

**Zeitschrift:** Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique  
**Herausgeber:** Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de l'Antiquité classique  
**Band:** 55 (2009)

**Artikel:** Aeschylus' gods : drama, cult, theology  
**Autor:** Parker, Robert  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-660903>

#### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

#### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

#### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 08.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

### III

ROBERT PARKER

## AESCHYLUS' GODS: DRAMA, CULT, THEOLOGY

Herodotus in book 2 tells how, in Egyptian myth, Apollo (Horos) and Artemis (Boubastis) were not children of Leto but of Demeter (Isis), who gave them to Leto to hide from Typhon and to nurse. "And it is from this story and no other that Aeschylus the son of Euphorion stole what I shall now mention, alone among all poets up to his day. For he made Artemis a daughter of Demeter".<sup>1</sup> This passage is Aeschylus' first appearance in the historical record, and Herodotus inaugurates, however churlishly, a long tradition of seeing the poet as an innovator in theology. It is, however, a statement about divine genealogy, not for instance about divine justice or care for mankind, that has caught Herodotus' attention. No ancient source anticipates the once popular modern conception of Aeschylus as a thinker straining out against the confines of traditional polytheism towards a new 'Zeus religion'.<sup>2</sup> Herodotus also inaugurates a long tradition of treating statements made by

<sup>1</sup> HDT. 2.156.4-5 (=S. RADT [ed.], *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Vol. 3, *Aeschylus* [Göttingen 1985] [TrGF 3] F 333, among the *incertarum fabularum fragmenta*). S. Radt assembles the guesses of scholars about the fragment (from *Aigyptioi* or *Danaides*? a fragment of Eleusinian lore?). J.E. POWELL, "Notes on Herodotus", in *CQ* 129 (1935), 81-2 (quoted with approval by A.B. LLOYD (ed.), *Herodotus. Book II Commentary 99-182* [Leiden 1988], *ad. loc.*) supposed Aeschylus to have taken the detail from Hecataeus.

<sup>2</sup> This tradition is documented, and criticised, in H. LLOYD-JONES, "Zeus in Aeschylus", in *JHS* 76 (1956), 55-67 (= *Greek Epic, Lyric, and Tragedy* [Oxford 1990] 238-261).

characters in tragedies (for such the new genealogy of Artemis must necessarily have been) as statements made by the poet himself. But in all probability the apparently bizarre innovation was determined by its context in some way; Herodotus may be right, for instance, that the detail is an Egyptianizing one, and the speaker may have been a Greco-Egyptian like the Danaids in *Supplices*.

That particular problem is limited, and insoluble. But the methodological issue is fundamental to studying the presentation of the gods in any mimetic art-form. Of the many statements relating to the gods in any tragedy, which are merely imitations of the ways in which men do speak about the gods, which if any can claim to convey truths about the dealings of gods with man? The different views expressed in *Persae* about the Persian defeat are a model illustration of the point. The Persian elders warn of the danger of 'god's crafty deception' (δολόμητις ἀπάτα θεοῦ), the messenger speaks of "some *daimon*", "an *alastor* or an evil *daimon*" and "the gods' envy"; the queen bemoans a "hateful *daimon*" which deceived the Persians, and the chorus a "*daimon* bringing heavy toil" (δυσπόνητος) which has leapt upon the nation.<sup>3</sup> But the ghost of Darius has a different account to give of the matter. Xerxes has not been brought low through random and inexplicable divine hostility to the Persian people: he has been punished for his impious and arrogant treatment of the Bosphorus, for the burning of temples, for aspirations not proper in a mortal.<sup>4</sup> Darius is a good king summoned from the dead and thus equipped with prophetic insight; he also refers to oracles which predicted Persian disasters, though at an uncertain date.<sup>5</sup> He speaks therefore with absolute authority; within the world of the play, what he says is truth. The survivors, however, seem to derive little profit from his revelation: not only Xerxes, who

<sup>3</sup> AESCH. *Pers.* 93; 345; 354; 362; 472; 515-6. See too 724.

<sup>4</sup> AESCH. *Pers.* 744-750; 808-815; 820-822. I follow the excellent discussion of R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983), 1-15.

<sup>5</sup> AESCH. *Pers.* 739; 800-2.

was not there to hear him, but even the chorus, who were, continue after his return to the shades to speak uncomprehendingly of the hostility of a *daimon*.<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps this failure to learn that gives the end of *Persae* that unresolved character which has left many critics unsatisfied.

Darius' speech is 'truth within the play'; and there are other such religious truths within the play in Aeschylus, though perhaps not very many. Like religious certainties in real life for the Greeks, they usually derive from prophecy or something similar. In *Septem*, Apollo's warning to Laius not to beget children and Oedipus' curse upon his sons are uncontested facts which are certain, given the authority of an oracular god and a father's curse, to have disastrous consequences; when such consequences occur, the causal link between past and present seen by characters in the play is manifestly correct.<sup>7</sup> In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra the prophetess sees a connection between "the original mad act ( $\pi\varphi\omega\tau\alpha\varphi\chi\omega\varsigma\ \ddot{\alpha}\tau\eta$ )" that occurred in the "brother's bed hostile to him who set foot in it", the revenge in the form of "the roast flesh eaten by the father", and the revenge for the revenge about to be enacted by the murder of Agamemnon.<sup>8</sup> Clytaemnestra and the chorus later speak in similar terms of a *daimon* or an *alastor* of the Pleisthenid race, and Aegisthus adds an actual curse spoken by Thyestes;<sup>9</sup> but it is the prophetess' insight that renders these diagnoses wholly reliable. Earlier in the play, the seer Calchas has predicted how a "cunning house-keeper, a remembering child-avenging Wrath" will execute a second "lawless, feastless sacrifice" (147-155); the allusion is to Clytaemnestra avenging Iphigeneia. In *Eumenides*, we learn from the mouth of Apollo, the god who cannot lie, that it is Zeus' will that Orestes be acquitted (614-621), and Athena endorses the claim if endorsement is needed (797-9); already

<sup>6</sup> AESCH. *Pers.* 911-2; 921; 942; 1005 (plural).

<sup>7</sup> For the facts see AESCH. *Sept.* 720-791; for the causal link 653-5, 691, 695-6, 709, and often later.

<sup>8</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 1192-3; 1097, *cf.* 1217-1222; 1223-1241.

<sup>9</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 1468-1480; 1497-1512; 1600-1602.

in *Agamemnon* Cassandra had spoken of "a great oath of the gods" that Orestes would come home to avenge his father (1284-5). Various prophecies about the future are revealed or alluded to in *Prometheus Vinctus*. Some statements about past events too are made in the plays which, even though not due to prophets or confirmed by prophecy, we should accept simply on the grounds that there is no reason to doubt them; on this basis we learn, for instance, in *Supplices* (as is predicted in *Prometheus Vinctus*) that Zeus' pursuit of Io led in the end to the emergence of a prosperous dynasty.<sup>10</sup> And two plays evidently have a special status in that they deploy gods as actual speaking characters. But the relation of the primeval divine world of *Prometheus Vinctus* to that in which we live is controversial, to say nothing of the one-sidedness of the account of it given by Prometheus. As for *Eumenides*, its concern is with a particular mythological situation and the establishment of a particular cult; we learn from it much about the powers of the Semnai at Athens, little of a general kind about the dealings of gods with men. (One exception is Apollo's bold statement that "I have never on my mantic seat said anything, about man, woman, or city, that was not ordered by Zeus the father of the Olympians" [*Eum.* 616-8].) And that conclusion can be made more general: the 'facts' about the divine world that we find in Aeschylus relate to specific situations; doubtless some generalisation from those specific cases will be natural enough — if Zeus did not abandon Io, he will not abandon other targets of his fancy; if Oedipus' curse was fearsomely effective, so will be those of other wronged fathers — but a detailed casuistry of the scope and limits of gods' concern for men and for fair dealing among them is far from emerging.

<sup>10</sup> AESCH. *Supp.* 531-589; *PV* 846-874. Io's account of Zeus' pursuit of her in *PV* 640-686 falls in the same category. On the authorship of *Prometheus Vinctus* I am an agnostic; I include it only glancingly in this article, because its unique character as a play set among the gods in primeval time makes it a special case whatever view one takes of its authenticity.

Alongside these limited certainties, the plays contain numerous assertions about the divine made by characters and chorus. It would be foolish to dismiss such assertions en bloc as powerless to persuade a spectator or reader; the claims of characters in plays, like those of live people, may appear more or less well-grounded, more or less perceptive and objective. But one cannot simply assemble them all and construct an Aeschylean view of the gods from the full set; some such views are products of folly, arrogance, or an interest that distorts judgement. The Egyptian messenger who seeks to carry off the Danaids by force at the end of *Supplices* tries to parry an accusation of impiety with the claim "the gods I respect are those about the Nile" (922). Few critics no doubt have ever been impressed by that argument, an improvisation determined by the situation and manifestly either insincere or deluded. Nor will many have accepted Aegisthus' claim, in the first words he speaks in *Agamemnon* (1577-1582), to have divine justice on his side:

O kindly light of a justice-bringing day! Now at last would I say that the gods from above watch over the griefs of earth, now that I have seen this man lying in the woven robes of the Erinyes — to my delight! — paying for what his father's hand devised.

It may be true that in a sense Agamemnon has paid for what his father's hand devised. But it is hard to believe that the gods care much for the griefs of Aegisthus, the "cowardly lion, ranging in the bed" (1224) of another man, who leaves his mistress to fight his battles and only arrives after the murder has been performed. Many critics, by contrast, have accepted as a fact that, when in the crisis at Aulis the sacrifice of Iphigeneia was proposed, it was "right in religion" ( $\thetaέμις$ ) for Agamemnon or for the army (there is textual uncertainty) to "desire a wind-stopping sacrifice and maiden blood" (215-7).<sup>11</sup> But this is no more than a self-justifying assertion by Agamemnon, and the

<sup>11</sup> So e.g. J.D. DENNISTON and D. PAGE (eds.), *Aeschylus, Agamemnon* (Oxford 1957), xxiv; S. GOLDHILL, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: the Oresteia* (Cambridge, 1984), 29, 262.

chorus go on at once to show what they think of it by designating his decision as “impious, impure, profane” (219-221). We need not suppose that they anticipate the subtleties of some modern moral philosophers whereby a single act may be both necessary and blameworthy.<sup>12</sup> They simply reject Agamemnon’s desperate defence of his foul deed.

It is worth stressing that, though chorus and characters often represent the Greek expedition against Troy as the avenging instrument of Zeus Xenios,<sup>13</sup> that proposition only glancingly and incidentally receives the kind of endorsement through prophecy which, in the terms of the argument so far, turns assertion about religious matters into fact. The relevant prophecy is Calchas’ interpretation of the bird omen, two eagles eating a pregnant hare, that accompanied the start of the expedition. Calchas’ emphasis lies on the terrible consequences implied by the death of the pregnant hare. He also predicts that the expedition will be successful in its aim of capturing Troy. Only when he says that Artemis is angry against “the winged dogs of her father” for the killing of the hare does he represent the eagles, *i.e.* the Atreidai, as agents of Zeus.<sup>14</sup> But that is far from a statement that Zeus willed the Greek fleet to sail to Troy at all costs, including that of human sacrifice. And that negative is essential to the economy of the play. Aeschylus artfully interchanges three perspectives on the expedition against Troy. On one side it was just revenge for a crime against hospitality. On the other it was a war not worth fighting, one that brought death on innumerable men for the sake of a worthless woman.<sup>15</sup> And, as even just wars always may, it led not only to deaths on the battlefield but to war-crimes, beginning with the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and ending with the brutalities accompanying the

<sup>12</sup> For this view see M. NUSSBAUM, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1986), 32-8.

<sup>13</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 61-2, 362-6, 748, etc.

<sup>14</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 126-155.

<sup>15</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 62; 448-9.

sack.<sup>16</sup> It is the holding of these three perspectives in tension that gives the play its extraordinary power as a meditation on war. Too strong and authoritative an emphasis on Zeus' support for the expedition would have confused and spoilt the balance. Had an oracle instructed Agamemnon to lead an expedition against Troy in the cause of Zeus Xenios, he would indeed have faced at Aulis the impossible dilemma, a genuine conflict between two absolute requirements, sometimes postulated by readers of the play. But no such instruction was issued. He faces, it is true, an acute and agonizing dilemma of the kind that Aeschylus excels in portraying:<sup>17</sup> to abandon the expedition would mean defying the wishes and expectations of his peers, and renouncing his own hopes of glory. But the decision that he reached was not one imposed upon him by divine command. To say, as the chorus do, that the expedition was an instrument of Zeus Xenios is merely to say that Troy deserved punishment for Paris' crime. But gods have long memories, and Troy could have been punished in a way that did not involve the murder of a daughter by her father.<sup>18</sup>

I revert to the issue of the authority that different statements about the divine may lay claim to. Some may suppose, chiefly on the basis of *Agamemnon*, that utterances of the chorus have a special status. And one might cite in support the heightened awareness in recent criticism of the double aspect of the chorus, as both characters in a play and also continuators of the ancient tradition of choral song in honour of the gods. But

<sup>16</sup> Probably symbolized by the killing of the pregnant hare in the portent at Aulis (*Ag.* 135-8): on this notorious crux see the survey of opinions in D.J. CONACHER, *Aeschylus' Oresteia: a literary commentary* (Toronto 1987), 76-83.

<sup>17</sup> A. LESKY, "Decision and Responsibility in the Tragedy of Aeschylus", in *JHS* 86 (1966), 78-86.

<sup>18</sup> I follow J.J. PERADOTTO, "The omen of the eagles and the ΗΟΟΣ of Agamemnon", in *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 237-263, esp. 251; cf. e.g. B. VICKERS, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London 1973), 350-3; R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 85-6; A.H. SOMMERSTEIN, *Aeschylean Tragedy* (Bari 1996), 364-6; 425; S. TIMPANARO, "Antinomie nell'Agamennone di Eschilo", in *GIF* 50,2 (1998), 131-184.

Aeschylus' choruses are often characterised with great vividness, and no-one will suppose that, for instance, the frightened and disorderly women who constitute the chorus in the first half of *Septem Contra Thebas* are to be seen as mouthpieces of civic wisdom. Those same women acquire, it is true, a new gravity in the second half of the play, a change that is symbolised when they address their king as "child" (686). But that observation underlines the point that choral utterances have no general claim to authority.<sup>19</sup> We have already seen that the chorus in *Persai* shows no sign of understanding the religious explanation for Xerxes' downfall even when this has been authoritatively explained by Darius' ghost.

The chorus of *Supplices* is a particularly interesting case. The old view of Aeschylus' distinctive 'Zeus religion' found much of its support in this play. "Lord of lords, most blessed of the blessed, strength mightiest to accomplish of all accomplishers, all-fortunate Zeus", sing the chorus. They go on to tell the story of Io in a way which presents Zeus not as seducer but as saviour, jealous Hera being the source of all her suffering; and they end with another acclamation to "the universal resource, favouring Zeus".<sup>20</sup> Earlier they had told of Zeus how: "he casts down mortals to utter destruction from the high tower of their hopes, but arms no force against them. Seated, he somehow brings his purposes to accomplishment without movement, from his sacred seat."<sup>21</sup> Some have supposed an influence here from the unlabouring god of Xenophanes, who

<sup>19</sup> Cf. R.B. RUTHERFORD, "Why should I mention Io? Aspects of Choral Narration in Greek Tragedy", in *Cambridge Classical Journal* (previously *PCPS*) 53 (2007), 1-39, at 16: "the special status of this body means that the voice is fluid".

<sup>20</sup> 524-599. In their note on *Supp.* 524-6, H. FRIIS JOHANSEN and E.W. WHITTLE (eds.), *Aeschylus, The Suppliants*, (Copenhagen 1980), vol. II, 408 speak of the lines' rhetorical structure as "outstanding for the intensity of the religious feeling it conveys".

<sup>21</sup> 96-103 (the glorification of Zeus begins at 86); recent editors more or less concur in so restoring these corrupt lines. For Zeus' effortlessness cf. *Eum.* 651; fr. 99. 2-3.

“controls everything without effort by the thought of his mind” and “always remains motionless in the same spot, and it is not fit that he should go now hither, now thither”.<sup>22</sup> Xenophanes’ god is anticipated by Homer’s in one of his aspects: though Homer’s god does indeed go ‘now hither, now thither’, it is usually in pursuit of his pleasure that he does so, while he brings his most important ‘plans’ to fulfilment ‘easily’, through the agency of other gods and mortals, without stirring from Olympus. Thus the effortless Zeus of *Supplices* can be seen as the Homeric Zeus, piously interpreted as is appropriate in a hymn of praise, no less than as an early form of the god of the philosophers. But even on that view, such a selection and interpretation of a single aspect of a tradition is a form of innovation. The chorus express too the old idea of the inscrutability of Zeus’ will with new metaphorical splendours.<sup>23</sup> The effect is a remarkable intensity of devotion to Zeus. It is not easy to find parallels in Greek poetry for such trusting and passionate magnificats, before or afterwards.<sup>24</sup>

Commentators, however, have noted that the rhetorical structure “lord of lords, most blessed of the blessed” finds parallels in ancient near eastern rather than in Greek literature. The chorus are characterised in many ways as unGreek;<sup>25</sup> they expect Pelasgos, for instance, to rule as an absolute monarch for whom the state is himself (370-5). Though singing in

<sup>22</sup> H. DIELS und W. KRANZ (hrsg.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin 1952), [= DK] 21, B 25, 26; cf. W. RÖSLER, *Reflexe vorsokratischen Denkens bei Aischylos* (Meisenheim 1970), 7-10, with earlier references, and H. FRIIS JOHANSEN and E.W. WHITTLE, *op. cit.* (n. 20), *ad loc.*, who accept the connection; J. KERCHENSTEINER in *Gnomon* 49 (1977), 622-3 doubts it. W. KIEFNER, *Der Religiöse Allbegriff des Aischylos* (Hildesheim 1965), argues that the idea of Zeus’ omnipotence acquires a new insistence in Aeschylus; but he himself shows, 20-32, that the idea is firmly rooted in Homer.

<sup>23</sup> 89-90, 1057-8.

<sup>24</sup> The praise of Zeus at the start of HES. *Op.* is much less personal and intense. Cf. perhaps PI. *Pyth.* 9.43-9. We lack actual cult hymns almost entirely, it is true; but the fragments we have do not suggest such power.

<sup>25</sup> See J. GRETHLEIN, *Asyl und Athen* (Stuttgart 2003), 53-72; on their attitude to Zeus esp. 60-65.

Greek, they even refer to their own “barbarian voice” (119, 130). And one may wonder how an Athenian audience might have responded to some of the religious arguments that they employ. Doubtless there is nothing intrinsically offensive in their belief that Zeus is morally obliged to protect them, as descendants of his loved one Io.<sup>26</sup> That is merely one expression of the idea that gods and mortals can be bound by ties of *charis*, mutual obligation grounded in mutual favours; and the frequent appeal to that idea by speakers in tragedy, in Aeschylus not least, can plausibly be seen as one of the ways in which tragic characters reflect ordinary Greek attitudes. The chorus in *Septem Contra Thebas* too appeal to family ties with gods whose protection they are seeking, and urge the gods of the city to “remember” the sacrifices that have been made to them;<sup>27</sup> the reverse of that argument, “it is in your interest to help us, for sacrifices will follow” (or variants thereon) is used by Eteocles, and by Orestes in *Choephoroi*.<sup>28</sup> So the chorus’ expectation of favour from Zeus characterises them neither for good nor ill. But they are extremely quick in applying moral blackmail to Pelasgos with their threats of polluting suicide on Argos’ altars.<sup>29</sup> And they have earlier, if less directly, applied a similar threat to Zeus himself: they will die and transfer their supplication to “the all-receiving Zeus of the dead” if the Olympian gods will not help them, and then the Zeus of the upper world will be exposed to “just reproaches”.<sup>30</sup> These are the girls who will go on to murder the sons of Aigyptos en masse. They express boundless faith in Zeus, and they also threaten him. Their famous magnificats to Zeus may have been seen as no less excessive than their attempts to blackmail the god.

<sup>26</sup> AESCH. *Supp.* 162-75, 531-594.

<sup>27</sup> AESCH. *Sept.* 106-7, 140-3, 179-180.

<sup>28</sup> AESCH. *Sept.* 76-77, *Cho.* 255-7; 483-5, *cf.* 790-793. On *charis* see H. YUNIS, *A New Creed* (Göttingen 1988), 101-111, and my essay in C. GILL *et al.* (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998), 105-125.

<sup>29</sup> AESCH. *Supp.* 455-467.

<sup>30</sup> AESCH. *Supp.* 154-174.

The other chorus whose utterances have been held to illustrate Aeschylus' Zeus religion is that of the *Agamemnon*. The famous 'Hymn to Zeus', though much grimmer, is little less intense than the celebrations of Zeus by the Danaids. Zeus, we are told in a strophe, is beyond all possible comparison; it is only by turning to him that the chorus can "cast off the vain burden from their thoughts".<sup>31</sup> An antistrophe celebrates the god's omnipotence; a new strophe speaks of the painful learning, the "violent *charis*", inflicted on mortals by Zeus. Evidently we cannot dismiss the respectable elders of Argos as if they were over-passionate maidens from Egypt. But the so-called Hymn is not a theological statement; it has a carefully-crafted place within the chorus' narration of the terrible events at Aulis, a narration which resumes in the antistrophe following the strophe that ended with the gods' "violent *charis*". Cunningly positioned between Calchas' ominous prediction and its fulfilment, the 'Hymn' creates a kind of suspense. It moves from trust in Zeus to an emphasis on Zeus' punishing and sobering power. Its relevance to the main narrative is not made clear;<sup>32</sup> as so often in Aeschylus, the hearer must struggle, anxiously and only in part successfully, to understand. But one will naturally try first to apply it to the narrative of Iphigeneia's sacrifice which it interrupts, and at the end of which the threat of Dike bringing learning through suffering is repeated.<sup>33</sup> The effect in context is to enhance the mood of grim foreboding, to foreshadow dire consequences from Agamemnon's terrible act.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> I follow the traditional interpretation of *Ag.* 160-166, despite the counter-arguments of P.M. SMITH, *On the Hymn to Zeus in Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (Chico 1980); cf. A.F. GARVIE, in *JHS* 103 (1983), 164. P.M. Smith suspects (p. 5) that the idea of turning to the gods for relief from care is Christian, not Greek, but see EUR. *Hipp.* 1102-3 or SOPH. *El.* 173-8.

<sup>32</sup> So rightly S. GOLDHILL, *op. cit.* (n. 11), 28.

<sup>33</sup> Aliter P.M. SMITH, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 25, 27; M. GAGARIN, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley 1976), 139-150.

<sup>34</sup> T.J. ROSENMEYER, "Gorgias, Aeschylus, and *Apate*" in *AJPh* 76 (1955), 255-6.

The argument thus far may seem destined to end with a much thinner account of the role of religion in Aeschylus than has usually been accepted. If everything except a limited number of truths sanctioned by curse or prophecy is to be dismissed as characterisation or as contextually-determined, what is left of the great religious poet? I sound a retreat at this point from that extreme position. However unreliable the voice of the chorus in the first half of *Septem* and throughout *Supplices* may be (but is even that voice reliably unreliable?), it is hard not to be swayed by the great choruses of *Agamemnon* or in the second half of *Septem*; their interpretations mesh so persuasively with the revelations of prophecy and with what we see on stage. In no other Greek author (not even notably pious authors such as Herodotus and Sophocles) are human actions marinated, as it were, in the divine in quite the same way. Beliefs that are part of the common stock acquire in Aeschylus a new intensity.<sup>35</sup> For Herodotus, for instance, no less than in Aeschylus divine justice is often at work in human history; but whereas for him this involvement of the divine is a conclusion that may be drawn at the end of a pragmatic narrative of events, in the choruses of *Agamemnon* the whole Trojan war becomes nothing but a “blow of Zeus”; no other aspect of it matters, except of course the further religious guilt incurred by the Greek commanders. One of the great differences between Aeschylus and Sophocles lies in the contrasting role of the chorus as a religious commentator; it is largely because there is much less such commentary in Sophocles that so little is revealed about the divine world in his plays.

<sup>35</sup> See J. DE ROMILLY, “Vengeance humaine et vengeance divine. Remarques sur l’Orestie d’Eschyle”, in *Das Altertum und jedes neue Gute. Festschrift für W. Schadewalt*, Hrsg. von K. GAISER (Stuttgart 1970), 65-77. On Aeschylus’ great ritual scenes which so contribute to this ensorcellment of our world see EAD., *L’Évolution du pathétique d’Eschyle à Euripide* (Paris 1961), 10. B. OTIS, *Cosmos and Tragedy* (Chapel Hill 1981), 20, speaks of “an almost unbearable weight of historical and cosmic meaning”.

What emerges in Aeschylus, however, is often much more an attempt to portray the human consequences of certain beliefs than to justify god's ways to man. Karl Reinhardt once spoke of Aeschylus "tearing open the gaps, which the Solonian theodicy covered up".<sup>36</sup> Inherited guilt or the late punishment of the gods was for Solon a way of supporting the claim that religious offences are, in the end, always punished. But when Eteocles finds "the hateful curse of his dear father" "sitting upon" him with "dry unweeping eyes",<sup>37</sup> and argues that "the gods have somehow abandoned all care for us by now", all the emphasis lies on the horror of his situation; and though its ultimate cause is said to lie, via Oedipus' curse, in Laius' disobedience to Apollo,<sup>38</sup> no character responds or could respond with a sense of moral satisfaction at the working out of divine justice. Such operations can be, rather, paradoxical and terrible: "what is fulfilled among mortals without Zeus? What of all this is not god-ordained?" ask the chorus in *Agamemnon* when they come to see how it is the curse on the Atreid house that has led to Agamemnon's murder (1486-7). They speak in horror, not pious enlightenment.

Again, the thundering insistence in the choruses of the *Orestiea* that "the doer shall suffer; this a thrice-ancient saying declares" (*Cho.* 313-4) is identical at a propositional level with the morally bracing statement that "no mortal who acts unjustly will not be punished" (uttered by a dream-figure to Hipparchus the night before he died in Herodotus<sup>39</sup>). But its implications

<sup>36</sup> See K. REINHARDT, *Aischylos als Regisseur und Theologe* (Bern 1949), 17 (the Solon passage is fr. 13. 25-32, M.L. WEST (ed.) *Iambi et elegi graeci ante Alexandrum cantati. Vol. II* [Oxford 1992]). N.J. SEWELL-RUTTER, *Guilt by Descent. Moral Inheritance and Decision Making in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 2007), 20 writes "The justice of the tragedians is generally an agent of destruction, and the  $\Deltaίκα$  that shines forth in smoky dwellings in one passage of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (772 *sqq.*) is often scarcely visible through the pall of transgression, Erinys and curse."

<sup>37</sup> AESCH. *Sept.* 695-6 (but N.J. SEWELL-RUTTER, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 31 n. 49, argues that the eyes are those of Eteocles); 702.

<sup>38</sup> AESCH. *Sept.* 742-767; 800-802; 842.

<sup>39</sup> HDT. 5.56.1.

in Aeschylus are appalling. "Our deeds carry their terrible consequences... consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves" (as Mr Irwin says in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, his Aeschylus open in front of him).<sup>40</sup> Far from lacking responsibility for their actions (as some have supposed) the characters of Aeschylus are intensely and catastrophically responsible;<sup>41</sup> and they may bring affliction on themselves, their descendants, their cities, and many innocents besides. What is more, goodness is fragile; in the wrong circumstances it is very easy to err disastrously. Clytaemnestra indeed is a monstrous figure (though not without her justifications), but Agamemnon is merely a man of average ambition and heartlessness, Paris merely a pampered youth. (The resistance of both has been weakened by the great corrupter, wealth.) The two themes, that deeds carry their terrible consequences and that transgression is easy, converge in the second stasimon of *Agamemnon*: the chorus describe the mere carelessness of mind with which Paris stole Helen and the Trojans welcomed her home, bringing doom on themselves and on many Greeks besides, who came to fight "for a promiscuous woman" in a "woman-avenging war".<sup>42</sup> Such language reveals, as was noted earlier, that the Trojan war, though in one sense just, was in another not worth fighting; and through it Agamemnon and the wronged Greeks themselves move into the wrong, by sacrificing Iphigeneia and by their brutality and impiety during the sack of Troy. The fall of Troy is just, the death of Agamemnon is just, the death of Clytaemnestra is just, but there is little comfort in any of this. The principle that 'no mortal who acts

<sup>40</sup> Chapter 16; cf. R. JENKYN, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1980), 116.

<sup>41</sup> "Here we find the most searching and sustained analysis of human action in Greek tragedy": B. VICKERS, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 347; cf. N.J. SEWELL-RUTTER, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 150-161.

<sup>42</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 717-749, *cf.* 385-402 (and for Helen's similar levity 407,  $\delta\acute{\iota}\mu\phi\alpha$ ); 62; 225-6. For the view of Agamemnon's character taken here see e.g. R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 78-100.

unjustly will not be punished' is not in Aeschylus a simple solution to the confusion and horror of human life, but also a part of it.

Aeschylus might, it is true, seem to mitigate the harshness of the old Solonian doctrine of delayed divine punishment. Solon spoke of "innocent" descendants paying for the offences of their ancestors. In his defence of the "delayed vengeance of the gods", Plutarch was eventually to argue that only those children of bad parents who are themselves bad are punished, while those who have escaped the moral contamination of their race are spared. This explicit modification of the old doctrine is already implicit in Aeschylus' exploitation of it.<sup>43</sup> Eteocles chooses freely to fight his brother, although other options are offered to him by the chorus; they speak of his "evil desire" (687-8) for a potentially fratricidal combat. Agamemnon adds new guilt to that which he has inherited, while Orestes, who performs his terrible task only with reluctance, and at a god's command, in the end goes free. A further element is present too, enriching and complicating. The agents used by the gods to punish Agamemnon for his own and his father's deeds of blood are not disinterested parties: Clytaemnestra avenges Agamemnon's offence against her daughter, Aegisthus that of Agamemnon's father against his own father Thyestes. Thus unpunished crimes remain recorded in human, as well as divine, books of reckoning. It is not just that ancestral guilt is not 'the' cause of later suffering (as if there were no other); it is almost a metaphor for a purely human chain of causality. Herodotus sometimes detects "the divine element" in events in their very paradoxical quality<sup>44</sup>; but the curse on the house of the Atreidai works in all too familiar human terms. In a horrendous and magnificent moment, Clytaemnestra

<sup>43</sup> SOLON fr. 13. 25-32; PLU. *Ser. Num. Vind.* 21, 562e-563b. On the Aeschylean modification see most recently N.J. SEWELL-RUTTER, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 30 (with references), 33, 48, and on Eteocles *ibid.* 158-161. An unanswerable question remains about Oedipus in the *Septem* trilogy: was he inculpated in any way?

<sup>44</sup> e.g. HDT. 7.137.1.

suggests that she herself has become the *alastor* of the house (*Ag.* 1497-1504).

Aeschylus' version may avoid the obvious unfairness of the Solonian punishment of innocent descendants. But this vision of a house torn apart "not by others outside but by themselves, through raw bloody Strife"<sup>45</sup> is in some ways much more terrible. There is an old debate about the many demonic figures, the *alastores* and *palamnaioi* and *prostropaioi* and curses and Erinyes, who haunt the pages of Aeschylus. Were such figures realities for the poet and his contemporaries, or figures of speech, or something in between?<sup>46</sup> A new element entered the discussion with the publication in 1993 of the 'New Lex Sacra from Selinus', which revealed that in the mid fifth century a Sicilian community could publish a ritual prescription for "purifying oneself from an *elasteros*" (evidently a variant of an *alastor*). One possible variety of *elasteros* was apparently an "ancestral" ( $\pi\alpha\tau\varphi\omega\iota\sigma$ ) one, though it must be admitted that other types ("visible", "audible") defy reliable interpretation, as does much in this remarkable text.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps then the chorus in *Septem* were not being wholly unrealistic when they suggested to Eteocles that "the black-clad Erinys will leave your house, when the gods receive sacrifice" (699-701). Mechanisms for getting free of *elasteroi* existed. But if the ancestral *alastor* was embodied in Clytaemnestra, there was no hope of 'purifying' her 'off'.

"Reading the *Oresteia* makes one afraid for one's life", one critic has written. *La Crainte et l'angoisse dans le théâtre d'Eschyle*

<sup>45</sup> AESCH. *Cho.* 472-4, slightly misapplied.

<sup>46</sup> The extreme statement of the former view is by W. KRANZ, *Stasimon* (Berlin 1933), 40-2; of the latter perhaps H.D.F. KITTO, *Poiesis* (Berkeley 1966), 38-74; for an intermediate view E.R. DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951), 40-41. See now F. GEISSE, *Götter, Geister und Dämonen. Unheilsmächte bei Aischylos – zwischen Aberglauben und Theatralik* (München 2002), who is agnostic.

<sup>47</sup> M.H. JAMESON, D.R. JORDAN, R.D. KOTANSKY, *A Lex Sacra from Selinus* (Durham 1993) (= *SEG* XLIII 630); the text has been re-edited in E. LUPU, *Greek Sacred Law. A Collection of New Documents* (Leiden 2005), n°. 27.

is the title of a monograph which captures much that is most powerfully Aeschylean.<sup>48</sup> In the last few paragraphs I have tried to illustrate that which is terrifying even in Aeschylus' vision of divine justice. Yet, extraordinarily, the same poet is responsible for the most compelling evocations of human wellbeing to be found in Greek literature; it is perhaps not surprising that some critics have sought to see in his thought a striving, analogous to that of some pre-socratic thinkers, to achieve a reconciliation of opposites.<sup>49</sup> The basis for studying the poet's paradoxical double-sidedness is, alas, desperately narrow. The symbol of this 'bent back harmony' is the contrast in mood between the first two plays of the *Oresteia* and the third: it is something which one needs a whole trilogy to comprehend, and of these we have only one. It would be foolish to suppose that the problems and solutions dramatised in the *Oresteia* would have been reproduced elsewhere, in trilogy after trilogy. But we must work with what we have.

Disastrous decisions, we have noted, bring those who make them, their families and perhaps their cities to ruin. Those who have "healthiness of mind"<sup>50</sup> will not make such decisions. Those who lack it and go wrong are restored, all unwillingly, to sobriety of mind by their downfall; this is the famous "violent care" of the gods for men.<sup>51</sup> As it happens, the trilogy fails to provide illustrations of characters learning from their sufferings, as Croesus and Cambyses learn in Herodotus;<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> By J. DE ROMILLY (Paris 1958). One critic: B. VICKERS, *op. cit.* (n. 18), 425.

<sup>49</sup> K. REINHARDT, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 73-4; R. SEAFORD, "Aeschylus and the unity of opposites", in *JHS* 123 (2003), 141-163. But note the critics of such approaches cited by J. GRETLEIN, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 239. Human wellbeing: *Supp.* 625-709, as well as the end of *Eumenides*.

<sup>50</sup> AESCH. *Eum.* 535-6.

<sup>51</sup> AESCH. *Ag.* 176-183 (the use of *charis* here gives a sardonic twist to its familiar religious application); 250-1: cf. P.M. SMITH, *op. cit.* (n. 31), 21-6, with his references; on the reading in 182, *ibid.*, 73 n. 90.

<sup>52</sup> HDT. 1.86, 207.1; 3.65 (cf. however H.P. STAHL, "Learning through suffering? Croesus' conversations in the history of Herodotus", in *YCS* 24, [1975], 1-36). On the questionable 'learning' of Orestes see R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 144-5. As for learning by others, this is certainly not the normal

nor is there much support for the obvious thought that unaffected persons (and the spectators of tragedy) might learn from the sufferings of the principals. What Aeschylus presents instead is, in *Eumenides*, a vision of a just society in which men's vagrant desires are restrained by fear of punishment. Thus, ideally, the citizens will never need to "learn through suffering"; the city has thought in advance and embodies in its institutions the necessary restraints that will keep their minds healthy. The organ of restraint is, on the human level, the legal process symbolised by the Areopagus. That human process, however, reflects and in a sense cooperates with the principles of divine retribution embodied in the Erinyes. The citizens will be just, says Athena, through "fear" of the Areopagus; the Erinyes themselves have earlier justified their function by explaining "there is a place where fear must remain seated... to oversee the mind". The trilogy ends with the procession of citizens escorting the Erinyes to their new home below the Areopagus. The orator Dinarchus surely remembered Aeschylus when he said that "the reverend goddesses accepted the verdict given by the Areopagus in the case of Orestes, and made themselves partners in the court's truthfulness from then on" (Din. 1.87).<sup>53</sup>

Orestes' acquittal by the Areopagus is surely, for the spectator, an entirely desirable outcome; huge sympathy has been built up for him, a kind of complicity therefore of the audience in the divinely-sanctioned matricidal plot, since the start of *Choephoroi*.<sup>54</sup> On calmer reflection, some of the arguments used

sense of the old adage (still a modern Greek proverb) παθήματα μαθήματα (cf. e.g. M. GAGARIN, *op. cit.* [n. 33], 139-150).

<sup>53</sup> AESCH. *Eum.* 696-703; 517-9; and on the learning of the citizens through time 1000 (with the mss: M.L. WEST accepts H. HERWERDEN's κόρων, ruinously). See above all C.W. MACLEOD, "Politics and the Oresteia", in *JHS* 102 (1982), 124-144 esp. 129, 135-6; also E.R. DODDS, *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford, 1973), 61-2.

<sup>54</sup> This is achieved not least through the kommos. As W. SCHADEWALDT, "Der Kommos in Aischylos' *Choephoren*", in *Hermes* 67 (1932), 312-54 showed, the kommos has nothing to do with shaping Orestes' resolve to kill his mother,

to support it may not appear very satisfactory;<sup>55</sup> but, in terms of the realities of mid fifth century Athens, a society that had had courts for more than a hundred and fifty years, the question of whether an Orestes ought or ought not to have exercised self-help as he did was not an urgent or contemporary one. The details of the case of Orestes cease to matter very much, and his acquittal is accordingly not the climax of the play; what comes to matter is the vision of a just and flourishing city that emerges after his departure. Aeschylus' preoccupation with family curses is sometimes seen as a product of his archaic world-view, for which what is important is the *fortuna domus*, not of the individual. But Aeschylus' central concern is neither of these, but rather the *fortuna reipublicae*. It is not only in the *Oresteia* that a polluted family and a prosperous city are set in contrast. *Septem Contra Thebas* too derives much of its dramatic power from the tension that is resolved when the two brothers die in terrible fratricide, but the city of Thebes is saved.<sup>56</sup> A great chorus in *Supplices*<sup>57</sup> through which the Danaids present a vision of prosperity for Argos suggests that the theme may have been relevant in that trilogy too, though the resolution there is lost to us.

One of the most extraordinary features of the *Oresteia*'s extraordinary ending is the interpretation that Aeschylus provides

a resolve already formed. It is a ritual designed to secure the dead Agamemnon's support by reminding him of the outrages inflicted on him by Clytaemnestra: on the power of insults remembered note esp. 491-6 (and cf. *Eum.* 135), and for the active role envisaged for Agamemnon 489, probably 583-4 (cf. O. TAPLIN, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* [Oxford 1977], 339 n. 3), *Eum.* 598. But in the theatre the real recipients of the kommos are the audience; it is they who are stirred up by the great litany of outrages inflicted.

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. C. PELLING, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London 2000), 167-177; J. GRETHLEIN, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 232-50.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. 71, 764-5, 815-7, with R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 16-54; cf. R. SEAFORD, *Ritual and Reciprocity* (Oxford 1994), 344-62.

<sup>57</sup> AESCH. *Supp.* 625-709. Here too, as in *Eumenides*, the context is 'pollution averted': cf. R. PARKER, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983), 279. But pollution will follow, with the murder of the sons of Aiguptos.

in it of an actual Athenian cult. Many tragedies allude to cults, but no other except perhaps *Oedipus at Colonus* gives a cult such a weight of dramatic meaning. Aeschylus' starting point is the sanctuary of the Semnai Theai, located in a rock-cleft below the Areopagus.<sup>58</sup> The cave, unfortunately, has yielded no remains, and most of our knowledge about the cult-practice comes from the play itself. The goddesses are to receive sacrifices "for children" (or, "before child-birth") "and the fulfilment of marriage" (835); they seem to be close partners of their sisters the Moirai (959-67), with whom they are also linked in a fragment of Euripides;<sup>59</sup> they have in their control the weather, as it affects agriculture, the growth of crops, the increase of animals, and "protection of human seed" (903-9; 938-47); they indeed influence, Athena politely suggests, "all human affairs" (though elsewhere, by an interesting division, she reserves warfare for herself).<sup>60</sup> From Pausanias' brief description of the sanctuary we

<sup>58</sup> For its probable site, where the remains of the church of S. Dionysius the Areopagite now are, see W. JUDEICH, *Topographie von Athen* (München 1931), 300; R.W. WALLACE, *The Areopagus Council* (Baltimore 1989), 273 n. 51. It is hard to accept the suggestion (for which see A.H. SOMMERSTEIN, *Aeschylus. Eumenides*, (Cambridge 1989), notes on 853 and 1025-6) that in *Eumenides* Aeschylus has disregarded the actual location, when he was depicting the origin of this cult situated about five minutes walk from the theatre of Dionysus! The votive material found in a Geometric building on the north slope of the Acropolis is now felt to belong there, not as originally thought to have been dumped from the shrine of the Semnai above: H.A. THOMPSON and R.E. WYCHERLEY, *Agora XIV: The Agora of Athens: The History, Shape and Uses of an Ancient City Centre* (Princeton 1972), 17 n. 50. A roof tile inscribed ΣΕΜΝΩΝ ΘΕΩΝ has, however, been found, re-used, at the junction of Lenormant and Konstantinoupoleos Streets some way to the north: *Archaiologika Analecta ex Athenon* 18 (1985), 50; *Archaeological Reports* 1988-9, 13. It is less likely to come from Colonus, as the excavator suggests, as the goddesses were more normally Eumenides there. For votives from elsewhere in Greece see n. 63.

<sup>59</sup> R. KANNICHT (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta Vol. 5, Euripides* (Göttingen 2004), *Melanippe Desmotis* F 494.18 (where, however, the reference can scarcely be specifically Athenian): cf. A. HENRICHES "Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama", in *Fragmenta Dramatica. Beiträge zur Interpretation der griechischen Tragikerfragmente und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*, Hrsg. von A. HARDER und H. HOFMANN (Göttingen 1991), 161-201: 174-5.

<sup>60</sup> AESCH. *Eum.* 930-1; 913-5.

learn that it contained statues of other powers associated with the earth and the wealth that comes from it — Plouton, Hermes, and Earth herself — and also, mysteriously, a supposed “tomb of Oedipus”. Other sources add little about the powers of the goddesses, but bring the very important confirmation that this was, indeed, a cult of central civic significance. Not only was the precinct of the Semnai one of the two recognised places of sanctuary in the city; we find them associated with the central civic gods in public prayers for success in political ventures, while the procession to their shrine (which is probably loosely evoked in the finale of *Eumenides*) was doubtless one of the most splendid of the year. Men of the standing of Lycurgus and Demosthenes served as officiants, *hieropoioi*, in the cult, in connection, probably, with the great procession.<sup>61</sup> It seems, finally, that the fearsome oaths that accompanied trials at the Areopagus were sworn by the Semnai; and Pausanias tells us that those acquitted there brought sacrifice to the goddesses.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Sanctuary: cf. A.L. BROWN, “Eumenides in Greek Tragedy”, in *CQ* 34 (1984), 262, also *Suda* s.v. Θησεῖον (it already served as such in the seventh century, as the Cylonian affair shows). Prayers: *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 112.9 (362/1 B.C.), with Zeus Olympios, Athena Polias, Demeter and Kore, the Twelve Gods; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 114.7 (reliably restored: 361), with the Twelve Gods and Heracles; and already before the battle of Arginusae, *DIOD.* 13.102, with Zeus Soter and Apollo. AESCHIN. 1.188 shows that public prayers to them were common; note too their place in Dinarchus’ solemn protestation, 1.64. Procession: see R. PARKER, *Athenian Religion. A History* (Oxford 1996), 298-9. Other details recorded are: the shrine was a χρηστήριον (EUR. *El.* 1272, unless corrupt); δευτερόποτμοι were excluded from it (POLEMO *ap.* HESYCH. δ 746); cakes and milk were offered to them, in earthenware jars, AESCHIN. 1.188 (but cf. *Eum.* 1006, σφάγια). If EUR. *Melanippe Desmotis* F 494. 18-21 [R. KANNICHT, *op. cit.* (n. 59)], on rites performed for “the nameless goddesses” by women alone, concerns Athens, the reference will probably be to the Hesychides who served in the cult (R. PFEIFFER [ed.], *Callimachus. Fragmenta* [Oxford 1949], fr. 681; R. PARKER, *loc. cit.*).

<sup>62</sup> See DIN. 1.47 ἐπιωρκηώς μὲν τὰς σεμνὰς θεὰς ἐν Ἀρείῳ πάγῳ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους θεοὺς οὓς ἔκει διόμνυσθαι νόμιμόν ἐστι: the reference is not to a murder trial, but a fortiori one would expect them to be involved in the *diomosiai* there too (on which see D.M. MACDOWELL, *Athenian Homicide Law* [Manchester 1963], 90-92; E. ROHDE, *Psyche. Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* [Tübingen 1921], I. 268 n. 2). According to Σ AESCHIN. 1. 188, murder trials on the Areopagus were held on three days each month, one for each Semne.

In non-poetic texts, the Athenian goddesses are always called 'the Semnai Theai'. They — or at least their images — were two or three in number, and had, Pausanias tells us, "nothing frightening about them".<sup>63</sup> It has often been asked whether it was Aeschylus who first identified this pair or trio of goddesses of local cult with the Erinyes, avenging powers of no fixed number known almost exclusively from panhellenic myth and poetry; the equation was common after him.<sup>64</sup> Two questions are in fact involved: first, whether Erinyes were traditionally seen as related to goddesses such as the Semnai ('such as' because they had many local equivalents); secondly, whether anyone before Aeschylus had associated the Erinyes with, precisely, the Semnai worshipped on the Areopagus in Athens. The answer seems to be that Erinyes and Semnai are, at bottom, the same double-sided powers, but seen respectively from the perspective of myth, which dwells on horrors, and of cult, which postulates optimistically that it can obtain the good that

<sup>63</sup> PAUS. 1.28.6: on the number see PHYLARCH. *FGrH* 81 F 82, with F. JACOBY's note (similarly Σ AESCHIN. 1.188). Apparently unfrightening Eumenides appear on the well-known inscribed votive plaques from Tiryns and Argos: see *LIMC* III.I (1986), *s.v.* Erinys, 839 nos. 112-119 (also e.g. in M.P. NILSSON, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* (München ³1967), fig. 51.2); they do, however, bear snakes in the right hand (fruit or flowers in the left), and the argument that these are "symbols, not of terror and torture, but merely of that source of wealth, the underworld" (J.E. HARRISON, *Prolegomena to Greek Religion* [Cambridge, 1903], 256) may over-simplify what worshippers saw in them. On Aeschylus' creation of a visible stage-image of the Erinyes see F. FRONTISI-DUCROUX, "The Invention of the Erinyes", in *Visualizing the Tragic. Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature: Essays in honour of Froma Zeitlin*, ed. by C. KRAUS et al. (Oxford 2007), 165-176.

<sup>64</sup> The difference between Erinyes and Semnai is stressed by J.E. HARRISON, *op. cit.* (n. 63), 239; L.R. FARRELL, *The Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford 1896-1907), vol. 5, 440; K. REINHARDT, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 157 (somewhat agnostic); A.L. BROWN, *art. cit.* (n. 61), 260-281, whom A.H. SOMMERSTEIN, *op. cit.* (n. 58), 6-12 follows; J.D. MIKALSON, *Honor Thy Gods* (Chapel Hill 1991), 214-7: see, contra, H. LLOYD-JONES, "Les Érinyes dans la tragédie grecque", in *REG* 102 (1989), 1-9 (English version in *Owls to Athens. Essays presented to Sir Kenneth Dover* [Oxford 1990], 203-211 = *The Further Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* [Oxford 2005], 90-99), and especially A. HENRICHES, *art. cit.* (n. 59).

it desires.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, it is easy to show that within the Semnai there lurk, as it were, potential Erinyes. It was not Aeschylus who conferred on them that double aspect whereby they could blight crops and children as well as make them grow: that dangerous potential was present in all the various groups of goddesses who had to be called by vague or euphemistic names, 'reverend ones', 'kindly ones', 'unharming ones', 'nameless goddesses', and the like. It was this potential that was acknowledged by those ostentatious avoidances best known from Sophocles' account of the Eumenides at Colonus: "the irresistible maidens, whom we fear to name and we pass by without looking, without speaking...". The great annual procession to the shrine of the Semnai was similarly conducted in silence, in part at least.<sup>66</sup> The disasters that the Semnai could inflict — infertility of crops and animals and men — were precisely the symptoms of pollution, of which the Erinyes were also the agents. We can see the similarity of function between the two groups particularly clearly at trials. The Semnai were almost certainly the main witnesses to the oaths — terrible oaths — sworn on the Areopagus: the punishment of perjurers is one of the Erinyes' most ancient roles. In Aeschylus, deprived of their victim Orestes, the Erinyes threaten to pollute all Athens, just as prosecutors in Antiphon's *Tetralogies* threaten the jurors and the city with pollution in the event of an unjust acquittal. But a procedure existed designed to avert that danger: an acquitted defendant in a homicide trial swore a second oath intended to ensure that, if his acquittal was undeserved, the resulting pollution should fall on his own perjured head, and spare the jurors and the city. He took, that is, the potential anger of the Semnai/Erinyes upon himself.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> So (and for what follows) A. HENRICHES, *art. cit.* (n. 59).

<sup>66</sup> SOPH. *OC* 127-131; on the procession Σ SOPH. *OC* 489. The goddesses of Colonus were Eumenides, not Semnai, but such groups were perceived as essentially identical despite differences in name.

<sup>67</sup> Oaths: above, n. 62. Oath after acquittal: AESCHIN. 2.87: the formula was "that those of the jurors who had voted for him had voted truly and justly, and

The difference is that the Erinyes as commonly represented correspond to only one, punitive aspect of the double-fronted Semnai. So, though it is certain that the Semnai as generally understood had an 'Erinyes' aspect, it is not certain that the opposite applies. Even if the change that Athena works in the Erinyes at the end of *Eumenides* is not so much a transformation as a completion of their nature, it may be a completion that would have surprised the audience; the old unity of power to help and power to harm may have been forgotten in their case. The strongest counter-indication is perhaps Herodotus' statement that the Aegeids of Sparta, suffering from recurrent child deaths, "founded on the basis of an oracle a shrine of the Erinyes of Laius and Oedipus".<sup>68</sup> They evidently thought, uninfluenced by Aeschylus, that the Erinyes could help with the kinds of problem that the Semnai too were concerned with. However this may be, even if the identity of Erinyes and Semnai was in fact taken for granted in Athens in the early 450s, it remains very plausible that it was Aeschylus who first explained the origin of the Athenian cult by identifying the Semnai as those Erinyes precisely who had pursued Orestes.<sup>69</sup> And even if he inherited a tradition that Orestes was tried before the Areopagus, he probably innovated in introducing the Erinyes as accusers, and in making this the first trial before the court.<sup>70</sup>

he had told no lie; but if he had, he prayed that he and his house should perish utterly, but the jurors should enjoy many blessings". (The reference is to the Palladion court; but the practice was surely general, as D.M. MACDOWELL, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 93, supposes.) Threats: ANT. *Tetr.* 1.3.9 "[the defendant] is asking of you nothing except to turn his own pollution upon yourselves"; *Tetr.* 2.3.11 "the whole defilement in the whole affair is transferred to you"; *Tetr.* 3.1.3 those who judge unjustly "bring a pollution that does not belong to them into their own houses"; cf. R. PARKER, *op. cit.* (n. 57), 110, 126. The acquitted defendant's sacrifice to the Semnai doubtless had a similar purpose. Note too AESCHIN. 1.188, where Aeschines states that public vows made to the Semnai by a polluted person will lead to *κοινὴ ἀπραξία*.

<sup>68</sup> HDT. 4.149.2.

<sup>69</sup> If so, the innovation caught on: see EUR. *El.* 1270-2, *IT* 968-9, DIN. 1.87.

<sup>70</sup> On the larger mythographic problems concerning Orestes' trial see A.H. SOMMERSTEIN, *op. cit.* (n. 58), 1-6, whose conclusions I accept.

Thus he will have been the first to bring the saga of the Atreidai to an end, so paradoxically, with the foundation of an Athenian court and cult.

These mythological questions have been much debated, and rightly. But there is a different aspect of Aeschylus' creativity, and in particular of his handling of religion, that deserves more attention than it has received. In the funeral speech ascribed to him by Thucydides, Pericles states that "it is chiefly because of fear that we observe the laws"; in a famous passage of Herodotus, Demaratus explains to Xerxes that the Spartans "fear law more than your subjects fear you".<sup>71</sup> What Aeschylus has done in the play is, as we have seen, to associate this deterrent fear with a particular cult, that of the Semnai; he has identified the Semnai not just with the Erinyes, but also, more remarkably, with a central political and social value. It is at no trivial level that the trilogy reaches a resolution through the foundation of a cult: the cult is made by Aeschylus to embody the central principle of social wellbeing towards which the whole work is moving. It constitutes a rare and precious example of a polytheist intellectual bringing together cult, morality and politics within a single vision, making his world one.

On his way to this conclusion, Aeschylus has handled divine figures with great boldness. This boldness is, incidentally, a sign that, as far as theology is concerned, *Prometheus Vinctus* could very well belong to a trilogy by Aeschylus; but the parallel also shows how inconceivable it is that Zeus should still have seemed at the end of the trilogy the lawless tyrant that he is in the first play<sup>72</sup> — as if *Eumenides* had ended with the Erinyes still just Erinyes. Between *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*, it has often been noted, a change has occurred in the standing of

<sup>71</sup> THUC. 2.37.3 (cf. SOPH. *Aj.* 1073-1086, and e.g. LYS. 14.15); HDT. 7.104.4. PLUT. *Cleom.* 30 says that the Spartans had a shrine of Fear "not believing it harmful like powers they avert, but believing that the political order was held together by fear above all".

<sup>72</sup> See the scrupulous analysis of S. SAÏD, *Sophiste et Tyran ou le problème du Prométhée enchaîné* (Paris 1985), 260-323.

the Erinyes<sup>73</sup>. In the earlier two plays, they have been, as they traditionally were, agents of Apollo and particularly of Zeus. In *Eumenides*, they become outlaws whom Apollo drives away with gross insults, who admit themselves that “Zeus has debarred our blood-dripping, abhorrent tribe from his society” (364-6). Their thirst for blood is hideous; and in the binding-song they practise a kind of magical attack against Orestes that was surely judged sinister and impious when used in contemporary society.<sup>74</sup> They claim themselves that they are members of an older generation of gods, upon whose proper privileges their juniors constantly encroach.<sup>75</sup> Apollo satisfies his obligations to Orestes in model fashion (there is far from being any criticism of Apollo in the play);<sup>76</sup> but, to enhance the polarisation, he is made to treat the Erinyes with an unattractive blue-blooded disdain (“wie ein trotziger Junker”, said U. Wilamowitz<sup>77</sup>). A ‘young’ god *par excellence*, he behaves as if the conflict between new and ancient right could be satisfactorily settled by the simple victory of one side. It was by no means necessary or self-evident that the issue between Apollo and the Erinyes should be interpreted in this ‘theogonic’ way, in terms of the Hesiodic myth of ‘succession of heaven’; this is Aeschylean myth-making, a reaching back to ancient themes in order, perhaps, to create a parallel for that conflict of old and new orders which Athens

<sup>73</sup> See e.g. K. REINHARDT, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 129, 149; C. MEIER, *Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen* (Frankfurt, 1980), 159 n. 48; R.P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 154-174 (on which the following depends). In Sophocles, they resume their traditional character: J. JOUANNA, *Sophocle* (Paris 2007), 446-450.

<sup>74</sup> AESCH. *Eum.* 307-96; cf. C.A. FARAONE, “Aeschylus (*Eum.* 306) and Attic judicial curse tablets”, in *JHS* 105 (1985), 150-4.

<sup>75</sup> AESCH. *Eum.* 150, 162-3, 731.

<sup>76</sup> This, admittedly, is disputed: for a survey of opinions see D. ROBERTS, *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia* (Göttingen 1984), 60-2, adding, for a denial of anti-Delphic sentiment, C. MEIER, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 237. The magnificent lines *Eum.* 85-7, 64-6 should not be forgotten here: cf. *Cho.* 269, and *Pl. Nem.* 10.54:  $\kappa\alpha\iota\mu\alpha\iota\theta\epsilon\omega\eta\pi\iota\sigma\tau\omega\gamma\epsilon\nu\omega\varsigma$ . Critics have perhaps not stressed enough how strong and striking is the allusion to Athens’ connections with Delphi in *Eum.* 12-14 (cf. R. PARKER, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* [Oxford 2005], 86-7).

<sup>77</sup> U. VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF, *Griechische Tragödien*. VII. *Aischylos, Die Versöhnung* (Berlin <sup>3</sup>1907), 42.

was, in 458, experiencing in acute form.<sup>78</sup> The cleft that has opened — that Aeschylus has opened — in the divine world is closed again by Athena, with the aid of another minor goddess of Attic cult whom the poet characteristically puts to political use, Persuasion. Allied with Persuasion, Athena emerges as a peculiarly charming and moderate figure, in sharp contrast with the aggressive and partisan Apollo. The Erinyes are appeased, assigned new privileges, and re-integrated into the divine world; they acquire positive as well as negative powers, and we duly find them praying to the Olympians. Since fear (and thus, alas, punishment) is a good, Aeschylus could not treat its ministers as mere “evil spirits”,<sup>79</sup> but had to find them a place of dignity in the total order sanctioned by Zeus himself.

In the early part of this essay I sought to set some restrictions on the attempt to extract theology from Aeschylus. Wholly reliable statements, *i.e.* those backed by prophecy or other indisputable authentication, about supernatural causation are not very frequent or broad in scope. The assertions of characters about divine matters are not necessarily to be relied on: attitude to the gods is a character trait and can be used by the poet for the characterisation, as becomes explicit in *Septem Contra Thebas* when Eteocles seeks to divert the chorus from panic-stricken supplication of the gods to a calmer form of prayer for divine support (265-281). And even statements that do not characterise create a mood in a particular situation and

<sup>78</sup> Cf. C. MEIER, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 177-214; and on the work's theogonic dimension, and Apollo's intolerant attitude to ancient divine prerogatives, S. SAÏD, *op. cit.* (n. 72), 326-40.

<sup>79</sup> As they became for Chrysippus, *ap. PLUT. Quaest. Rom.* 51. Persuasion: 885, 970, cf. R.G.A. BUXTON, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy. A Study of Peitho* (Cambridge 1982), 109-113. The trilogy's movement is certainly from *bia* to *peitho*; but too little is said about the nature of Zeus' rule in *Eumenides* for the idea that Zeus himself becomes less violent during the trilogy (H.D.F. KITTO, *Form and Meaning in Drama. A Study of Six Greek plays and of Hamlet* [London 1956], 69 *sqq.*; cf. A. SOMMERSTEIN, *op. cit.* [n. 18], 386: “at the end of the trilogy the gods, who always had power, have learned wisdom”) to be convincing: see contra C. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (Lanham 2003), 242-4.

need not cohere into a theology; claims about the justice of Zeus or the working out of curses anticipate, or respond to, horrific events, and what matters is the “blow of Zeus” rather than its justice. Loose ends and unanswerable questions perturb the anxious modern reader: we can work out, with difficulty, why Artemis hated the expedition against Troy, but why that hatred led her to demand a human sacrifice, and by what principle of fairness she could have justified that demand, Aeschylus does not encourage us to enquire. None the less, in the one trilogy that survives to us, the deserving Orestes heads home to Argos to a happy future and thus justice prevails. And a heavy weight of affirmation is borne by the establishment of a cult which is interpreted as the keystone of a just and flourishing society. Neither the decision to end the trilogy with that cult nor to interpret it in that way was at all self-evident. Herodotus’ conception of Aeschylus as an innovator within (but not against)<sup>80</sup> traditional polytheism has, after all, something to commend it.

<sup>80</sup> One famous fragment (without a context) expressed the wholly traditional idea of Zeus’ omnipotence in a physical idiom that is, surely, wholly untraditional: “Zeus is aether, Zeus is earth, Zeus is heaven / Zeus is everything, and whatever is higher than that” (*TrGF* 3, F 70): “Zeus controls everything” has become “Zeus is everything”. Philosophical ideas of the oneness of the universe doubtless lie in the background, and also the old Orphic hymn with its identical Zeus-anaphora: A. BERNABÉ (ed.), *Poetae Epici Graeci. Testimonia et fragmenta. Pars II, fasc. 1* (München 2004), F 31. See E. NORDEN, *Agnostos Theos. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Berlin 1913), 247-8; D. KIEFNER, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 131-2; W. RÖSLER, *op. cit.* (n. 22), 4 n. 4; M.L. WEST, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford 1983), 113 n. 87 and ID., “Cosmology in the Greek Tragedians”, in *Balkan and Asia Minor Studies* 8 (1982), 11 (“Aeschylus probably had no... definite theory in mind, but he could hardly have arrived at his pantheistic proposition without the impulse provided by theological cosmology.”) But taken as a whole Aeschylus’ work is that of an irrecoverable polytheist (F. SOLMSEN, “Strata of Greek religion in Aeschylus”, in *HThR* 40 [1947], 211-26), still giving currency (e.g. *Ag.* 168-175; *Eum.* 640-6; 723-8; *Supp.* 295-6) to the disgraceful old stories of bindings and seductions and deceptions among the gods rejected by Xenophanes. It is argued that such myths were for Aeschylus a traditional language that he exploited without commitment (H.D.F. KITTO, *Poiesis. Structure and thought* [Berkeley 1966], 55-7). But how could an audience know that the poet’s gods were sometimes metaphorical, sometimes real?

## DISCUSSION

*M. Griffith:* Thank you for a very skillfully framed and useful paper, with most of which I found myself agreeing enthusiastically. I have three questions: one small in scope, though a bit larger in implications; the other two more 'global'.

1. I share with you a basic acceptance of Winnington-Ingram's reading of the *Persians*. So I agree that Darius' understanding of the divine forces working to bring about Xerxes' defeat is indeed distinctive (unique) within the play, and is meant to be recognized as being highly authoritative. Nonetheless, I question whether we are we justified in treating Darius' statements (and his prophetic authority) as 100% trustworthy, i.e. as divinely guaranteed 'facts', when the play has given us some — few, but unmistakable — reminders that Darius himself made serious mistakes in his own lifetime leading up to the disaster at Marathon, i.e., he was not really quite the perfect monarch and strategist that the Chorus describe. This combination of Darius' almost infallible and quasi-divine status as expositor/interpreter of Xerxes' failure, with his flawed personal career as a father/king whose exalted, but not completely justified, reputation places huge and intolerable pressures on his son to achieve still more mighty deeds, makes for a very engaging and conflicted presentation of divine and paternal authority, and its effects on an impressionable, powerful individual (King Xerxes, who is portrayed in a way that recalls in many respects a typical Greek adolescent elite). Religion, psychology, and class relations all thus combine to form the 5<sup>th</sup> C. Athenian audience's views of gods, kings, and aristocrats in general, and it is these views, I would suggest, that are reworked and re-presented ('imagined') in Aeschylean tragedy. (A revised and abbreviated version of my "The King and Eye: The rule of the

father in Greek tragedy”, in *PCPhS* 44 [1998], 20-84 is reprinted in *Oxford Readings in Aeschylus*, ed. by M. Lloyd [Oxford 2006], 93-140).

Following up on this, one might ask whether ‘any’ Aeschylean personage, living or dead, human or divine, even Zeus, is completely reliable as providing ‘factual’ information and interpretation. Everyone, including the Olympian gods (Apollo’s oracle and all), is involved in a context; everyone is interested (not necessarily in purely selfish or reprehensible ways, but still to some degree personally interested) in the events that are taking place. Even Zeus is never completely ‘outside’ the contexts in which he is invoked or mentioned. So perhaps it would be better to see a spectrum of trustworthiness and objectivity, as to what amounts to a religious ‘fact’, that rarely attains 100% certainty and never is purely disinterested, rather than to posit certain events/situations as ‘facts’ and others as ‘non-facts’ and open to interpretation or disagreement?

2. Does your view of divine causation of human events in Aeschylean tragedy differ significantly from the model of “double-determination” (or “over-determination”) laid out by E. R. Dodds, A. Lesky, and others in the 1950s-1960s? If so, in what respects and with what consequences? You say that the gods in Aeschylus are “almost a metaphor for purely human causality”; and while much here obviously rides on the ‘almost’, it does look as if you are encouraging us to read the events of Aeschylus’ plays as being accounted for ‘both’ in purely human terms, ‘and’ as the result of divine enforcement of principles and norms, etc., without there being any contradiction felt between these different modes of explanation. (I.e., there is not, in the end, any level of ‘inscrutable divinity’, nor intrinsic limitations of human responsibility and independence of action, built in to Aeschylus’ religious worldview.)

3. Again, when you suggest that Aeschylus adumbrates Plutarch’s position, in presenting only independently-guilty descendants of polluted/guilty ancestors as being punished by the inevitable processes of Solonian-style ‘divine retribution’

(*i.e.*, he leaves room for children of tainted parents to turn out better and consequently not to be 'punished' for their inherited guilt), I wonder whether the lioncub stanzas in *Ag.* on the one hand (with their emphasis on the dangerous characteristics inherited "naturally" [= inescapably?] by a child from its parents) and, on the other hand, the implicit and explicit references to innocent sufferers at Troy, at Aulis (*Iphigeneia*) and among the Greek war-dead, do not in combination lead the audience to believe that many people at Troy, and among the Argives/Greeks, and within Agamemnon's immediate family (*Iphigeneia*), have died as the result of someone else's 'inherited' or externally-caused guilt (Agamemnon's; Paris') — not at all their own. Thus as Hesiod says, a whole city can suffer for one man's sins...

*R. Parker:* Thank you for those interesting points. To take them in reverse order, on the matter of innocent suffering my first instinct is to agree with you that, particularly if one thinks of the sack of Troy, there is a great deal of it in Aeschylus. Against that I note that the chorus in *Ag.* 738-749 treat the Trojans as collectively guilty of conniving in Paris' crime, however little chance in real terms ordinary Trojans would have had to do anything about it. But you could turn my own argument against me and say that they are just saying what, being Greeks, they might be expected to say on the point. There is certainly much suffering in Aeschylus that seems, one might say, under-deserved. As for double determination, my only objection to that formulation is that two causal chains may often be too few — I would think as you hinted in your own communication of multiple determination.

The problem you raise with your first point is that of the conflict between Darius' words in the play and his known deeds: few Athenians could have failed to know that he led the invasion of Greece which was driven back at Marathon, a disaster which is alluded to at 244 and 475 even though in general it is carefully veiled from view in the play. I would tentatively

reply that Darius' speech is crafted by Aeschylus in order to acknowledge the obvious truth that he pursued an aggressive foreign policy while separating him from the outrages against Greece perpetrated by his son; this presentation discourages the spectator from reacting with a "well, who are you to talk?" Your argument that Xerxes suffers from the pressures of his position as son of a glorious father is well-grounded in the text (753-8), but I'm not clear that Darius' own fallibility is a necessary element in it.

You go on to ask whether any voice, even that of Zeus, is completely reliable. I was doubtless wrong in claiming infallibility for Apollo on the basis of passages such as *Cho.* 559 ἀναξ Ἀπόλλων, μάντις ἀψευδής τὸ πρίν and *Eum.* 615 μάντις ὅν δ' οὐ ψεύσομαι. Like many other readers, I cannot take the god's physiological theorizing in *Eum.* 657-666 as incontrovertible truth: the gods in this play are given human roles, and Apollo here sounds like an advocate rather than a mouthpiece of ultimate truth. Perhaps the qualification he makes in 614-618 should be taken seriously: he there claims that he has never spoken anything μαντικοῖσιν ἐν θρόνοις other than the will of Zeus. He is only infallible in certain contexts, like the Pope. But we have to accept that Zeus wills the acquittal of Orestes and that Zeus' will (for we live in a world governed by Zeus) settles the rights of the matter. Though, however, we are told Zeus' verdict, we are not told his reasoning. He may for all we know have sympathized with the Erinyes' position much more than Apollo does. All we learn is that on balance he sides with Orestes.

*A. Podlecki:* I want to ask you about Kalkhas' role in the decision made at Aulis to sacrifice Iphigeneia. Did he, do you think, speak with his full prophetic (and so, as you point out, authoritative and indefeasible) voice? If so, what choice — realistically speaking — did Agamemnon have but to obey? You say that the proposition that the Greek expedition is Zeus's avenging instrument against Troy receives only 'glancing and

incidental endorsement' through prophecy. But surely the omen of 'the king of birds' appearing to the 'kings of the ships' had pretty clearly been sent by the king of the gods.

*R. Parker:* You are right that, by my own criteria, I underplayed the importance of the bird-omen: it clearly came from Zeus. But two lines of argument are still open to me: I can say either that the omen was merely predictive, an indication that Troy would be captured; or I can repeat that, though the omen showed Zeus' support for the goal of punishing Troy, it didn't give Agamemnon carte blanche as to the means to be adopted in fulfilling that goal. I allow Calchas full authority, but Calchas doesn't ever say "your duty to Zeus obliges you to sacrifice Iphigeneia", or anything like it. What should Agamemnon have done? He should have stated that he would not carry on with the expedition at the price of infanticide, as his first and better instinct is in Eur. *IA*. 96-8. It would then have been left to Zeus to punish Troy by some other path...

*F. Macintosh:* You identify the chorus as being key to providing the means of ushering in the divine in tragedy — as you say, through their religious commentary. You also refer to the impact of the *kommos* in the *Choephoroi* on the audience. Would you also add, then, that the chorus usher in the divine through their use of song and dance?

*R. Parker:* I'm glad that you pick up the point about the *kommos*, because I feel that the debate as to whose feelings the *kommos* worked on (Orestes' or Agamemnon's) passes by its real recipients in the theatre, namely us, the audience: there is a matricidal plot in *Choephoroi*, and it is the *kommos* which, rather shockingly, makes us complicit in it. More generally, the evident similarities between the singing and dancing of tragic choruses and of choruses engaged in actual ritual cannot but have had some effect on audience responses. Formally a choral hymn in tragedy is mimesis of a hymn, not an actual address to

the gods; but I agree with Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (*Tragedy and Athenian Religion* [Lanham 2003], 50-53) that in some cases at least — I think particularly of the great and moving prayers for civic wellbeing in *Supp.* 625-709 and *Eum.* 916-1020 — that formal division is likely in the spectators' experience to have been 'permeable'.

*P. Judet de La Combe:* J'ai le sentiment que dans la contribution extrêmement convaincante et réjouissante sur la question souvent si sommairement posée de la 'religion d'Eschyle', vous avez utilisé deux manières de concevoir la 'vérité' que peut présenter une œuvre théâtrale comme celle d'Eschyle: ou bien il s'agit de la vérité telle que la prononce un personnage (ou le chœur) dans un énoncé ou dans une série d'énoncés (une vérité 'propositionnelle' explicite), ou bien il s'agit de la vérité telle qu'elle ressort de la lecture de l'ensemble de l'œuvre. Pour la première, vous mettez, à raison, des conditions très restrictives à la possibilité qu'un énoncé puisse être considéré comme 'vrai': cet énoncé doit être prononcé par une autorité ayant une légitimité divine (Darios, Calchas, Cassandre); les autres énoncés, s'ils ne sont pas 'autorisés' en ce sens, prennent une valeur d'expression individuelle. Quant à la seconde, plus implicite, elle semble résulter de choix mythologiques ou dramaturgiques faits par l'auteur: ainsi, faire des Érinyes les accusatrices dans le procès d'Oreste puis les mettre au cœur même de la cité, et leur donner ainsi, de manière innovante, le rôle de garantes du lien social.

1. Ma première question porte sur le statut de ces deux formes de 'vérité', l'une interne au drame, l'autre comme proposition faite par Eschyle. Quel lien, si vous acceptez cette description, établissez-vous entre l'une et l'autre forme?

2. Ma deuxième question porte sur la fonction et la nature de la vérité que prononce Darios ("Darius'speech is 'truth within the play'"). Sans doute, vous avez raison de ne pas essayer de limiter ou de mettre en question cette 'vérité', en tentant, comme le font certains, d'y déceler des faiblesses ou des contradictions. Mais quelle fonction a l'énoncé de cette

vérité dans la pièce? La ‘leçon’ de Darios est un moment exceptionnel dans le drame, qui a peu d’incidence sur ce que va dire le chœur ensuite. Et si l’on considère le contenu des révélations faites par Darios, il semble bien qu’elles n’épuisent pas entièrement le sens du désastre des Perses. La pièce, en effet, paraît dire beaucoup plus sur la nature et les causes de la défaite: par la présentation qu’elle donne de l’histoire de l’Empire, de ses dynasties, des succès et des échecs de Darios lui-même, par l’interprétation presque ‘mythique’ de la disparition de masses immenses de Mèdes comme étant voulue par la Terre (792), de même que la Terre a, selon la tradition des *Chants Cypriens* détruit l’humanité héroïque à Troie. Un élément important, semble-t-il, de l’interprétation du désastre perse par Eschyle, et non par Darios, est que Xerxès a tenté de faire, de manière anachronique, une ‘Iliade’ barbare, tandis que les Grecs n’ont pas cherché à répéter un modèle homérique. La pièce propose aussi une ‘vérité’, moins explicite, sur la nature du régime politique d’Athènes, sur ses possibilités. Même si certains éléments de cette représentation de l’histoire perse et athénienne se trouvent mis dans la bouche de Darios, ils font sens si l’on envisage l’ensemble de l’œuvre et non pas seulement ce que dit Darios, dont le jugement porte avant tout, semble-t-il, sur l’*hubris* de son fils et la “maladie de sa pensée”. Comment rendre compte de ces différentes formes de ‘vérité’?

3. Enfin, peut-on dissocier dans les prédictions de Calchas l’annonce de la prise de Troie et celle de la nécessité du sacrifice d’Iphigénie (présenté par le devin comme un “remède” [Ag. 199] à l’aporie où se trouve l’armée des Achéens à Aulis)? Calchas est-il moins en position d’autorité quand il évoque la demande d’Artémis? Eschyle suggère-t-il que Troie aurait pu être châtiée autrement que par l’expédition guerrière menée par Agamemnon? Ou ne faut-il pas admettre que la prise violente de Troie (précédée de la mort d’Iphigénie, selon une version qu’Eschyle reprend, même si Homère l’a écartée) est, comme donnée du mythe, un fait ‘absolu’, incontournable, une donnée, dont Eschyle propose ici son interprétation?

*R. Parker:* I am very happy with your description of my approach: there are truths within a play, those pronounced by seers for instance, and there are truths created by the whole dramatic structure of a play, such as that concerning the role of the principle embodied by the Eumenides in an ordered society. Your question about the relation of these two kinds of truth is a difficult one. My first stab at an answer is that the former subserves the latter. Zeus' support for the acquittal of Orestes (a truth within the play) is a precondition for the trilogy to reach the ending that it does, but is not of crucial importance in itself. But I am not sure that that formula would deal with every case.

Your suggestions about *Persae* are very interesting. Without entering into the details of them, I will gladly accept that Darius tells the truth, but not the whole truth. We come back here close to the point raised by Mark Griffith. A passage such as 753-758, for instance, introduces a different and convincing perspective on the factors motivating Xerxes. I do not see Darius' authority as undermined by these further factors and perspectives; but the picture is made more complex.

You conclude by pressing me on the question of Agamemnon's freedom to act otherwise at Aulis. To your question "Eschyle suggère-t-il que Troie aurait pu être châtiée autrement que par l'expédition guerrière menée par Agamemnon?" I have to answer "no". But I continue to insist that the chorus' fierce condemnation of Agamemnon's act is very strange if they accepted that it was inevitable. In your own contribution you speak of there being "discontinuity" at this point: the chorus stop thinking about theological issues, and go over to a plain man's verdict on infanticide. That formulation recognises the difficulty, but I continue to prefer the other solution.

*G. Avezzù:* La lettura delle invocazioni a Zeus nelle *Supplici*, e in particolare del presunto 'inno' dei versi 524ss., mi trova totalmente d'accordo, e la ritengo di grande importanza anche riguardo alla funzione che queste due sequenze hanno nella

drammaturgia. Quasi a corollario, faccio notare che, a mio avviso, le descrizioni tanto dell'operare monarchico secondo l'ottica delle Danaidi, ai versi 373-374 delle *Supplici* (μονοψήφοισι νεύμασιν ... μονοσκήπτροισι δ' ἐν θρόνοις), quanto dell'agire di Dario, secondo il Coro, ai versi 864-866 dei *Persiani* (δσσας δ' εῖλε πόλεις πόρον οὐδεὶς διαβάς "Ἄλυος ποταμοῦ οὐδεὶς ἀφ' ἐστίας συθείς") trovano paralleli per così dire autoritativi nelle descrizioni dell'operare di Zeus offerte dalle Danaidi ai versi 101-103 (ἥμενος ... ἐξέπραξεν ξυπας ἐδράνων ἀφ' ἀγνῶν) e 592-594 (αὐτόχειρ ἀναξ ... οὐριος Ζεύς); e diversi altri ne potremmo trovare, che provano come i connotati attribuiti a Zeus rispondano all'azione di persuasione, alla μηχανή καλή lucidamente perseguita sul Re dalle Danaidi (cf. v. 459).

*R. Parker:* Thank you for that very relevant reinforcement of my position.

*J. Jouanna:* J'ai écouté avec beaucoup d'intérêt votre communication très pondérée, très fine et très nuancée qui s'efforce de replacer la religion dans le théâtre et d'éviter de reconstruire à partir des affirmations des personnages une théologie d'Eschyle.

Vous avez eu raison d'essayer de faire une distinction entre les paroles objectives qui contiennent une vérité et les paroles (subjectives) qui caractérisent les personnages ou se justifient dans une situation dramatique donnée. Mais n'est-il pas possible de dire que les mêmes paroles peuvent parfois être un message de vérité et s'inscrire dans la trame dramatique? Les paroles d'Apollon dans les *Eum.* 614-621 sont des paroles de vérité; mais en même temps, elles sont les paroles d'un témoin dans un procès. Inversement la parole du héraut dans les *Supp.* 922 τοὺς ἀμφὶ Νεῖλον δαίμονας σεβίζομαι n'est pas seulement une 'esquive' subjective d'un personnage, mais aussi une caractérisation objective opposant deux religions, voire deux civilisations; cf. dans le même dialogue l'opposition faite au vers 953 entre les buveurs de vin et les buveurs de bière.

Toute communication doit faire des choix. Vous n'avez pas parlé des rites (libations, prières, rite de la supplication). Ne pensez-vous pas que la représentation des rites sur la scène est une caractéristique du culte des dieux (et des morts) chez Eschyle?

*R. Parker:* I agree that Apollo remains a witness, a character with a case to make, even when passing on truths about the will of Zeus. About the herald I am not so sure: his  $\tauοὺς \alphaὐφὶ$  Νεῖλον δαίμονας  $\sigmaεβίζομαι$  is objectively true, but it can't have the same status as a justification as, for instance, 'the only language I understand is Egyptian' might have done: one can't understand a language one doesn't know, but (according to ancient standards of piety) one could and should show respect to gods one didn't actively worship.

I am grateful that you raised the issue of the dramatic power and importance of ritual scenes in Aeschylus, because I agree entirely. They are so prominent that Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, in the book I mentioned earlier, used them as evidence for Aeschylean drama remaining close to ritual origins. I hesitate to go so far, but they are certainly a main source of its religious intensity.