¹¹⁶ On Prometheus’ omission of religion in ‘catalogue of inventions’, see White 2001, 114.

¹¹⁷ Hes. *Op.* 106-201.

¹¹⁸ A similar moral criticism on the discovery of gold, after iron and bronze, can be found in the *Kulturentstehungslehre* of Lucretius (Lucr. 5.1275-1280). Conacher 1980, 49 argues that metals in general will be “relevant only to a more advanced stage in civilization”.

¹¹⁹ Utzinger 2003, 219.

¹²⁰ White 2001, 113: “Never does he mention any of the cooperative arts and institutions of social and political life, or any personal excellences, moral, intellectual or aesthetic, or even martial”.

¹²¹ See White 2001, 115, who calls this “obvious sexism, which poet and audience shared”, see also Green 2015, 130-131. From an ecofeminist perspective, it is interesting how faith in (male) practical knowledge and hope to attain control over nature through technology is connected with “the devaluing of nature and ‘feminine’ values” (Birkeland 1993, 18-19). This line of reasoning will be further developed in chapter 2.1.

¹²² Griffith 1983, 9. See also Ruffel 2012, 57 who states: “there is a strong hint, however, that materialism by itself is not enough, but the gap is to be filled with politics and civil society”.

To summarize this chapter, at first, humans were considered part of nature ('deep ecology'). The developments that started with the Promethean gifts of fire (though not explicitly mentioned) and intellectual understanding show that progress is rooted in learning from nature. Nature and culture are continuous ('natureculture') and nature acts both as a valuable resource and as a guide for cultural development. Thereby I argued against the idea that Prometheus thought people "to separate themselves from nature".¹²³ Yet exceedingly optimistic confidence that with his skills, humanity is capable of virtually anything, is unjustified. Ultimately, nature is a realm "of which man is not master, but merely variation".¹²⁴ The play draws attention to the relativity of the newly developed skills, for "the possession of τέχνη does not entail goodness or civilization".¹²⁵ I considered nature's harmful potential at the hands of Zeus and the inherent limitations to technological and intellectual insight. Humans cannot 'overcome' nature, but always remain subject to the natural cycle of birth and death. In an ethical sense, technological insight in nature is only fruitful when combined with moral insight in how to direct inventions at the right purposes. Moreover, social and political skills too are required to establish a society.

The complex relationship between nature and the human condition will receive closer consideration in a study of the only human on stage: Io. What does it mean that the only human is half-animal? What is the role of nature in her wanderings over the earth? How does her situation reflect upon the relationship between nature and cultural progress?

¹²³ Picariello & Saxonhouse 2015, 287.

¹²⁴ Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 160.

¹²⁵ Green 2015, 127.

2. NATURE AND THE COW-HORNED IO

In the third episode of *Prometheus Bound*, the cow-horned Io arrives at the rocks of Scythia, where Prometheus is chained (561ff.).¹²⁶ She explains how, as a young maiden, she recurrently dreamed Zeus had a passion for her (640-654). After telling her father Inachus, he consulted the oracles at Delphi and Dodona (655-662). The answer let him no choice but to make her wander around the fringes of the world, for he was threatened that otherwise Zeus would annihilate his whole family (663-672). Io became a half-cow hybrid, chased by the monster Argus and later by a gadfly (673-686). Who was responsible for her metamorphosis, either Zeus or Hera, remains ambiguous in this version of the myth.¹²⁷ Prometheus and Io obviously have a lot in common: they are fellow victims from divine rage, tortured by natural forces, and, notably, even their future liberations are intertwined.¹²⁸ Prometheus predicts that after a long journey Io will be restored to her human shape by Zeus in Egypt (846ff.). She will become the ancestress of famous mythological figures, such as the Danaids and the hero Heracles (850-873), who will kill the eagle and ultimately enable the release of Prometheus.¹²⁹

Io has repeatedly been considered a character of minor importance, whose pathetic and insane dancing on stage primarily serves to underline Zeus' tyrannical politics.¹³⁰ Gagarin examines Io in the light of the Hesiodic tale of Pandora.¹³¹ Instead of being the cause of all evils, Io is a victim of divine lust. Moreover, she plays a crucial role in the reversal of the Hesiodic story of decline into a story of progress. Her descendants will be founding figures of Greek civilization.¹³² Seaford too emphasizes the importance of the union between Zeus and Io as a victory of culture over nature.¹³³ The dialogue between Io and Prometheus has furthermore been interpreted as a *rite de passage* of a marriageable girl into adult life.¹³⁴ Recently, Gakopoulou illustrated how Io

¹²⁶ The story of Io was well-known (also in tragedy, for instance in A. *Suppl.* or Sophocles' fragmentary *Inachos*), but the connection to Prometheus unique to this tragedy. (Griffith 1983, 6). Anhalt 2015 studies the reworking of archaic stories on Io in 5th century tragedy in connection to the rise of democracy, focussing esp. on Io's quest for knowledge.

¹²⁷ At 589-592 Prometheus mentions both Zeus' desire and Hera's hatred as a cause of the metamorphosis; at 704 only Hera is mentioned. The chorus mentions Hera as the instigator of Io's terrible wanderings (δυσπλάνοις Ηρας ἀλατείαις, 900). Io herself, however, "holds Zeus wholly responsible for the brutal disruption of her family and for her present miseries" (Griffith 1983, 209, Cf. A. *Pr.* 669-692). Obviously, Hera's jealousy is only a response, so Zeus can rightfully be considered the "main party responsible for her suffering" (Gakopoulou 2020, 268). See also Gagarin 2014, 97.

¹²⁸ However, Griffith 1983, 12 rightly notes that Io's mobility, lack of knowledge of her own future and her mortality constitute undeniable differences between Io and Prometheus.

¹²⁹ Conacher 1980, 29 points out that Zeus too will be the ancestor of the liberator of Prometheus. Zeus thus has a fundamentally paradoxical attitude towards mankind, which can be resolved by assuming a transformation in his behavior.

¹³⁰ Taplin 1977, 267; Griffith 1983, 190: "both [i.e. Io and Prometheus] appear to exemplify the excesses of the young tyrant"; Olsen 2021, 64 n.47: "Aeschylus subtly subverts Zeus' authority through the play's representation of Io".

¹³¹ Gagarin 2014 on the presence of the Oceanids, Io and Thetis, instead of Pandora.

¹³² See also Suksi 2017, 214-215.

¹³³ Seaford 1987. In a similar vein, Green 2015, 127, who considers Io as "the missing link necessary for well-ordered human civilization" by "creating and preserving human political order through marriage and childbirth".

¹³⁴ On Io as a 'coming of age paradigm' for the audience, see Katz 1999, who also integrates the medical imagery: Io's disease of 'hysteria' will disappear when she makes the transition to marriage and motherhood (cf. Olsen 2021, 66).

and Prometheus respond differently to the suffering inflicted by divinities according to their gendered identities. Io fulfils both the stereotypical roles of ancient Greek women (daughter, wife, mother), but also transgresses the stereotypical by securing Prometheus' future release and her posthumous fame.¹³⁵ Moreover, the geographic details of Io's journey as described by Prometheus have received much scholarly attention.¹³⁶ The latter has mostly been studied from an interest in the sources of Aeschylus' geographical knowledge.¹³⁷ White contrasts Io's dangerous journey and struggle for survival with the previous Promethean optimism, arguing that we should not take his words at face value.¹³⁸ Yet none of the above mentioned studies do full justice to the significance of Io's cow shape and her relation to the natural world.

In my view the non-human world is of crucial importance in the Io-scene. First, the role of nature in Zeus' intended sexual assault lends itself well to exploration from an ecofeminist perspective: to what extent are the oppression of the non-human world and women connected? Secondly, Io's transformation into an animalistic being invites a comparison with the state of nature as described by Prometheus. I will discuss the hostile role of nature in Io's case as an example of 'dark ecology'. Finally, I will consider the role of nature in Io's future journeys as predicted by Prometheus. I demonstrate how from a frightening 'other' nature transforms into a more productive companion of human culture (a potential already seen in Prometheus' speech), but only when Io arrives in Egypt and enters a socially acceptable marriage with Zeus, who is by then gentler than one would expect based on his tyrannical role thus far.

2.1. An ecofeminist reading of the sexual assault of Io

Whereas ecocriticism focusses on the relationships between nature and humanity in literature, feminism is primarily concerned with the oppression and/or inequality of women. 'Ecofeminism', a branch of 'social ecology', as explained above, combines these theoretical frameworks and investigates the links between the oppression of the non-human world and patriarchal power structures.¹³⁹ Thus, ecofeminism concentrates on nature's role as the oppressed. From an ecofeminist perspective, I will analyse how in *Prometheus Bound* the attempted sexual assault of Io by the dominant male power of Zeus is enforced by the natural environment and her physical transformation into a half-cow.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Gakopoulou 2020.

¹³⁶ On geography see Bacon 1961, 45-59; Rehm 2002, 156-167. Suksi 2017, 211-215 and 220, considers the prophecy of Prometheus as a strategy to direct the future in such a way, as to bring about his own release. As an act of rebellion against Zeus, this geography or 'mapping space' has subversive potential (see Hawes 2017, 13).

¹³⁷ For instance, Hall 1989, 75-76, who states that the 'travelogues' in the Prometheus plays must be drawn from Hecataeus. Finkelberg 1998, argues that this section must be later reworking, influenced by the 4th-century Ctesias of Cnidus.

¹³⁸ White 2001, esp. 115ff.

¹³⁹ See also Birkeland 1993, 29 stating that the hierarchical social institutions of gerontocracy and patriarchy are mainly responsible for the "objectification, control and manipulation of the other" including the non-human environment.

¹⁴⁰ Although no explicit mention is made of sexual assault, Zeus' sexual desire is evident at 590-591 and 737-738.

Upon her arrival at Prometheus' rock, Io is pressed by the curiosity of the chorus to share her past. She tells how a recurring dream revealed that Zeus lusted after her. This dream is described as follows:

.... Ζεὺς γὰρ ἰμέρου βέλει
πρὸς σοῦ τέθαλπται καὶ ξυναίρεσθαι Κύπριν 650
θέλει· σὺ δ' ὦ παῖ, μὴ ἀπολακτίσης λέχος
τὸ Ζηνός, ἀλλ' ἔξελθε πρὸς Λέρνης βαθύν
λειμῶνα, ποιμένας βουστάσεις τε πρὸς πατρός,
ὡς ἂν τὸ Δῖον ὄμμα λωφήσῃ πόθου.

Zeus has been struck by a dart of desire coming from you [i.e. Io] and wishes to partake of Cypris with you. Do not, my child, spurn the bed of Zeus, but go out to the deep meadow of Lerna, among the flocks and cow-byres of your father, so that Zeus' eye may be assuaged of its desire.

According to Io's dream, the sexual desire of Zeus must be fulfilled in a natural setting: she must go to the meadow of Lerna (Λέρνης βαθύν / λειμῶνα, 652-653) and be among the animals to have sex with him.¹⁴¹ This agricultural metaphor is obviously linked to Io's future transformation. Interestingly, there is a parallel between the domination by her father Inachus over his flocks (ποιμένας βουστάσεις...πατρός, 653) and the domination of Zeus over Io. Thus, Io is likened to the animals under the power of male characters. In addition, in her dream she is told 'not to spurn' Zeus' bed, μὴ ἀπολακτίσης (651), a phrasing that evokes the image of horses kicking backwards. She should not be a disobedient animal but submissively follow orders. The main objective is the fulfilment of Zeus' desire (τὸ Δῖον ὄμμα λωφήσῃ πόθου, 654), to which Io is merely of instrumental value. The imaginary used here unequivocally establishes a distinction between male/dominance/culture and female/submission/nature.

When Io tells her father about this dream, he consults the oracles of Delphi and Dodona. The answer is clear: if Zeus cannot have Io, their whole family will be destroyed by thunder.¹⁴² Inachus therefore decides to let Io roam the earth. She becomes a half-cow, who is said to 'wander unprotected' (ἄφρατον ἀλάσθαι, 666). The adjective ἄφρατος, was commonly used to describe cattle belonging to a god of a sacred precinct.¹⁴³ In this way, Io becomes the 'sacred possession' of Zeus. I subscribe to Gakopoulou's view that "in particular her metamorphosis into a cow is related with the common belief that women are closer to nature, to the wild; therefore, the female needs male authority and control".¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ For other instances of grassy meadows as symbolic locations for sexual encounters see Griffith 1983, 207 *ad loc.* Beyond the erotic significance of the meadow of Lerna, this was also the place where Heracles fought the Hydra, which may connect this passage with descriptions of Heracles' journey in *Prometheus Unbound*.

¹⁴² Note that precisely the fire that would, according to Prometheus' promises, save humanity is used as the ultimate threat to Inachus' family by Zeus (see on this ambiguity of fire pages 43-46 below).

¹⁴³ Conacher 1980, 59 and Sommerstein 2008a, 514.

¹⁴⁴ Gakopoulou 2020, 270.

Additionally, of crucial importance from an ecofeminist perspective is that Io suffers a similar kind of oppression as animals. Her own experience of being ‘yoked’ is key to fully understanding the burdensome impact of Io’s new shape, as a result of divine male dominance. Her oppression becomes clear when Io wonders due to what mistake (ἄμαρτία) she deserved to be tortured like an animal:

τί ποτέ μ' ὦ Κρόνιε παῖ, τί ποτε ταῖσδ'
ἐνέζευξας εὐρών ἄμαρτοῦσαν ἐν πημοναῖσιν ἔ ἔ,
οἰστρηλάτῳ δὲ δειμάτι δειλαίαν 580
παράκοπον ὧδε τείρεις;

What crime, son of Cronus, what crime is it you have found me guilty of, that you have yoked me to these sufferings – ah, ah, and torment me out of my mind like this, wretched that I am, ever driven by the fearful gadfly?

Just like animals she is deprived of her freedom by a yoke (ἐνέζευξας 579).¹⁴⁵ Later, she even refers to Zeus’ whip (μάστιγι θείῳ, 682), a symbol of aggressive enforcement of dominance, used to tame animals. Note that the verb ζεύγνυμι, beyond the agricultural meaning, is commonly used for marriage.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the oppression of Io lies not only in the attempted sexual assault by Zeus and the transformation into an animal but should perhaps also be considered in the light of gendered role-patterns in Greek society more generally. As Mossman notes: “imagery from domestication (...) is regularly used in sexual, nuptial and sometimes sacrificial contexts, of young girls in early lyrical poetry and in tragedy; but here, because Io is in dramatic reality half-cow, half-human, the passages which describe her as bovine are ambiguous: they can be understood simultaneously directly and as metaphors”,¹⁴⁷ as is the case in the above cited passage: the yoking metaphor has both sexual connotations and applies to her status as a harnessed, oppressed half-animal.

In my view, the natural setting of the sexual union desired by Zeus’ and the following transformation of Io into a half-cow hybrid, demonstrates how nature functions as a tool to exercise power. Io is described as an oppressed animal and Zeus misuses his power over nature to make her suffer. Thus, this scene demonstrates how hierarchical social relations between male and female are paralleled to power relations between humans over animals. The role of nature that comes to the fore, is the role of the oppressed, for nature is merely viewed instrumentally for male pursuit of authority.

¹⁴⁵ In my view, hereby Io serves both as a contrast and a parallel to Prometheus, whom Zeus, as indicated above also attempted to reduce to an animal through his chains. In the last chapter, I demonstrate how the imagery of domesticating animals problematizes Zeus’ claim to power through force.

¹⁴⁶ LSJ s.v. ζεύγνυμι II.2 ‘join in wedlock’.

¹⁴⁷ Mossman 1996, 63.

2.2. Io's beast-like condition: 'dark ecology'

In this section, the role of nature as a threat is central. Io's transformation into a half-cow causes mental confusion and loss of rationality. Her animalistic state is reminiscent of the people in the 'state of nature', but the interpenetration of human and non-human here has a rather pessimistic undertone. In other words, Io finds herself in an extremely dangerous and harsh environment. Natural phenomena, such as other animals and the elements are threatening her existence. As I argue, her relationship to nature is an example of 'dark ecology'.

A dark transformation

At 673-674 Io describes the process of her partial metamorphosis into a cow: 'immediately my body and mind were twisted. I grew horns, as you now see' (εὐθὺς δὲ μορφή καὶ φρένες διάστροφοι / ἦσαν, κεραστὶς δ', ὡς ὀρᾶτ'). The entanglement of human and non-human within Io's body has a disastrous effect: she refers to the transformation as her body being 'twisted' with the adjective διάστροφοι (673). This 'distortion' affects her both physically (μορφή), and mentally (φρένες).¹⁴⁸

Her last utterance before she leaves the stage, rambling with desperate anxiety, even more pointedly illustrates Io's loss of rationality and her mental confusion.¹⁴⁹ In a final anapaestic rage of madness (881-886) Io clearly is unable to control her mind nor body any longer:

κραδία δὲ φόβῳ φρένα λακτίζει,
τροχοδινεῖται δ' ὄμμαθ' ἑλίγδην,
ἔξω δὲ δρόμου φέρομαι λύσσης πνεύματι μάργῳ
γλώσσης ἀκρατῆς, θολεροὶ δὲ λόγοι παίουσ' εἰκῆ 885
στυγνῆς πρὸς κύμασιν ἄτης.

In terror my heart is thumping my midriff,
my eyes are rolling in circles,
I am blown off course by the wild winds of insanity,
I cannot control my tongue, and its turbid, random flow of words
dashes against the hateful waves of ruin.

This passage dramatizes the duality between Io's human psyche (or what is left of it) and her animal body. She is frightened (φόβῳ, 882) and feels out of control (ἀκρατῆς, 885). This is underlined by her language: "the simple parataxis effectively highlight her sudden loss of control", as noticed by Griffith.¹⁵⁰ The uncontrollability of her body is furthermore underlined by the confusion of her body-parts: her heart (κραδία, 882) is out of place, as it

¹⁴⁸ In my view, a fruitful direction of further research would be to study metamorphoses in mythology as distortions of the boundary between human and non-human by adopting the concept 'trans-corporeality' (see the work by posthumanist scholar Alaimo 2008 and 2012), which, due to the scope of my thesis, I could not further explore myself.

¹⁴⁹ Throughout the scene, her despair and confusion are underlined by the metre (Conacher 1980, 57), as demonstrated in more detail by Griffith 1983, 190-193.

¹⁵⁰ Griffith 1983, 241.

can be felt in her midriff (φρένα, 882). This physical disorder foreshadows the language of the natural catastrophe that ends the play.¹⁵¹ The image of natural chaos is strengthened by the following lines: Io is blown off course (ἔξω δὲ δρόμου, 884) by wild raging winds (πνεύματι μάργω, 884).¹⁵² Her uncoherent words now resemble troubled or muddy water (θολεροί, 885) and a stormy sea (στυγνῆς...κύμασιν ἄτης, 886). Thus, the image of natural catastrophe describes how Io's animal-like status is threatening her very existence as a human being from the inside out. Her actions are purely driven by animalistic instinct, signified by the word εἰκῆ (885).

Io in the state of nature

Remarkably, the only other instance of the word εἰκῆ in this tragedy was in Prometheus' description of primitive human life (450). Therefore, Io's transformation into an animal can be compared to the 'state of nature'. Early human beings resembled other species, such as ants, which emphasized the deep connection between the human and non-human. In the case of Io, the human and non-human world are deeply connected too. After all, she is half-animal herself. Moreover, like the early human beings, she acts instinctively without reason (εἰκῆ). Besides, when Io is tormented by the image of the dead Argus, she refers to his ghost as an εἶδωλον (567). This hallucination can be paralleled to the dreamlike state of the early human beings.¹⁵³ Thus, in the words of White: "she is the very embodiment of primeval humanity".¹⁵⁴

However, Io's situation differs from mankind's early condition. The state of nature established a rather positive kind of interconnectedness between humans and non-human beings ('deep ecology'). Early humans did not experience any real threats from nature. Moreover, nature's beneficial potential was underlined in Prometheus' speech. In contrast to a 'deep ecological' emphasis on cohesion between all life forms, in the case of Io her animalistic status and her natural surroundings make her suffer greatly. In Io's world, nature is depicted as a threatening power ('dark ecology').

Chased by dangerous animals

Io is constantly pestered by nature. At first, it was the monster of Argus who chased her, but when he was lulled to sleep by Hermes, the gadfly (οἰστρος, 566) sent by Hera continued to drive her mad (cf. 677-681). Sharp stings drive her forth around the world (κέντροισι φοιταλείουσιν, 598; οἰστροπλήξ, 681).¹⁵⁵ At 572, she is said the be

¹⁵¹ As noted by Dawson 1951.

¹⁵² Opinions differ on the image that is evoked here, either of a ship tossed in storms (Dawson 1951, 128: "Io likens herself to a ship driven off its course by a ravenous wind, utterly out of control, while its oars flail in disorder against the waves of ruin") or a horse-chariot throwing the master out of the race track (Oudemans & Lardinois 1987, 91). To me, her animalistic state speaks in favour of the latter. However, the role of the wind makes a nautical image more plausible.

¹⁵³ Griffith 1983, 195.

¹⁵⁴ White 2001, 115.

¹⁵⁵ One may wonder to what extent the touching (χρῖει, 566) by the gadfly is symbolic for the sexual assault by Zeus, or perhaps rather for his eventual restoration of Io to her human shape (cf. 849).

hunted: κυνηγετεῖ, a verb used for chasing wild animals with dogs.¹⁵⁶ Later, her movements are described as σκιρτήματα (599, 675) ‘leaps’, a word normally used for frightened animals.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, she is referred to as the ‘gadfly driven daughter of Inachus’ by Prometheus (τῆς οἰστροδινήτου κόρης / τῆς Ἰναχείας 589-590). Being chased after is thus central to her anxious existence. Not to mention all the dangerous monsters and animals she will encounter on her future wanderings: ‘the snake-tressed Gorgons, haters of humans’ (δρακοντόμαλλοι Γοργόνες βροτοστυγεῖς, 799) or the Griffins with their sharp teeth (ὄξυστόμους γὰρ Ζηνὸς ἀκραγεῖς κύνας / γρυῖπας, 803-804).¹⁵⁸ Io, who is part of nature herself, experiences life on earth as a struggle. As such, the description of her suffering at the hands of the wild creatures in nature is an example of ‘dark ecology’.

Natural phenomena as hostile forces

Io is also exposed to the dangers of the elements. She describes her suffering in terms of a god-sent storm (θεόσσυτον χειμῶνα, 643). In fact, both Io and Prometheus are tortured by a metaphorical ‘stormy sea of ruinous sorrows’ (δυσχείμερόν γε πέλαγος ἀτηρᾶς δύης, 746), as Prometheus describes it. Although in the Promethean ‘catalogue of inventions’ humans skilfully made use of benevolent winds to sail the seas with linen-winged boats (467-468), here nothing of the previous synergy is left. Advantage is replaced by danger of severe storms and seas. “The ‘storms’ of sufferings endured by Prometheus and by Io links up effectively with the violence of the elements to which they are both actually being subjected”.¹⁵⁹

Io’s anguish is so unbearable that she rather wishes to end her life by submitting herself to the forces of nature, than to be tortured any longer:

πυρί < με > φλέξον, ἢ χθονὶ κάλυψον, ἢ 582
ποντίοις δάκεσι δὸς βοράν.

Burn me with fire, or bury me in the earth,
or give me as prey to the monsters of the sea.

These suicidal thoughts show Io’s perception of nature as a threat.¹⁶⁰ She considers the three elements mentioned here as harmful. The burning of fire here is fatal, in sharp contrast to Promethean optimism on the capacities of fire as the useful teacher of arts and crafts. The earth is a place for dead bodies, instead of a resource for

¹⁵⁶ Cf. 678 where Argus chases her (ὠμάρτει, lit. accompany, but here rather ‘chase’ or ‘follow’). We find the hunting-metaphor again at 858 for the Danaids and later with respect to Prometheus at 1072 and 1078-1079.

¹⁵⁷ Mossman 1996, 63. See also σκιρτᾶ at 1085, where it is used in the context of the final natural disaster. Griffith 1983, 278: “The similarity of language between the description of the Zeus-sent madness which swept Io away, and that of the elemental violence of Zeus’ punishment of Prometheus is curious”.

¹⁵⁸ On Io’s travels through hostile and uncivilized lands, see the next section on pages 36-39.

¹⁵⁹ Griffith 1983, 21.

¹⁶⁰ Scott 1987 remarks that here “Io foreshadowed the cataclysm which (...) will engulf Prometheus” in the catastrophic finale. Cf. 747-751, where Io again expresses the wish to throw herself of the rocks. See Zeitlin 1996 on the wish for death as a longing for sexual relief (156) and on Io’ condition as a “disease that only a male’s sexual touch can cure” (154).

nourishment and the home of all *living* beings. The sea is full of monsters (δάκεσι) and Io regards herself merely as food for monstrous beast. Due to her anxiety and irrationality, in her self-conception she is reduced to a prey (βοράν).¹⁶¹ Together, the elements underline the harmful nature of Io's surroundings.¹⁶²

To sum up, in contrast to the 'state of nature', Io's case paints a different picture of nature: instead of humans being part of and cooperating with nature ('deep ecology'), Io's life is a continuous struggle, and she suffers from a violent non-human world ('dark ecology'). Brockliss summarizes the pessimistic implications of "the interpenetration of the categories of human and non human: all are bound together into a single harsh ecology".¹⁶³ Nature is turned into a threat by divine will. For, we should keep in mind that ultimately, Io is not the victim of wild beasts, nor of the elements. Rather, she is a victim of Zeus' lustful passions and tyrannical force.

2.3. Wandering through barbarian lands: nature as 'the other'

Thus far, I considered how Io's case sheds light on the role of nature in connection with gendered power-hierarchies from an ecofeminist point of view. Next, I pointed out that Io's mental state as an anxious haunted animal demonstrates how nature figures as a threat and that her situation can be interpreted as an example of 'dark ecology'. In the last section of this chapter, I will explain how in Io's future wanderings, as prophesied by Prometheus, nature is turned into a frightening 'other'. Prometheus predicts how Io will travel through Europe (700-741), continue her journey through the regions of Asia and Africa (785-822), until eventually she arrives in Egypt (844-876).¹⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, White recognizes an underlying cultural imperialism in these descriptions: Io's journey "celebrates an Athenian vision of panhellenic culture by imagining the horrors of a world remote in both time and space and devoid of distinctive Hellenic blessings".¹⁶⁵ The non-human world is a crucial element in this discourse of 'othering', as I will argue. Yet the closer Io comes to the place where she mates with Zeus – a union that leads to the beginning of Greek civilization – the more nature transforms into a guiding, cooperative force.

¹⁶¹ Interestingly, in fr.193 of *Prometheus Unbound* (Sommerstein 2008b, 202-205), which is part of a Latin translation by Cicero, Prometheus too emphasizes that by providing nourishment to 'feed his guard' (*custodem ... alo*, 18), he is deprived of his 'self' (*sic me ipse viduus*, 22). Thereby his body becomes the 'site of damage' of the cruelties (*haec vetusta ... luctifica clades nostro infixata est corpori*, 25-26).

¹⁶² Only the element air is omitted from the description of nature as a dangerous place, for which I have no sure explanation.

¹⁶³ Brockliss 2018, 25.

¹⁶⁴ Prometheus' prophesies cover many of the lands and people's that were known to the Greeks at the time and thereby offer valuable insight in geographical and ethnographical knowledge. See Griffith 1983, 213-214 and notes 136 and 137 above. Cf. A. *Supp.* 538-555, which contains a much simpler version of Io's journey.

¹⁶⁵ White 2001, 116.

Io in Europe

According to Prometheus, Io will first cross ἀνηρότους γύας (708), an ‘unploughed’ or ‘uncultivated’ wilderness. There, she will encounter the Scythians, whose far-shooting bows she must fear.¹⁶⁶ They do have tools, but only use them for hostile ends of warfare, instead of applying them to fruitful ends for, such as working the land. Next, she will enter the lands of the Chalybes, another savage (ἀνήμεροι, 716) people. These untamed people dwell in an untamed natural environment,¹⁶⁷ as becomes clear when Prometheus warns Io for the ‘Insolent River’ and the high peaks of the Caucasus:

ἤξεις δ’ Υβριστὴν ποταμὸν οὐ ψευδώνυμον·
ὄν μὴ περάσης, οὐ γὰρ εὐβατος περᾶν,
πρὶν ἂν πρὸς αὐτὸν Καύκασον μόλης, ὄρων
ὑψιστον, ἔνθα ποταμὸς ἐκφυσᾷ μένος 720
κροτάφων ἀπ’ αὐτῶν·

You will then come to the river Insolence, not inaptly named; do not cross it—it is not easy to cross—until you come to Caucasus itself, the highest of mountains, where the river pours its strength out from the very summit.¹⁶⁸

The river is rightfully called Υβριστής, according to Prometheus (οὐ ψευδώνυμον, 717).¹⁶⁹ This may indicate that the river overflows its borders frequently and thereby displays ὑβρις; going beyond the right measure. At the same time, this impassable ‘insolent’ river is an obstacle for Io’s journey (οὐ ... εὐβατος, 718) and its strength (μένος, 720) when pouring forcefully from the mountain slope is vividly depicted (ἐκφυσᾷ, 720). The Caucasian mountains form another obstacle during Io’s journey: they are unparalleled in their extraordinary height (ὄρων / ὑψιστον, 719-720), even reaching near the stars (ἀστρογείτονας, 721). Nature is thus unusual, harsh and uncultivated, like the people Io encounters. These peoples and landscapes stand in sharp contrast to the audience’s point of reference. Therefore, nature can be interpreted as ‘the other’.

In the last stage of her journey through Europe, Io will meet the Amazons (723-724), who assist Io on her way (728).¹⁷⁰ In passing, Prometheus includes a prediction on the future abode of the Amazons: they will settle at Themiscyra (724), located at a dangerous cape of Salmydessus: ‘where is the savage jaw of Salmydessus,

¹⁶⁶ The Scythians are ‘equipped with far-shooting bows’ (ἐκηβόλοις τόξοισιν ἐξηρτυμένοι· 711) and she should ‘not go near them’ (μὴ πελάζειν, 712), Cf. Hdt. 4.19.

¹⁶⁷ This section seems to embody a notion of ‘environmental determinism’, or “the idea that climate, geography, or other environmental factors cause people to look and behave the way they do” (Bosak-Schroeder 2015, 29), which can also be found in Herodotus (cf. Thomas 2000).

¹⁶⁸ Translation adapted, choosing the name ‘Insolence’, for Υβριστὴν ποταμὸν (following Podlecki 2005, and others).

¹⁶⁹ The identification of this river is doubted, among the suggestions are the Kuban (Sommerstein 2008a, 521), the Araxas and the Tanais (see Podlecki 2005, 129). According to Griffith 1983, 217 the river is either invented or “a fabulous name taken from travellers’ tales”, see also West 1990b, 304.

¹⁷⁰ The reason why the Amazons, otherwise lovers of combat, are sympathetic towards Io is unclear. Perhaps, as Rehm 2002, 158 suggests, they recognize in Io a fellow victim of male ὑβρις.

inhospitable to sailors, the stepmother of ships' (ἴνα / τραχεῖα πόντου Σαλμυδησσία γνάθος / ἐχθρόξενος ναύτησι, μητρυῖα νεῶν, 725-727).¹⁷¹ According to Sommerstein, this digression is “irrelevant, unless it foreshadows a (not directly attested) mention in *Prometheus Unbound* of Heracles' battle with the Amazons at Themiscyra”.¹⁷² Though the extant fragments do not exclude this possibility,¹⁷³ I deem another, less speculative reason more convincing. The personification of the cape of Salmydessus as a monster, with a savage jaw (τραχεῖα...γνάθος, 726) fits nicely with the portrayal of nature as a frightening ‘other’.¹⁷⁴ This ‘othering’ is supported by the comparison of the cape to an evil stepmother (μητρυῖα, 727), in contrast to nature as a nourishing ‘mother earth’.¹⁷⁵ This passage thus contributes to the narrative of nature as a dangerous ‘other’ in the same vein as the Ὑβριστὴν ποταμὸν and the Caucasian peaks.

Io in Asia and Africa

Io must then travel towards regions inhabited by all kinds of mythical hybrid monsters, including Gorgons, Griffins and Arimaspea. Prometheus emphasizes the monstrous qualities of each of these figures, adding to their fearsomeness. He mentions the dangerous Gorgons with snake hair (δρακοντόμαλλοι, 799), qualified as ‘human haters’ (βροτοστυγεῖς, 799), upon whom no mortal can gaze without perishing.¹⁷⁶ Next, the griffins are called ‘sharp-toothed, unbarking hounds of Zeus’ (ὄξυστόμους γὰρ Ζηνὸς ἀκραγεῖς κύνας 803), and Arimaspea is called ἵπποβάμονα (horseriding, 805). For an Athenian audience, these descriptions of beastlike mythological figures certainly contribute to the ‘otherness’ and hostility of the places Io has to cross.

Near the end of her journey (and nearer to the Greek world), nature becomes less bizarre. Instead of playing the frightening ‘other’, nature’s productive potential enters the picture again, as Io’s arrival at the Nile demonstrates. She will reach Ethiopia, where the river Aithiops serves as a guide to the cataract, the boundary between Ethiopia and Egypt. The next river she encounters is the Nile, characterized as σεπτόν (‘holy’, 812), indicating the intrinsic value of this natural element. Moreover, its water is εὔποτον (‘good to drink from’, 812), which underlines the role of nature as a life-giving resource. Here, finally a settlement can be founded (κτίσαι, 815). Nature is thus no longer a hostile ‘other’, but the closer Io travels to the known Greek world, the more nature’s beneficial powers are foregrounded.

¹⁷¹ Translation adapted, with respect to γνάθος (jaw).

¹⁷² Sommerstein 2008a, 522.

¹⁷³ Fragments 195-199 (Radt 1985, 313-315; Sommerstein 2008b, 206-209). See West 1979, 142 and 144-146.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. 1048, where the adjective τραχὺς ‘harsh’ is again applied to the sea. Podlecki 1969, 288 notes that Oceanus uses it for both Prometheus (311) and Zeus (324).

¹⁷⁵ Griffith 1983, 218: “step-mothers were proverbially cruel”.

¹⁷⁶ A. Pr. 800: ἄς θνητὸς οὐδεὶς εἰσιδὼν ἔξει πνοάς.

Io in Egypt

The last stage of Io's prophesied itinerary includes the union between Io and Zeus in Egypt, at the city Canobus, where she will be restored to her human shape:

ἔστιν πόλις Κάνωβος, ἐσχάτη χθονός, 846
Νείλου πρὸς αὐτῷ στόματι καὶ προσχώματι·
ἐνταῦθα δὴ σε Ζεὺς τίθησιν ἔμφορα
ἐπαῶν ἀταρβεῖ χειρὶ καὶ θιγῶν μόνον·

There is a city called Canobus, on the edge of land
and sea, right at the mouth of the Nile where it lays down its silt.
There Zeus will restore you to your right mind
simply by touching you and laying his hand on you, nothing to be afraid of.

Importantly, the natural setting of Io's restoration to a human being differs entirely from the animal-filled meadow of Lerna, where Zeus initially wished to make his sexual advances. Whereas that setting reinforced the hierarchical structure of male domination over women and animals, this setting is rather civilized. The fertile riverbanks are a strategic place for a settlement, where a thriving society can develop itself. Here, Io will regain her human shape, but the text underlines the mental aspect of her transformation rather than the physical: she will be ἔμφορα (848), 'sensible', 'rational' or 'mentally sane'.¹⁷⁷ According to Conacher, "the most striking feature of Zeus' deliverance of Io in Egypt is its gentleness".¹⁷⁸ Even Prometheus acknowledges that Zeus is 'nothing to be afraid of' (ἀταρβεῖ, 849). As this must indicate a change in character, I adhere to an 'evolutionary account' of Zeus: a more just and compassionate Zeus than before *secures* the survival of humankind, instead of aiming to destroy it. This amelioration of Zeus' temper is a crucial prerequisite for nature and humanity to productively interact.

Prometheus' prophecy on the future of Epaphus, the son of Io and Zeus, is another illustration of the possibility of cultural progress through cooperation between nature and humans: 'he will reap the fruits of all the land that is watered by the broad-flowing Nile' (ὄς καρπώσεται / ὄσῃν πλατύρρους Νεῖλος ἀρδεύει χθόνα, 851-852). By irrigating the land around the Nile, Epaphus will make use of nature's potential to enable agricultural developments.¹⁷⁹ This is an example of nature as a cooperative force and a resource at the same time. The overflowing Nile (πλατύρρους, 852) is crucial for the cultivation of the land, as such it stands in sharp contrast to the previously mentioned Insolent river (717) with its dangerous floods. The order is no coincidence, only after the change in Zeus' attitude, a more fruitful cooperation between nature and humanity is possible. As

¹⁷⁷ Note Gakopoulou 2020, 274: "The notion that order is restored through sexual relations and marriage allies with the stereotypical perception that erotic union or marriage contributes to the wild female instinct being civilized".

¹⁷⁸ Conacher 1980, 64.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Hdt. 2.14.

Green explains: Epaphus' "harmonious relationship with the Nile, a son of Ocean, is a testament to Zeus' changed ways and the incorporation of the natural into his rule".¹⁸⁰

In the last part of his geographical predictions, Prometheus reveals that Io's name will be connected to the waters she traversed: she will lend her name to the Cimmerian Bosphorus (732-734) and the Ionian sea (839-841) as a memorial.¹⁸¹ Prometheus thereby predicts a "transformation of open space into storied and remembered place".¹⁸² From a 'barbarian wilderness', in which nature was a hostile 'other', nature will become familiar and recognisable.

As this chapter has revealed, Io's encounter with Prometheus offers important insights in the multiple roles of nature in the play. Io's transformation into an animal as a result of Zeus' passions is an endorsement of the distinctions between male/female and human/animal. The cow-horned Io is an example of the oppression of nature. Her assimilation to an animal in both mind and body reminds the audience of the animal-like mode of living of primitive humans in the 'state of nature'. However, in the case of Io, human and non-human do not harmoniously life together ('deep ecology'), nor can a fruitful 'natureculture' develop. Instead, the natural world figures as a threat, which is considered an example of 'dark ecology'. Finally, the numerous encounters with savage people, hybrid monsters and hostile places underlined the 'otherness' of nature and the lack of civilization during Io's future wanderings, until her reunion with Zeus. Only after a change in his attitude, nature is able to play the role of a productive companion of cultural progress.

¹⁸⁰ Green 2015, 131-132.

¹⁸¹ See Anhalt 2015, 254; Podlecki 2005, 184; and Sano 2021.

¹⁸² Suksi 2017, 213; cf, Rehm 2002, 158. They distinguish between 'space' as a natural concept and 'place' as a cultural construct. For an ecocritical perspective on this distinction, see Buell 2005, 62-96.

3. NATURE AND THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ZEUS AND PROMETHEUS

Having received the ‘gift’ of knowledge about her future journeys, Io leaves the stage. In the next stasimon (887-907) the chorus sing about the importance of proper marriage, which reminds Prometheus of his secret knowledge of the union that would bring Zeus’ tyranny down. Zeus sends Hermes to urgently find out the name of the woman (944ff.). Unsurprisingly, Prometheus is not quite prepared to reveal this secret.¹⁸³ Hermes threatens Prometheus with an intensification of his suffering (1016-1029). A collapse of the cliff will bury Prometheus under the ground for a vast length of time. Eventually, he will re-emerge, but then his liver will continuously be ripped to shreds by Zeus’ eagle. Still not compelled to disclose his prophetic knowledge, Prometheus continues to taunt his opponent (1040-1053) and the chorus of Oceanids decide to side with him (1067). The first part of Hermes’ threat comes true (1080ff.): the earth starts to tremble and thunder, lightning, and whirlwinds blend the sea and sky into one (1089). After a final lamentation to the earth, heaven and seas (1091-1093) Prometheus vanishes into the earth.

This striking finale has posed numerous problems for interpreters regarding its dramatic performance. How could such a natural catastrophe possibly be put on stage?¹⁸⁴ Moreover, scholars have wondered, what kind of natural catastrophe is exactly described.¹⁸⁵ Others studied the influence of Greek natural philosophy on the finale. The blend of the elements is reminiscent of Empedoclean cosmology, in which the force of strife is responsible for a separation of all the elements.¹⁸⁶ Alternatively, Heraclitean influence can also be traced, for his philosophy centres around the ever-transforming element of fire, which plays an important role in the natural disaster.¹⁸⁷ Finally, the open ending raises obvious questions of how to evaluate the outcome: what views on politics, theology and ethics are communicated through this spectacular climax?

In this chapter, I connect the roles of nature to such larger interpretative questions. The antagonism between Zeus and Prometheus ultimately boils down to a conflict between power versus knowledge, or tyranny versus technology. In this conflict, the future of humanity is at stake: their reconciliation is intertwined with the prospect of developing a civilized society. First, a close analysis of the role of nature as a tool for Zeus’ tyranny reveals the vulnerability of his regime. Then, I turn to the catastrophe itself. Nature has a decisive role in this political ‘στάσις’ (dispute) between two opposing forces, by embodying by a universal necessity that is larger

¹⁸³ A. Pr. 963: πείση γὰρ οὐδὲν ὧν ἀνιστορεῖς ἐμέ, (‘you will learn nothing of what you have asked of me’).

¹⁸⁴ On the stagecraft see Taplin 1977, 273-275; West 1979, 135-140; Conacher 1980, 175-191; Griffith 1983, 276-277; Davidson 1994; Bollack 2006; Irby-Massie 2008, 137 n.20; Saïd 1985, 47 and Lloyd-Jones 2003, 56 note that events which required explicit description by the characters, were often invisible to the audience.

¹⁸⁵ Groeneboom 1928, 282-283 seems to consider it a hurricane; Dawson 1951, 237 opts for “stormy earthquake”; Glauthier 2018, argues that the finale is a volcanic eruption. He investigates the engagement with 5th-century volcanic scientific discourse, and tentatively hints at a connection with Anaxagoras (see 263, n.31).

¹⁸⁶ Griffith 1978, 113-116 denies Empedoclean influence. Irby-Massie 2008, 144-145 sees Empedoclean influence, but argues against direct Empedoclean correlation.

¹⁸⁷ See Irby-Massie 2008, 152-157 on Heraclitus.

than any of the characters. The last part of this chapter considers the outcome of the open-ended play. Nature has the role of a moral example, displaying the necessary qualities to establish divine stability and bring about human progress towards civilization.

However, before turning to these roles of nature, it is important to first consider the causes of the catastrophe and shed light on the concept of Necessity, as to explain how nature figures as an embodiment of this universal principle.

The nature of Necessity

The precise cause of the natural catastrophe is hard to pin down. On the one hand, it seems that the inflexible behaviour of both Prometheus and Zeus brings about a catastrophe that could otherwise have been prevented. In their enmity, neither of the two protagonists are willing to cooperate. Zeus is unwilling to release Prometheus and holds on to violent power as his 'tool for tyranny'. Prometheus too is reluctant to share his secret knowledge of the future, despite Hermes' warnings for a disastrous ending. In his intransigence and provocation, he seems to be "flirting with catastrophe".¹⁸⁸

At the same time, it was already predetermined that Prometheus' suffering had to endure and even intensify for generations before he would be released (511-513), reveal his secret knowledge, and thereby avoid the fall of Zeus. For, as the audience knows, Zeus will maintain power in some way and ultimately the Olympian order will be established.¹⁸⁹ After all, by the time of the performance, Zeus was surely regarded the father of the gods, the arbiter of justice,¹⁹⁰ who brought stability in the divine quarrels, after the Titanomachy.¹⁹¹

The ending thus displays a fundamental duality between freely acting characters and external powers of Necessity.¹⁹² As Griffith states: "throughout the play, a tension is maintained between the *inevitability* of certain future events (...) and the *possibility* of the unexpected".¹⁹³ Although the catastrophe seems to be induced by the provocations of Prometheus and Zeus' forceful rage, in fact, an underlying principle of cosmic Necessity, more powerful than the deities, is at play.¹⁹⁴ And, as Prometheus said: 'the power of Necessity is

¹⁸⁸ A phrase borrowed from Kerridge 2000, 248, an ecocritical scholar who studies the tension between impending disaster and the feeling of security as a distant observer.

¹⁸⁹ Throughout the play, several characters enquire whether Zeus will indeed lose his power and be defeated (*Pr.* 519, 757). Thereby, within the drama the possibility that he will be overthrown is maintained. Yet all Prometheus' predictions of his opponent's downfall are conditional (Griffith 1983, 7).

¹⁹⁰ Groeneboom 1928, 15: "aan het einde van de tragedie groeit Zeus uit van een wereldtyran tot een wereldbeheerschenden vader met Dikè als πάρεδρος".

¹⁹¹ Cf. Conacher 1980, 68: "as we all know, Zeus does not fall from power".

¹⁹² Konstan 1977, 62 on this duality with respect to Prometheus: "he seems both of our world and beyond it, passionately engaged in struggle yet obedient to destiny".

¹⁹³ Griffith 1983, 17.

¹⁹⁴ For the vocabulary indicating concepts related to fate and Necessity, see Inoue & Cohen 1978, 29

unchallengeable'.¹⁹⁵ Earlier in play he already realized that his own 'technology is far weaker than Necessity' (τέχνη δ' ἀνάγκης ἀσθενεστέρα μακρῶ, 514),¹⁹⁶ and ultimately Zeus' tyrannical forces are inferior to this higher principle too.¹⁹⁷ As Irby-Massie puts it: Necessity entails a "natural law to which *all* are subjected. Zeus stands as a mere cog in the machine of *physis*".¹⁹⁸ The role of the physical world in the last episode is thus decisive within the plot of the play: nature acts as a moral agent steering towards universal justice.

3.1. Nature and the vulnerability of the tyrant

As the preliminary investigation of Necessity clarified, Zeus' power is inferior to cosmic forces. Precisely this limit to his tyranny is marked by nature in the passages towards the end. In the finale of *Prometheus Bound* the question arises: to what extent is power over nature the right way to guarantee stability of rulership?¹⁹⁹ Zeus uses nature as a means to exercise his dominance. However, a detailed examination of the role of nature uncovers a reversal of this power-hierarchy: the tyrant will be subject to the threat of natural forces himself. This becomes clear from the imagery of domesticating animals and the subversive role of fire.

Taming the tyrant

From the very first scene of the play, in which Prometheus is chained to the cliff, the audience is confronted with Zeus' attempts to reduce his opponent to the status of a captured animal. At the end of the tragedy, the 'animality' of Prometheus reaches a climax, when Hermes compares Prometheus' resistance to a horse not accepting the bit and reins. However, the same passage draws attention to the limits of Zeus' power:

... δακῶν δὲ στόμιον ὡς νεοζυγῆς
πῶλος βιάζῃ καὶ πρὸς ἡνίας μάχῃ. 1010

Like a newly-harnessed colt, you [i.e. Prometheus] have taken the bit between your teeth, and you are struggling and fighting against the reins.

¹⁹⁵ A. Pr. 105: τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔστ' ἀδήριτον σθένος.

¹⁹⁶ Stated right after his 'catalogue of inventions', Prometheus hereby initially expressed his faith in a future release from his bonds. He knows that ultimately will be freed from the 'τέχναι' of Hephaestus. However, in hindsight, this phrase can be read differently (which is supported by Lloyd-Jones 2003, 61). Prometheus himself is closely associated to the τέχναι too. What is implicitly meant by τέχναι are not only the particular bonds by which he is chained, but also technological insight more generally. This phrase acknowledges that there is a necessity in the course of developments (ἀνάγκη) proving the insufficiency of technology only as to establish a society: technology is weaker than necessity.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. A. Pr. 518: οὐκ οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην, 'Certainly he [i.e. Zeus] cannot escape destiny'. See also Rader 2013, 169: "on the one hand, he portrays Zeus as a tyrant whose power is unmatched and untouchable; on the other, for all his intractable menace Zeus is still subject to the same systemic law of the cosmos: Necessity"; and Konstan 1977, 70: "even Zeus's intentions are subordinate to a grand design".

¹⁹⁸ Irby-Massie 2008, 154 (my emphasis).

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Swanson 1995, 216: "One of the play's universal messages concerns the ethical requirements of government". I leave aside the much-debated question to what extent this conflict reflects on actual historical political events (a question that is complicated by the debate on authenticity and date), for the contemporary political context see Podlecki 1966.

In his act of rebellion, i.e. the refusal to share the crucial information on the union that will endanger Zeus' reign, Prometheus is compared to a young horse (νεοζυγής / πῶλος, 1009-110) not accepting the rule of its master. With the bit between its teeth, the horse can go its own way, without heeding the master's directions. Although at first sight the metaphor of taming a young horse may prospect the ultimate dominance of Zeus over Prometheus, as Hermes probably intended it, the uncontrollability of the horse underlines the limits of reducing one's opponents to a mere animal. Yet it also underscores Prometheus' share in the downfall, because of his unwillingness to cooperate. Moreover, the comparison with the horse contains military references to strife, as indicated by the words βιάζει and μάχη (1010). This image of a horse fighting its horse's tack is an allusion to the 'war' between Zeus and Prometheus, foreshadowing the crucial importance of the non-human world in dramatizing civil strife in the play's climax.

The abovementioned passage elucidates Prometheus' act of resistance and the limits of reducing one's opponent to an animal. Prometheus' further prophecies turn things around: the tyrant will become the chained beast himself. Prometheus describes Zeus' impending fall and states that his opponent will 'learn the difference between rulership and slavery' (μαθήσεται / ὅσον τό τ' ἄρχειν καὶ τὸ δουλεύειν δίχα, 926-927). In other words, if Zeus continues to enforce his tyranny through violence, he will turn from the 'ruler' into the 'ruled'. This reversal of power is a reference to the animals in Prometheus' 'catalogue of inventions', which were said to 'serve as slaves' (δουλεύοντα, 463). By 'learning what it means to 'δουλεύειν'', Zeus is reduced to the domesticated animal himself.

Prometheus' next prophecy is even more persuasive: Zeus 'will have to bear an even harsher yoke of suffering than this' (καὶ τῶνδ' ἔξει δυσλοφώτερος πόνους, 931). The adjective δύσλοφος refers to something that is 'hard to bear for the neck', i.e. an oppressing yoke. The comparative form suggests that Zeus will suffer even more than the chained Prometheus. Power hierarchies between the tyrant and his opponents are thus once more described in terms of the oppression of non-human beings. This is an example of the social ecological idea that inequality (oppression) among people (or in this case divinities) goes hand in hand with violent attitudes towards the non-human world. The image of domestication of animals thus serves to illustrate the precarious power-hierarchies, the political resistance of Prometheus, and the vulnerability of tyranny.

The destabilizing force of fire

Zeus not only attempts to hold his opponents down by chaining them as if they were animals under the oppression of a yoke, but he also uses natural forces to ensure his reign. Metaphorically, Hermes designates the intensified suffering of Prometheus as a χειμῶν καὶ κακῶν τρικυμία ('a tempest and a triple wave of evil', 1015). But stormy winds and seas are not the only natural forces the tyrant has at his disposal for oppressing others.

As Irby-Massie states: “Zeus ... endeavours to dominate the world by means of his control over fire”.²⁰⁰ Fire has many contradicting roles: it is called the god Hephaestus’ glory (ἄνθος, 7), it is of course Prometheus’ benevolent gift to humankind, but also the most important element to ensure Zeus’ domination.

Zeus’ use of fire as a powerful force for domination becomes clear throughout the play. He used it, for instance, as a threat against Inachus. The oracles told him that Zeus’ ‘fiery thunderbolt’ (πυρωπὸν...κεραυνόν, 667-668) would destroy his family, if he would not send his daughter away. Fear of the destructive power of fire forces Io’s father to commit an act against his own daughter, only because Zeus had a lust for Io, which he wanted to fulfil through tyrannical power, regardless of the suffering of an innocent human being.

Another character against whom Zeus directed his fiery powers is Typhos. In the conversation with Oceanus in the first episode (284-396), Prometheus recalls the unfair suffering of his brothers Atlas and Typhos (347-376): Typhos, after revolting against Zeus’ regime, was forcefully subjugated by the tyrant (359-372).²⁰¹ Zeus hurled down his ‘wakeful weapon’ (ἄγρυπνον βέλος, 358), the ‘fire-breathing thunderbolt’ (κεραυνὸς ἐκπνέων φλόγα, 359) to oppress his rebelling brother.²⁰² The adjective ‘wakeful’ suggests that the thunderbolt has a quality of permanence, in line with Zeus’ aim to guarantee the duration of his reign through his violent use of this natural element.²⁰³ The once strong Typhos now lies ‘crushed underneath the Aetna’ (ἰπούμενος ῥίζησιν Αἰτναίαις ὑπο, 365)²⁰⁴ reduced to ashes (ἐφεψαλώθη, 362) by Zeus’ lightning (κάξεβροντήθη, 362). The threatening and destructive potential of fire at the hands of Zeus is evident.

However, Zeus’ dominance is not as lasting as it seems. Prometheus predicts a future eruption of the volcano.²⁰⁵ By Typhos’ revengeful act, Zeus’ exclusive mastery over fire is undermined:

... ἔνθεν ἐκραγήσονται ποτε
ποταμοὶ πυρὸς δάπτοντες ἀγρίαις γνάθοις
τῆς καλλικάρπου Σικελίας λευροῦς γύας·
τοιόνδε Τυφῶς ἐξαναζέσει χόλον
θερμοῖς ἀπλάτου βέλεσι πυρπνόου ζάλης,
καίπερ κεραυνῶ Ζηνὸς ἠνθρακωμένος.

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and from there [i.e. from underneath the Aetna] one day will burst forth rivers of fire,
devouring with their savage jaws the smooth fields of Sicily with their fine crops.
Such is the rage in which Typhos will boil over,
raining hot darts of fiery breath that no one can touch,

²⁰⁰ Irby-Massie 2008, 146.

²⁰¹ This passage is narrated too in Hes. *Th.* 821-868; it bears textual resemblance to Pi. *P.* 1.15-28 (Lloyd-Jones 2003, 60; Glauthier 2018, 263-266).

²⁰² At 917 Zeus’ thunderbolt is once again called a ‘fire-breathing weapon’ (πύρπνον βέλος).

²⁰³ Alternatively, it may also indicate that the fire ‘keeps one awake’, the subject being Typhos, parallel to the sleeplessness of Prometheus in his upright position, chained to the rock.

²⁰⁴ Glauthier 2018, 264: “the mountain represents cosmic stability, the victory of Olympian Zeus”, but not for long.

²⁰⁵ Rehm 2002, 159 interprets this “volcanic eruption from the depths of the earth that cannot be contained” as an example of the irrepressibility of nature.

even though he has been calcinated by the thunderbolt of Zeus.

From within the Aetna, lava-streams will burst out: ἔνθεν ἐκραγήσονται ποτε / ποταμοὶ πυρὸς (367-368). The fire is compared to a savage beast, shredding apart everything on its way (δάπτοντες ἀγρίαις γνάθοις, 368),²⁰⁶ destroying Sicily's crops (τῆς καλλικάρπου Σικελίας λευροῦς γύας, 369). Thus, the attempt to resolve a political conflict by using natural elements, backfires with disastrous effects on the agriculture of Sicily.²⁰⁷ The underlying message being that political conflict is dangerous for cultural development and the thriving of society.²⁰⁸ Eventually, the anger of Typhos is said to boil over (ἐξαναζέσει, 370). His raging emotion is paralleled with the outburst of the volcano. Fire becomes the agent of his act of resistance against Zeus. The control over fire is thus not at all exclusive to Zeus. On the contrary, at 371 the 'untouchable fire-breathing darts' (ἀπλάτου βέλεσι πυρπνίου) have become Typhos' weapon.

Far from being Zeus' exclusive 'tyrannical tool' a closer analysis of the role of fire in the scene of Typhos revealed that this subversive element marks the limits of his tyranny. Fire is a highly destabilizing force, as the following passage further demonstrates. Prometheus has the prophetic vision of Zeus' impending fall (if he does not alter his attitude), as a consequence of a union with a woman, who will bear a son greater than his father. Prometheus describes Zeus' defeat by an "unborn overthrewer"²⁰⁹ as follows:

τοῖον παλαιστὴν νῦν παρασκευάζεται	920
ἐπ' αὐτὸς αὐτῷ, δυσμαχώτατον τέρας,	
ὃς δὴ κεραυνοῦ κρείσσον' εὐρήσει φλόγα	
βροντῆς θ' ὑπερβάλλοντα καρτερὸν κτύπον	
θαλασσίαν τε γῆς τινάκτειραν νόσον	
ἢ τρίκροον αἰχμὴν τὴν Ποσειδῶνος σκεδᾶ.	925

Such is the wrestler that he [i.e. Zeus] is even now himself preparing against himself, a monster almost impossible to fight against, who will discover a fire more powerful than the lightning-bolt, a mighty crash surpassing the thunder, and a weapon to plague the sea and shake the earth which will shatter to pieces the three-pointed spear of Poseidon.

This passage crushes any remaining doubt: the possession of fire is not unique to Zeus, for someone will find a 'fire more powerful than the lightning bolt' (κεραυνοῦ κρείσσον' εὐρήσει φλόγα, 922).²¹⁰ This new power even 'surpasses (ὑπερβάλλοντα) the thunder' (βροντῆς, 923). Thus, the limits to Zeus' control over natural elements

²⁰⁶ Cf. A. Pr. 726 for the description of Salmydessus as a monster with savage jaws, see pages 36-37 above.

²⁰⁷ One must be aware that the author probably had in mind a real eruption of the Aetna, supposedly around 479. In ancient Greek thought, it was common to ascribe natural disasters to divine causes, as for instance, Walter 2017 illustrates with respect to the destruction of Helike by an earthquake and accompanying tsunami (see also Dürbeck 2012, 3).

²⁰⁸ See too Green 2015, 128.

²⁰⁹ Conacher 1980, 67.

²¹⁰ It has not gone unnoticed that this figure shares a lot of features with Prometheus himself, cf. Glauthier 2018, 267 who says that the one who will threaten Zeus' reign "mirrors Prometheus' own identity".

to enforce his rulership is affirmed. His way of ruling is self-destructive, as the repetition of αὐτός underlines (ἐπ' αὐτὸς αὐτῷ, 921). Moreover, the stability of his regime is proved to be an illusion: the earth and sea will be shaken (τινάκτειραν, 924) and even the trident of Poseidon will be shattered to pieces. The image of dispersing parts (σκεδᾶ, 925) illustrates the chaos and disruption as opposed to stability. I agree with Picariello and Saxonhouse, that this “marks the failure of Zeus’ efforts to resist the world of flux and make his rule immobile”.²¹¹

3.2. Natural disaster and political disorder

The disruptive role of nature is even more obvious in the climactic natural catastrophe that ends the play, proving both the inherent weakness of Zeus’ tyranny, and the inadequacy of Promethean knowledge to prevent the cosmos from falling apart. An ecocritical reading of the role of nature reveals the importance of the opposition between permanence and the world of flux, between order and disorder.

Volcanic stasis

By the end of the play, after many threats from Hermes, the catastrophe becomes reality. In a final monologue, Prometheus describes the cataclysm taking place on stage, and “the natural world itself now offers a striking image for the destructive processes of civil strife”.²¹² This passage is worth to cite in full:

καὶ μὴν ἔργῳ κούκέτι μύθῳ χθῶν σεσάλευται,	1080
βρυχία δ' ἠχῶ παραμυκᾶται	
βροντῆς, ἔλικες δ' ἐκλάμπουσι στεροπῆς ζάπυροι,	
στρόμβοι δὲ κόνιν εἰλίσσουσι,	
σκιρτᾶ δ' ἀνέμων πνεύματα πάντων	1085
εἰς ἄλληλα στάσιν ἀντίπνουν ἀποδεικνύμενα,	
ξυντετάρακται δ' αἰθὴρ πόντῳ.	
τοιᾷδ' ἐπ' ἐμοὶ ῥιπὴ Διόθεν	
τεύχουσα φόβον στεῖχει φανερῶς.	1090

Now in deed, no more in word alone, the earth is shaking and reeling!
 From the depths, in accompaniment,
 there bellows the sound of thunder; fiery twists
 of lightning shine out; the dust
 is whirled by whirlwinds; the blasts of all the winds
 at once leap at one another in a raging display of mutual strife,
 and sky and sea are blended into one.
 Such is the tempest that has plainly come
 from Zeus upon me, to strike terror.

²¹¹ Picariello & Saxonhouse 2015, 283. Rehm 2002, 160 too acknowledges that the cataclysmic chaos of natural elements indicates that Zeus has lost his control.

²¹² Glauthier 2018, 273. Thus, as Dürbeck 2012, 3 writes: “literature gives meaning to catastrophes either through scientific explanations and religious, ethical or political interpretations”.

All the elements are entangled with one another in this catastrophic finale. First, Prometheus notices an earthquake, followed by the sound of thunder from below him. The cosmic order is disturbed to such an extent, that the sound of thunder comes from the earth rather than the sky. The confusion is intensified by the blending of the sea and the skies (ξυντετάρακται δ' αἰθήρ πόντω). Moreover, lightning erupts from the earth.²¹³ The winds blow in all directions, which is described as a 'mutual strife'.²¹⁴ A closer look at this phrase, reveals that the physical world and the underlying political conflict are intertwined: the large-scale disturbance of the natural world is called *στάσις*, a term meaning a political strife among different parties, in this case Zeus' tyrannical power and Prometheus' technological insight. Nature is turned into the stage of divine conflict in this "elemental play".²¹⁵ As Glauthier describes it, the whole cosmos turns into "a political or social landscape, one that uncontrollable forces, simultaneously natural and supernatural, tear apart from the inside out".²¹⁶

One could argue that this ending exhibits a victory of Zeus' power over Promethean knowledge. However, the emphasis on cosmic disorder stands in sharp contrast to Zeus' aims for the stability and permanence of his regime. Besides, Zeus' actual objective was to force Prometheus to disclose his secret foreknowledge, which is required to guarantee the stability of his reign. The cosmic confusion is far from his best interest as a tyrannical ruler. Thereby, this catastrophe is disastrous for both Prometheus and Zeus. However, it is a predestined development, which not even Zeus can 'pause': the all-powerful natural forces, direct the course of events in the interest of universal justice or fate.

An open end

Inevitably, human advancement stands in sharp contrast to the natural catastrophe on stage. When the whole cosmos is at disorder, there is no place for human progress either. The physical reality of the audience outside the theatre was considerably different from the imagined catastrophe on stage, intermingling all the natural elements. This certainly made the spectators aware of the orderly nature of their own natural surroundings. Instead of a hostile natural environment, to the Greek audience, the sea, skies, sun and earth were more benevolent.²¹⁷ The apocalyptic open end therefore urges the questions: what has to change in order to resolve the conflict? Moreover, this final catastrophe underlines that Promethean technological insight cannot ensure control over fate. Thus, what are the necessary requirements for a thriving society beyond Promethean gifts

²¹³ I agree with Irby-Massie 2008 and Glauthier 2018 that this should be taken as a volcanic eruption.

²¹⁴ Dawson 1951, 237 "Our interest should be roused by the word σκιρτᾶ", a word encountered earlier in Io's final verses at 599 and 675, see page 34.

²¹⁵ Rehm 2002, 163.

²¹⁶ Glauthier 2018, 273.

²¹⁷ See Rehm 2002, 163 and Glauthier 2018, 275.

alone? To shed light on these issues, it is not necessary to turn to speculation on the sequel. Instead, a possible answer can be found by uncovering the last role of nature in *Prometheus Bound*.

3.3. Natural phenomena as moral exempla

The problem at the heart of the conflict between Prometheus and Zeus is, as in many tragedies, their inflexibility of character and their lack of willingness to cooperate.²¹⁸ Prometheus displays a ‘heroic’ stubbornness and lacks moderation and prudence.²¹⁹ His arrogance and disobedience to divine order are recognized and criticized by the other characters in the play.²²⁰ The chorus, for instance, urge him to abandon his arrogance, and choose εὐβουλία (prudence, 1038) over αὐθαδία (arrogance or self-will, 1037). Zeus’ lack of morality is even more obvious. As a true tyrant, he distrusts those who once were his φίλοι,²²¹ has no faith in communication, betrays a certain paranoia, is immoderate in his lustful feelings (such as for Io), and his will counts as ‘justice’.²²² Most importantly, he shows no signs of pity for those who suffer under his tyrannical regime.²²³ “In sum he displays all the traditional characteristics of the ‘bad tyrant’”.²²⁴

A reconciliation would surely require an evolution in the character of Zeus and a mutual willingness to enter a friendly bond.²²⁵ Interestingly, the absence of ethical, social, and political skills could be noticed in Promethean society too. As pointed out previously, progress was limited to developing technological tools for material and intellectual advancement; none of Prometheus’ skills enabled mankind to live together in a civilized community. The reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus, also requiring social, political and ethical skills,

²¹⁸ For instance, at *A. Pr.* 164 Zeus is called ‘inflexible’ (ἄγναμπτον). See Karp 1996 on both characters’ inflexibility.

²¹⁹ See Conacher 1980, 71 on Prometheus overstepping boundaries, both by his theft of fire and his insults towards Hermes he shows ὑβρίς and lack of σωφροσύνη. Yet he does have the qualities of pity and compassion, for instance with the mortal race, his brothers Atlas and Typhos, and with Io. In fact, Swanson 1995 argues that excessive pity is his major flaw: “Prometheus represents compassion and pity more than he does intellectuality and pride” (219). Podlecki 1969 argues that Prometheus is “guilty of many of the same faults and excesses he accuses his adversary of possessing” (287) by pointing out patterns of verbal repetitions of moral discourse (such as αὐθαδία and τραχύς) and thereby uncovering a ‘reciprocal’ relationship between Zeus and Prometheus.

²²⁰ For criticism from the chorus, see *A. Pr.* 259-260; 507; 540-544.

²²¹ Cf. *A. Pr.* 224-225: ἔνεστι γάρ πως τοῦτο τῇ τυραννίδι / νόσημα, τοῖς φίλοισι μὴ πεποιθέναί, ‘it is a sickness that comes somehow with every tyranny, to place no trust in one’s friends’.

²²² For instance, at *A. Pr.* 403 Zeus is said to rule by his ‘own laws’ (ἰδίους νόμοις, cf. 150 νεοχομοῖς...νόμοις). See also Griffith 1983, 7; Seaford 2003, 99; Lloyd-Jones 2003, 68.

²²³ At 980-983 Prometheus says that ὤμοι, an expression of pity, has no place in Zeus’ vocabulary. Moreover, at 242-244 the chorus says that whoever does not feel pity at the sight of Prometheus’ suffering, must have a heart of iron: This certainly applies to Zeus, who chained Prometheus in a region labelled the ‘mother of iron’ (τὴν σιδηρομήτορα, 301).

²²⁴ Griffith 1983, 7.

²²⁵ This bond (ἄρθμὸν, 191) or friendship (φιλότητα, 191) is foreshadowed by Prometheus at 186-192.

is thus closely linked to the future of humanity. Only a *benevolent* Zeus will release Prometheus. Only a *benevolent* Zeus can grant humans the crucial skills to be able to live together in a flourishing society.²²⁶

Within the dramatic timeframe, the resolution between Prometheus and Zeus still lies far ahead. Prometheus foresaw that once he is hurled into Tartarus it will take generations until he is released by Io's descendant Heracles (870-873). However, the audience, can already recognize some of the missing links for the reconciliation in the characters that advice, sympathize with and support Prometheus. Notably, the crucial moral qualities are displayed by characters all closely associated with nature: Oceanus, the Oceanids and Gaia.²²⁷ The last role of nature which I will therefore distinguish, is the role of nature as a moral example. That is not to say these figures have any immediate moral *agency*, for there is still a necessary course of events and change can only happen at the right, predestined moment (καιρός).²²⁸ However, in my view, their virtues are intended to be recognized by the audience as moral *exempla*, to be contrasted with the stubborn behaviour of both protagonists. In Greek myth, the notion that natural phenomena can embody human values is not new. As Calvino explains: “the flora and fauna, the mineral world and the firmament encompass within their common substance that collection of corporeal, psychological and moral qualities which we usually consider human”.²²⁹

Watery lamentations from the Oceanids

At 128 the chorus of Oceanids enter, and immediately they emphasize that they come as friends (φιλία). The friendly Oceanids frequently express their pity and have compassion with Prometheus. For instance, at 144-148 his suffering brings them to tears (φοβερά δ' ἑμοῖσιν ὄσσοις / ὀμίχλα προσῆξε πλήρης / δακρύων, ‘fear brings rushes into my eyes, a mist full of tears’, 144-146). They again lament Prometheus’ suffering at 398-401:

στένω σε τᾶς οὐλομένας τύχας Προμηθεῦ·
δακρυσίστακτον ἀπ' ὄσσων
ῥαδινῶν λειβομένα ῥέος παρειᾶν
νοτίοις ἔτεγξα παγαῖς. 400

I groan, Prometheus, for your terrible fate:
I let fall a flow of tear-drops
from my tender eyes, and moisten my cheek
with their watery stream;

²²⁶ Perhaps what is meant at 186-187: ‘he keeps justice with himself’, is that Zeus hides this from humans, just like he used to hide fire. If justice is still hidden, perhaps in the future Zeus will grant humanity this virtue, as argued by Lloyd-Jones 2003, 68.

²²⁷ I believe, I need not defend the plausibility of assuming that Oceanus, the Oceanids and Gaia are to be associated with the forces of nature, as they are personifications of the ocean, the element of water and ‘mother Earth’. To be sure, there is no necessity to seek an ‘elemental balance’ in the personifications of natural elements, as Herington 1963 tried.

²²⁸ Cf. A. Pr. 523 on καιρός.

²²⁹ Calvino 2009, 26.

The Oceanids cry for Prometheus a river of tears. The watery nature of the Oceanids is vividly emphasized in their expression of pity (esp. δακρυσίστακτον, 399 and νοτίοις... παγαῖς, 401).²³⁰ Nature is turned into a moral example and displays a virtue that Zeus is clearly lacking.

Whereas the Oceanids first came across as timid and obedient daughters of Oceanus, by the end of the play, they unexpectedly decide to side with Prometheus, for they do not wish to adhere to traitors (προδότας, 1068). Scott therefore argues for a change in the behaviour of the chorus taking place between the second and third stasimon: “after they see Io, they realize that Zeus’ power is great, but corrupting, that his rule is tarnished by the plaintive cries of his subjects, and that the proper attitude toward Zeus and the other Olympians is fear and aversion”.²³¹ Indeed, their compassion for Io brings about a change in their attitude. As other ecocritical studies on ‘disaster discourse’ have shown, the behaviour people display in a situation of impending catastrophe is motivated by their central cultural values, social relations, and personal virtues.²³² This act of the Oceanids clearly shows courage, solidarity and a kind of φιλία in the face of cosmic violence.²³³

Moreover, in the choral songs, the Oceanids convey traditional moral messages: for instance, the third stasimon celebrates σωφροσύνη and the fourth emphasizes the importance of proper marriage. Thus, the Oceanids display important moral and civic virtues both in words and deeds. Thereby, the watery element, personified by the Oceanids, provides an *exemplum* of praiseworthy moral behaviour.

Oceanus as a moderator

The father of the Oceanids, Oceanus is the personification of the all-encircling sea and ever-flowing ocean.²³⁴ When Oceanus arrives at the Scythian cliff, to which Prometheus is chained, he expresses his pity and emphasizes that he has come to help his companion, feeling a duty to do so based on their kinship:

ταῖς σαῖς δὲ τύχαις, ἴσθι, συναλγῶ·
τό τε γάρ με, δοκῶ, ξυγγενὲς οὕτως ἐπαναγκάζει. 290

I share the pain of your misfortunes, I assure you;
our kinship, I feel, compels me to do so.

A few lines below, he even states that Prometheus will have no firmer friend than himself (οὐ γάρ ποτ’ ἐρεῖς ὡς Ὠκεανοῦ / φίλος ἐστὶ βεβαιώτερός σοι, 296-297). In his conversation with Prometheus, Oceanus advises him to

²³⁰ See Conacher 1980, 48 on the pity of the watery element.

²³¹ Scott 1987, 94. Gagarin 2014, 96 supports this view of their transformation.

²³² Rigby 2008, 25: “The manner in which people comport themselves in the midst of a disaster (...) is likely to be inflected by their horizon of understanding and cultural values, as well as by the character of their social relations and personal virtues”.

²³³ See Rehm 2002, 161.

²³⁴ Cf. A. Pr. 531 ἄσβεστον πόρον, ‘everflowing stream’.

be more moderate, to temper his too free speech and to make amends with Zeus.²³⁵ He even wants to mediate in a reconciliation. In addition, Oceanus conveys the proverbial ethical message ‘know yourself’ (γίγνωσκε σαυτόν, 309), which was part of common Greek moral knowledge,²³⁶ meaning one should know one’s own limits and beware of ὑβρις.²³⁷ It is clear that Oceanus stands for collaboration and reciprocity.²³⁸

However, Prometheus rejects his helpful advice and sends him home. Due to the unsuccessful outcome of his mission as a mediator, both Oceanus’ sincerity and the value of this episode have been called into question in scholarly interpretation.²³⁹ Yet in my view Prometheus’ refusal has not so much to do with a ‘miscalculation’ or ‘wrong intent’ on Oceanus’ side. Rather, the course of Necessity makes it impossible for Prometheus to let Oceanus be a moderator in the reconciliation with Zeus, not the least because, for instance, Prometheus still needs to help Io on her journey with his prophetic knowledge, etcetera.²⁴⁰ The fact that *within* the play, a reconciliation with the help of Oceanus is impossible, does however not hinder him from being a moral *exemplum* for the audience. On the contrary, as Konstan summarizes: Ocean’s “spirit of sympathy, kinship and cooperation (cf. 288; 289; 295) is not only the manifestation of a political point of view but also a function of his mythic identity, inasmuch as he represents *par excellence* the original unity and harmony of nature”.²⁴¹

Gaia and the elements as witnesses

Finally, I wish to return to Prometheus’ opening lamentation to nature. His very first words on stage evoked nature as a witness to his suffering:

ὦ δῖος αἰθήρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί
 ποταμῶν τε πηγαὶ ποντίων τε κυμάτων
 ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, παμμήτωρ τε γῆ, 90
 καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ·
 ἴδεσθέ μ’ οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός

O heavenly sky and swift-winged winds,
 river-springs, countless smiles of waves of the sea,
 the earth, mother of all, and the all-seeing circle of the sun,
 I call upon you: See me, how I as a god suffer at the hands of gods

²³⁵ For instance at 315ff.

²³⁶ See Konstan 1977, 63: Oceanus “has much proverbial advice on the subject of self-control, moderation and appeasement” and Podlecki 1969, 287.

²³⁷ See Podlecki 1969, 287.

²³⁸ Rader 2013, 178.

²³⁹ On doubt concerning the intent and effectiveness of Oceanus’ contribution to the play, see Taplin 1977, 262, who argued that Oceanus was insincere; Rehm 2002, 165, who argues that Oceanus as an unsuccessful moderator overstates his own importance; Conacher 1980, 44 with n.22.

²⁴⁰ See Konstan 64-65.

²⁴¹ Konstan 1977, 68.

In a well-ordered sequence, all the elements are incorporated in these famous opening lines.²⁴² Prometheus evokes the element air, then the water of rivers and seas, mother earth and the fire of the sun: all are called not only to ‘see’, but to ‘witness’ his suffering and thereby to become his ally.²⁴³ It is important to note that in this play Prometheus has a special connection to the earth. As opposed to traditional mythology (where he is a son of Iapetus and Clymene), he is the son of Gaia, who is identified with Themis, the goddess of justice at 209-210. This double function of his mother Earth as the goddess of justice is significant. Throughout the play, the earth functions as his ally, which “harmonizes with the normal Greek idea that Earth is always man’s friend. She will naturally stand on the side of man’s great benefactor”.²⁴⁴ The natural elements, especially the earth, thus provide a moral example: as witnesses they show the value of justice.

As Picariello and Saxonhouse remark: “it is the earth that Prometheus calls on to witness his punishment, to become an ally through that witnessing, and it is the earth that cries for Prometheus (at 408-409)”.²⁴⁵ Prometheus relies on his mother as a witness once more, when he utters the last words of the tragedy:

ὦ μητρὸς ἐμῆς σέβας, ὦ πάντων 1093
 αἰθῆρ κοινὸν φάος εἰλίσσων,
 ἐσορᾷς μ’ ὡς ἔκδικα πάσχω.

O my honoured mother, O Sky
 around whom rolls the light that shines on all,
 see me, how I suffer unjustly!²⁴⁶

In this final lamentation, Prometheus calls his mother, the element air, and indirectly the sun to witness his suffering. In the preceding verses, Prometheus had just described how all the elements were in cosmic disorder. Griffith therefore considers this passage a culmination of Prometheus’ “utter isolation and vulnerability”.²⁴⁷ His forthcoming downfall into Tartarus puts the final lamentation to the natural world in a tragic perspective. Prometheus laments to a natural environment, which he will not see for a long time. Yet in my view, taking into account the important identification between Gaia and Themis, his last words are also hopeful. Prometheus’ addresses his ‘mother’, which can be earth (Gaia), in line with the sky and the sun, but it can equally well be an appeal to Themis, the goddess of justice. In this lamentation both roles are at once implied in μητρὸς ἐμῆς σέβας. Thus, Prometheus here evokes nature as a witness to foreshadow the universal justice and restoration of the cosmic order as predestined by Necessity.

²⁴² Herington 1970, 181.

²⁴³ Rehm 2002, 162: “Nature herself must look on his suffering”.

²⁴⁴ Adams 1933, 98. Even in Prometheus’ final collapse into the earth he is said to be embraced by the rocks (πετραία δ’ ἀγκάλη σε βαστάσει, 1019).

²⁴⁵ Picariello & Saxonhouse 2015, 283.

²⁴⁶ Translation adapted, in accordance with ἐσορᾷς μ’ (West) instead of ἐσορᾷθ’ (Sommerstein).

²⁴⁷ Griffith 193, 280 (see also his note on μητρὸς ἐμῆς σέβας).

This chapter connected an ecocritical reading of the final catastrophe with larger interpretative questions concerning the political conflict between Prometheus and Zeus and the future of humankind. As I have pointed out, nature underlined the vulnerability of the tyrant and the limits of using natural forces as a means of claiming authority: Zeus' tyranny cannot withstand in the face of Necessity. The cosmic chaos, brought about by the final natural catastrophe is interpreted as an embodiment of political στάσις. Ultimately, the audience must have wondered how the conflict could ever be resolved. Moreover, since the resolution of the conflict is closely linked to the future of humanity, the audience is invited to reflect upon the remains of 'Promethean society', as Promethean knowledge could not prevent the natural catastrophe. What is clearly lacking, both in the two main characters of the play, and in human 'culture' as outlined by Prometheus, are social, political, and moral skills. A final analysis of the characters Oceanus, the chorus of Oceanids and Gaia showed how natural characters figure as moral *exempla*. In contrast to Prometheus and Zeus, these natural characters *do* display the crucial virtues of pity, moderation, and justice.

CONCLUSION

This thesis departed from the assumption that nature is not merely the background to the tragic events of the *Prometheus Bound*. In this tragedy, nature pervades and transcends the human and divine realm. I have investigated the complex dynamics of the interrelations between the divine, the human, and the non-human world, by treating nature as an agent in its own right. In line with an ecocritical theoretical framework, I have analysed the different roles of nature. This analysis shifted between perspectives from deep ecology, dark ecology, social ecology, and ecofeminism.

What is commonly taken to be a play about the origins of civilization in the face of forces of nature, in fact displayed a more complex conception of human life on earth. As I demonstrated, *Prometheus Bound* manifests a fundamental awareness of roots of human existence in the natural realm. Moreover, nature is not merely a foil for culture, nor an obstacle to cultural progress. Instead, nature and culture can productively feed into each other. Yet different scenes of the play stand at different ends of the spectrum of an integrated 'natureculture' or a separation between man and the environment.

Nature's value is to a great extent recognized, both in the sense of nature as a resource and in the sense of nature as a productive, cooperative, inspirational, teaching, and guiding force. However, there is a danger in seeing nature merely instrumentally. Promethean insight in nature will only bring material and technological advancement, which is an important, but not sufficient constituent of civilized society. Moreover, the limits of instrumentalizing nature for one's own benefits, without proper moral insight, are underlined by tyrannical Zeus. His use of nature as an oppressive power has proven untenable. In the same way, human beings should not use nature beyond the necessary, without having any sense of moderation. To some extent, the play thus nuances the binary opposition between nature and culture, and sheds light on the importance of ethical, social and political insight.

That said, the play also endorses some of the binary categories of modern thinking, such as male/female, human/animal and civilized/barbarian. Io's dream of Zeus' sexual advances and her transformation into a half-animal underline the hierarchical power relations of the male over the female, and the human over the animal. Moreover, the harsh and dangerous environment faced by Io, is part of a discourse of 'othering', that celebrates Greek civilization over Barbarian primitivism.

The end of the play displayed the tension between the divine, the natural and what can be called the 'supranatural'. Nature became a moral agent, embodying a higher cosmic principle of Necessity, which transcended even the powers of Zeus. The all-encompassing final natural catastrophe underlined the disastrous effects of civil strife. This stressed the inevitability of fate, as well as the importance of cooperation for reconciliation. In addition, nature, personified by the characters of Oceanus, the Oceanids, and Gaia, provided

the Athenian audience with crucial *exempla* of the necessary political, social, and ethical skills to make civilized society flourish.

Taken together, the variety of roles of nature is thus much greater than has previously been recognized, and so are the modes of engagement between the divine, the human and the non-human world. Here, I have endeavoured to demonstrate why “it is absolutely vital to further explore the classical texts that created the cultural imaginary still used when talking about the environment”.²⁴⁸ At the same time, this thesis proves that modern theories allow the exploration of elements that have received too limited attention in traditional scholarship, in order to come to a richer understanding of some of the most important texts of human history.

²⁴⁸ Schliephake 2017, 8.

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