MERCIFUL HEAVENS?
A question in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

In discussions of Aeschylus' theology one of the passages most often quoted is the so-called 'hymn to Zeus' in the first chorus of the *Agamemnon* (*Ag.* 160–83). Fraenkel in his commentary goes so far as to call it 'the corner-stone not only of this play but of the whole trilogy'. The passage concludes with two lines which in all modern editions are read as a statement, though our oldest manuscript, the Medicean, writes them as a question. Textually the difference is merely one of accent, but the difference of accent carries with it a reversal of meaning. As a statement the lines mean that the gods are something to be grateful for, that there is some χάρις or kindness associated with them. Taken as a question they deny this. Clearly then it is of great importance for the interpretation of Aeschylus to decide which is the correct reading.

The lines in question, written without accents, are

δαιμονων δε που χαρις βιαιως
σελμα σεμνον ἡμενων

Our oldest manuscript, M, as I have said, writes ποῦ with an accent. So does our next oldest, the manuscript 468 of the Biblioteca di San Marco, generally known as V. If this reading stems uncorrupted from the time when accents were first applied to the text of Aeschylus and if at that time the oral tradition of the poet's words was not yet dead, then it will not be destitute of authority. But the thread is far too tenuous to bear any weight of proof.

Equally there can be no argument from authority on the side of reading the lines as a statement. For though Triclinius and the closely associated manuscript F write που without an accent as an enclitic, this is as likely as not to be due to simple conjecture.

These are the only two readings offered by our manuscripts. But Turnebus in his Paris edition of 1552 printed βίαιος for βιαίως and που as an enclitic. Though this too is a conjecture, and what is more a conjecture made by a man who had never read the play—for F and Triclinius had not yet been recovered and the *Agamemnon* consisted of only a few hundred lines and was run together with the *Choephoroe*—it has nevertheless exercised a strong appeal on subsequent editors. Turnebus' reading must therefore be discussed along with the others.[1]

[1] Among the editors, translators, and commentators who have supported the reading of F and Triclinius are Canter in 1580, Casaubon, Pearson (who wrote κρατερῶς in his copy of the text), Stanley in 1663 ('scilicet *haec* gratia Deorum efficaciter/Sedili venerando *coeli* insidentium'), Schütz in 1782, Butler in 1811, Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1816 ('Huld der Götter ist dies, die gewaltsam thronen hoch am Rudersitz'), Weil in 1858, Verrall in 1889 ('and it is perhaps a mercy from a Deity who came by struggle to his majestic seat'), Murray in his 1920 translation and his 1937 OCT edition, Wilamowitz in 1914, Fraenkel in 1950, and Postgate in 1969 (who comments 'Gods who won their own throne by violence are likely to discipline mortals harshly').

Hermann in 1852 and Schneidewin in 1856 printed the other form of the adverb, βίαια.

Turnebus's followers have included Grotius in 1626 (though he translates 'Cura Deorum qui vi solida/Resident coeli sedibus altis'), Abresch in 1743, Pauw in 1745 ('. . . perbene . . . nihil certius . . . quid tibi videtur, nonne accedit ad Gratiam efficacem, de qua Theologi hodie acriter adeo disputant?'), Blomfield in 1818 ('et deorum reverentia per vim incutitur'), Paley in 1845, Conington in 1848, Headlam in 1909, Weir-Smith in 1926, and in our own generation Thomson, Groeneboom, Mazon, the OCT second edition, Rose, Denniston and Page, Page's edition of the OCT, and Lloyd-Jones ('There is, I think, a grace which comes by violence from the gods/seated upon the dread bench of the helmsman' in his 1970 translation, and several citations of the phrase χάρις βίαιος in his more recent expositions of Aeschylus's thought).

The only editor in modern times to have printed the reading of M, as far as I know, is Wecklein in 1885.

The three readings are

a δαιμόνων δὲ ποῦ χάρις βιαίως
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων;
M V ed. Ald. 1518

b δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βιαίως
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων.
F Tr Victorius 1557

c δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων.
Turnebus 1552

Two of the three must be wrong. Is there anything in their language which defines them as un-Greek or at least as un-Aeschylean? I believe that there is.

According to Italie's *Index Aeschyleus* που is found in the surviving plays and fragments of Aeschylus, not counting the present passage, 30 times. Of these 30 occurrences, 15 are interrogative, 15 enclitic. Though nothing could be less diagnostic than this dead-heat, if we pass beyond the mere numbers and look at the patterns of usage, our attention will be struck by the fact that in ten of the fifteen sentences containing interrogative ποῦ there is no verb expressed. They are *Pers.* 955, 956, 966; *Prom.* 546; *Ch.* 900, 916; *Eum.* 422, 427; *fr.* (Mette) 308, 375. In all cases, were the verb expressed, it would have to be a copulative one. And what is more important, we shall note that in seven or eight of these ten instances the ποῦ is not genuinely asking for information, but is ironic, equivalent in force to a strong negative, in conformity with the gloss in Hesychius ποῦ · ἐν ἴσῳ τῷ οὐδαμῶς.

Let us now look at the 15 instances of enclitic που listed by Italie. They are *Pers.* 724, 740; *Prom.* 247, 521, 743, 822, 1064; *Sept* 514; *Ag.* 520, 711, 1646; *Eum.* 252; *Sup.* 400, 778; *fr.* (Mette) 464 line 4. This last is in a mutilated line from a papyrus. The other sentences in this list present a strong contrast to those in the other. In all but one of them the verb is expressed. The only exception is *Ag.* 520, where the που occurs in a parenthetical conditional clause (εἴ που πάλαι). It is therefore not at all on a par with the sentence to which we are seeking parallels.

This brief examination of που has yielded just the sort of diagnostic evidence that is needed in the situation. It offers a criterion according to which the accentuation of M (δαιμόνων δὲ ποῦ χάρις . . . ;) makes a sentence which fits fair and square into the pattern of Aeschylean usage, and the Triclinian accentuation (δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις . . .) makes a sentence which is in sharp conflict with it.

Twenty-nine instances are not negligible, but they are not enough for full confidence. We shall feel considerably more comfortable if the same pattern of usage can be shown to obtain over a wider field. So let us look at authors other than Aeschylus.

First Homer. Wackernagel (*Kleine Schriften* 701) lists 46 occurrences of enclitic που in Homer, of which 25 are in the Iliad, 21 in the Odyssey. All the sentences in which it occurs have the verb expressed. So do the three or four sentences where according to Paulson's *Index* enclitic που occurs in Hesiod. But of course Aeschylus was not an epic poet and epic usage cannot do more than lend support from the side-lines.

Turning then to lyric and to an author very much closer to Aeschylus, we shall find in Pindar five sentences containing enclitic που. In three of them, *Ol.* I 28, *Pyth.* X 11, *Isth.* VI 59, there is a finite verb expressed. In *Isth.* II 24 the verb is expressed in the form of a participle—πάθοντές πού τι φιλόξενον ἔργον. In the fifth instance, *Pyth.* IV 87, the sentence runs

οὔ τί που οὗτος Ἀπόλλων οὐδὲ μὰν
χαλκάρματός ἐστι πόσις Ἀφροδίτης.

This may make us pause. Despite the presence of a verb in the second clause of the sentence, I do not think we should be entitled to place it in the same category as the others. *οὔ τί που οὗτος Ἀπόλλων* seems to me to form a sufficiently clear Greek sentence in itself. Nevertheless it is a Greek sentence of a pattern in which the copula is most naturally omitted. It contains both subject and predicate. The Aeschylus sentence *δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βιαίως . . .* does not.

Bacchylides presents us with one example of enclitic *που* (V 91 *τὰ δέ που Παλλάδι ξανθᾷ μέλει*). The verb is expressed. He also presents us with a strikingly appropriate example of an ironic interrogative *ποῦ. ὑπέρ[βι]ϵ δαῖμον*, he makes Croesus exclaim on his funeral pyre, *[πο]ῦ θεῶν ἐστιν χάρις; [πο]ῦ δὲ Λατοΐδας ἄναξ;* Coincidence perhaps. But the words must have been written within the same decade as our Aeschylus passage.

Now tragedy. It will be quickest to show the position in a table.

	Interrogative ποῦ		*Enclitic που*	
	Verb expressed	*Verb not expressed*	*Verb expressed*	*Verb not expressed*
Aeschylus	5	10	13	1
Sophocles	34	9	40+	2
Euripides	29	10	49	4

These figures would by themselves create a strong presupposition in favour of reading interrogative *ποῦ* in our passage. This presupposition could only be upset if any of the instances of verbless sentences with enclitic *που* were of the same nature as our sentence. But they are not. They fall into three categories, all patently distinct from it. The first is the combination *εἴ που* which we have already seen in *Ag.* 520. It is now joined by an example from Sophocles. In *Electra* 1473 we read

σὺ δέ,
εἴ που κατ' οἰκόν μοι Κλυταιμήστρα, κάλει

But *εἰ* clauses in Greek are not infrequently verbless. Ellendt lists over two dozen instances in Sophocles and the *Electra* alone can show two sentences of very similar structure. In line 891 Electra says

σὺ δ' οὖν λέγ', εἴ σοι τῷ λόγῳ τις ἡδονή.

and Chrysothemis says in line 944

ἀλλ' εἴ τις ὠφέλειά γ', οὐκ ἀπώσομαι.

So it is unnecessary to suppose that the omission of the verb in line 1473 is in any way facilitated by the occurrence of *που*.

Sentences where the copulative verb is missing but which contain both subject and predicate form our second category. We have seen one example of such a sentence with *που* in Pindar. It is now joined by one in Sophocles, where Iocasta is made to say to Oedipus (*O.T.* 769):

ἀλλ' ἔξεται μέν · ἀξία δέ που μαθεῖν
κἀγὼ τά γ' ἐν σοὶ δυσφόρως ἔχοντ', ἄναξ.

and by one in a fragment of Euripides, which I shall assume to be complete, though it may not be (*fr.* 9):

ἤ που κρεῖσσον τῆς εὐγενίας
τὸ καλῶς πράσσειν . . .

The remaining three instances, all from Euripides (*Or.* 435, *El.* 630, *Hel.* 95), occur in stichomythia and the construction is taken over from the sentence of the previous speaker, where in each case the verb is expressed. They are therefore in no way parallel to *Ag.* 182–3.

So. We have now well over a hundred witnesses to the usage of που in the time of Aeschylus. Their testimony is unequivocal. The accentuation

δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βιαίως
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων.

would create a unique form of sentence. Even if it had better manuscript authority than F and Triclinius, we should surely be safe in rejecting it.

This leaves us with two contenders—the reading of M and V, and the conjecture of Turnebus. At first glance it is strange that when the transmitted text makes perfectly good Greek Turnebus's conjecture should have enjoyed such popularity with editors. At a second glance, when one looks at the reasons they have given, it is stranger still. Pauw, in 1745, enthusiastically pointed out how close χάρις βίαιος was to the theological concept of *gratia efficax*, and so it must be right. Thomson, in 1938, followed by Groeneboom in 1944, quotes the description of meat-eating as a χάρις βιαία in a vegetarian tract of 750 years later (Porphyry *de abstinentia* I 51) to show that the phrase was a known one. Rose, in 1958, cast his vote in its favour on the frankly aesthetic ground that it makes 'a splendid oxymoron'. But bad arguments should not be allowed to damage truth. We must examine Turnebus's suggestion on its own merits.

First comes the question of authority. Does the unanimous manuscript reading carry any weight? This is sometimes denied, for instance by Groeneboom and by Rose, on the ground that omikron and omega were no longer distinguished in pronounciation in Roman or Byzantine times, and may therefore count as virtually the same letter. This assumes of course that sound, or imagined sound, played a major part in the process of copying, since to the eye omicron and omega remained as different as ever. But the unit of hearing is the word, not the letter. And the most important thing about a word, in later Greek at least, is the position of the accent. After Roman times τῶν and τόν will have sounded exactly alike. But βιαίως and βίαιος will not. In theory therefore manuscript authority will have its full weight in the second case, though little or none in the first.

In theory. But theoretical predictions are not always born out by fact, and we should check them if we can. Luckily, in this case, a check is possible, though laborious. If we count all the instances of wrong omega in the manuscripts of Aeschylus, we shall be able to see if there is any significant difference between the number of instances where the change to omega necessitates a change of word accent and the number of instances where it does not. I have made this count in detail for two plays—the *Prometheus* and the *Agamemnon*. The results can be presented in tabular form (See p. 104).

Of course the collations have not been taken against absolute truth, but only against current substitutes for it—the O.C.T. second edition in the case of the *Prometheus*, and Fraenkel's text in the case of the *Agamemnon*. Nevertheless the contrasts are so striking that there can be no doubt of their significance. When the word accent remains the same, wrong omegas

THE NUMBER OF INSTANCES OF WRONG ω IN THE MANUSCRIPTS OF AESCHYLUS

1. *P.V.* (count taken from Dawe's collation against OCT second edition)

		ω for o			*ω for any other vowel or diphthong*		
	T	t	=	X	t	=	X
M							
First hand	22	15	13	2	7	7	0
Corrections	13	11	10	1	2	2	0
Errors remaining after correction	9	4	3	1	5	5	0
Sixteen other MSS.							
First hand	171	69	62	7	102	102	0
Corrections	32	19	18	1	13	13	0
Errors remaining after correction	139	50	44	6	89	89	0

2. *Agamemnon* (count taken from Fraenkel's text and *apparatus criticus*)

		ω for o			*ω for any other vowel or diphthong*		
	T	t	=	X	t	=	X
M 1–310 1067–1159							
First hand	6	5	5	0	1	1	0
Corrections	3	3	3	0	0	0	0
Errors remaining after correction	3	2	2	0	1	1	0
F	14	11	10	1	3	3	0
Tr	12	8	7	1	4	4	0

KEY: T total number of instances where ω seems erroneous
t total number of instances in category
= number of instances where the change of letter involves no change in the position of the accent
X number of instances where a change in the position of the accent or a change in the number of accented syllables is involved.

are written with comparative frequency. When a change of accent is necessitated, they are very rare indeed.[2] The prediction, made on theoretical grounds, is verified.

[2] In the *Prometheus* M reads ὡς for ὅς in line 428. Four manuscripts give εὐδαίμων for εὔδαιμον in line 647. Two manuscripts give τοῦτ' ὦ Προμηθεῦ for τοῦτο Προμηθεῦ in line 278. In the *Agamemnon* F and Tr give ἐτητύμως for ἐτήτυμος in line 477.

The count reveals a further point, which was not to be expected. This is the frequency with which the first hand of the Medicean makes mistakes in writing omega and the regularity with which the *diorthotes* corrects them. It is almost as if he were particularly on the look-out for this type of error.

Suppose we were now to summon a bookmaker, inform him that a correct omega was to be expected on average twice in every three lines of a Greek play, and ask him to tell us the odds against βιαίως having been written erroneously for βίαιος in *Ag.* 182 and having remained uncorrected in the manuscript, he would answer that if it were a case where the word-accent remained unaffected, the odds might be as short as 100 to 1 against, but that if there were a change of word-accent, then the odds would lengthen to at least 1,000 to 1. These would of course be the odds for any one manuscript. The odds against several manuscripts independently making the error would of course be much longer still.

Enough has been said to show that the manuscript reading βιαίως has substantial authority. It cannot be lightly dismissed as being virtually the same as βίαιος. The alteration, if it is to be made, must be made as a conjecture and defended on the ground that it is more probable.

But is it more probable? Indeed is it probable at all? It is true that there can no longer be any objection from the verblessness of the sentence. For χάρις will be the subject and βίαιος the predicate. But there are other objections. Perhaps the least objectively compelling of them is that in the sentence

> δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος
> σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων

the last three words are grammatically unnecessary and semantically, as far as I can see, pointless. My impression is that it is not Aeschylus's habit to end his sentences, let alone his larger units of composition, in such a manner. But it is an impression which I do not know how to validate.

The second objection concerns the meaning of the phrase χάρις βίαιος. The words must be subject and predicate. They cannot possibly be predicate and qualifying adjective, for the sentence would then be without a subject. Only in the latter case, it seems to me, would the phrase merit being called an oxymoron. Severe training, unwelcome at the time but useful for the future, can naturally be described as cruel kindness. But to call kindness itself cruel in a quite independent sentence would be mixing oil and vinegar in the same jar. It would not be an oxymoron but a contradiction. χάρις in Aeschylus is always used in a good sense, βίαιος always in a bad, semantically indistinguishable from ἄδικος. I find it hard to believe that Aeschylus could have made his old men equate these two opposing concepts, or that if he did he would have them introduce their outrageous paradox with the particle που, which, in Denniston's words, 'conveys a feeling of uncertainty in the speaker' or may be 'used ironically, with assumed diffidence, by a speaker who is quite sure of his ground'.

The third objection concerns the δαιμόνων. Those who read βίαιος must understand δαιμόνων as referring either to Zeus himself or to Zeus and his fellow-Olympians. It must exclude Zeus's two predecessors, because it was only under Zeus that human wisdom and suffering came into the picture. Now δαίμονες is a frequent word in Aeschylus. Normally it seems to be just another term for θεοί, no more and no less. It is sometimes used, qualified by an adjective (χθόνιοι, ἀντήλιοι, οἱ ἀμφὶ Νεῖλον etc.) to mean 'spirits' or 'divine beings' of a less elevated or personalised order. Finally, δαίμονες at the end of invocations, or in a list, may be used as a catch-all for 'all other gods and spirits'. But it is never restrictive, and never excludes any previously mentioned deity or category of divine beings. It is therefore highly unlikely that in this passage δαιμόνων can refer to the Olympians as opposed to the previous generations of gods.

The argument from authority, and the cumulative weight of these arguments from probability, make between them a formidable case against the conjecture *βίαιος*. The only legitimate reason for taking refuge in it could be the impossibility of the transmitted text.

To attack the transmitted text there is only, as far as I am aware, one argument, if it can be called an argument. It is that put forward by (among others) Denniston and Page, and consists in translating *βιαίως* 'violently', and then saying that the phrase is impossible Greek because a man 'cannot be seated forcibly'. But if one looks at the other instances of *βιαίως* in Aeschylus—and they are not many—one will see that the word does not imply the active and continuing use of force or energy at all. In *Ch.* 549 Orestes deduces that since Clytaemestra in her dream has nurtured a monster she will herself die *βιαίως*. In *Eum.* 555 the Furies assert that the man who acts without justice will one day lower his sails *βιαίως*. In both cases the meaning is clearly not 'energetically' but 'unnaturally' or 'by force'. The same holds for the alternative adverbial form *βίαια* in *Supp.* 821. In short the word is equivalent to *παρὰ φύσιν* or *παρὰ δίκην* and its opposite is not *ἡσύχως* but *φυσικῶς* or *δικαίως*. Semantically therefore there is no reason to think it an unsuitable word to qualify *ἡμένων*.

So much for the negative side. Now for the positive. The reading of our two oldest manuscripts, M and V,

δαιμόνων δὲ ποῦ χάρις βιαίως
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων;

gives a sentence which is not only unexceptionable as Greek, but which falls centrally within the pattern of Aeschylean usage. Structurally, we have seen that in Aeschylus the ironic, or negativing, use of *ποῦ* is rather more frequent than the information-seeking one, and that it occurs twice as often in sentences without a verb than in sentences with one. Lexically, we have seen that the words *δαίμονες* and *βιαίως* are used by Aeschylus elsewhere in exactly the same way as they are used here. And as for the sentiment expressed—the questioning of the existence of *charis*—it will not take us long to find several instances of this in fifth-century poets. Euripides makes his suppliant women cry (*Suppl.* 1067):

ποῦ δὲ πόνος ἐμῶν τέκνων;
ποῦ λοχευμάτων χάρις;

and his Helen decline the honour of voluntarily joining her husband in death (*Helen* 1402):

ἐγὼ δὲ διὰ τὸ μὲν στέργειν πόσιν
καὶ ξυνθάνοιμ' ἄν · ἀλλὰ τίς κείνῳ χάρις
ξὺν καθάνοντι καθανεῖν;

In Sophocles' *Tereus* (*fr.* 519.5) the question is asked:

ἀλλὰ τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν
τίς χάρις, εἰ κακόβουλος
φροντὶς ἐκτρέφει τὸν εὐαίωνα πλοῦτον;

A fragment of Aeschylus, restored as:

ἆρ' ἐ]στιν χάρις ἐν θ[εο]ῖς
ἀ]νδ[ρά]σι τοῖς δικαίοις;

by Lloyd-Jones (*fr.* 280 in his Loeb edition) and *ποῦ]'στιν χάρις . . .* by M. L. Cunningham (*Rh. Mus.* 96 (1953) 223–31), is unfortunately not a citable witness. But there can be no doubt about the Bacchylides passage, written only a few years before the *Agamemnon*, with its almost identical wording *πο]ῦ θεῶν ἐστιν χάρις;*

One would suppose that a reading given by the oldest manuscripts, contradicted by none, which made faultless Greek and which yielded a sentiment voiced by another author

writing in a similar genre in the same decade, would be generally printed in our editions. It is not. The only edition I have found it in is Wecklein's of 1885. The reason for this extraordinary neglect is not far to seek. It is the prejudice most simply and directly expressed by Groeneboom in his commentary, that Aeschylus never doubts the goodness of the gods. This might seem a difficult view to maintain in view of the things that are said in the *Prometheus Vinctus*, but maintained it has been, and despite some recent questionings, it may still fairly be termed the orthodox position. Its upholders quote these two lines, taken in their context in the whole so-called Hymn to Zeus, as one of their basic texts. We must therefore re-examine them, no longer from the technical point of view of textual authority and linguistic usage, but from the point of view of their position and purpose in the drama as a whole. I shall begin with the immediate environment of the two lines, and from them work outwards into the more treacherous fields of general interpretation.

According to the majority of commentators, Aeschylus was, theologically speaking, an optimist, who believed that the Supreme Power of the Universe has at heart the ultimate good of mankind, and plans to bring about the attainment of human wisdom. Let us then examine the preceding lines to discover if such a divine plan is mentioned in them.

τὸν φρονεῖν βρότους ὁδώ-
σαντα, τῷ πάθει μάθος
θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν ·
στάζει δ' ἀνθ' ὕπνου πρὸ καρδίας
μνησιπήμων πόνος · καὶ παρ' ἄ-
κοντας ἦλθε σωφρονεῖν.
δαιμόνων δὲ ποῦ χάρις βιαίως
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων;

177 τὸν Schütz. 179 ἀνθ' ὕπνου Emperius: ἔν (ἔν M) θ'ὕπνῳ codd. 182 δέ που F. Tr. βίαιος Turnebus.

According to those who wish Aeschylus to say that the heavens are cruel only to be kind, this strophe explains what the generosity of the gods, or rather of Zeus, consists in. It is the gift of wisdom learnt through suffering. There are two difficulties with this view. The first is general. Who learns what? Denniston and Page put the point well (page 86 of their *Agamemnon*): 'Agamemnon's *sufferings* are indeed clear enough. . . . His μάθος, on the other hand, what he *learns* from all this, is hard to see. Nobody supposes that he was morally improved by the divinely thrust-on killing of his daughter; or that, even if he had emerged from that experience a wiser and a better man, his ultimate doom would have been different. And it is obvious that his final suffering, his own death, taught him no lesson at all.' Perhaps then others are supposed to learn from Agamemnon's example? You suffer, I learn. Page considers this possibility but finds it 'plainly unsatisfactory'. Rightly so too. Nothing could be less noble or less tragic.

The other difficulty with this interpretation of the strophe is not where to find wisdom in the world but where to find it in the Greek. In σωφρονεῖν? On the statistics of Aeschylean usage it is possible, but not likely, that the word σωφρονεῖν connotes wisdom in anything resembling the way we are accustomed to use the term, that is to say a faculty or virtue possessed and exercised in freedom. The occasion on which it comes nearest to this ambience is *Eum.* 1000, where the reformed Furies greet the Athenian people σωφρονοῦντες ἐν χρόνῳ. It is also used as a term of honour in *Supp.* 1013, where Danaus tells his daughters to live

τὸ σωφρονεῖν τιμῶσα τοῦ βίου πλέον.

But of course Danaus's daughters are women and there is an inevitable hint of subservience. In four instances it is used brusquely for the sense that may be knocked into a recalcitrant opponent. Those who use it thus are Clytaemestra (*Ag.* 1425) and Aigisthos (*Ag.* 1620) speaking to the old men of Argos, Hermes (*Prom.* 982) speaking to Prometheus, and the angry Furies (*Eum.* 520) speaking of men in general. The one other occurrence is *Pers.* 829. Here text and meaning are doubtful (see Broadhead). It is used by Darius and must be spoken either of the chorus or of Xerxes. If it is of the latter, which seems the more likely, then it will fit comfortably into the same pattern of significance as the last four.

This then is the evidence on which we must decide the meaning of *Ag.* 181. Is the natural nuance of the line 'Unwillingly we come to be wise', or is it 'Unwillingly we come to heel'? For my part I believe the second to be almost inevitable.

Almost. But not quite. It is possible to argue that the σωφρονεῖν of line 181 takes its colour from the φρονεῖν of line 176, and that the meaning of φρονεῖν is to be wise in a rather nobler sense.

We must now therefore turn to consider the nuances of φρονεῖν. There is no doubt that in the later fifth century the word φρονεῖν could be used by itself to imply being wise. There is equally no doubt that earlier on it could be used without any such implication. ξυνόν ἐστι πᾶσι τὸ φρονέειν said Heraclitus (113 DK), who certainly did not mean by it that all men were wise. But the question that matters to us is how Aeschylus used the word. It occurs 28 times. Generally it is accompanied by an adverb or internal accusative or prolative infinitive, and means to be disposed or minded in a certain way. The way is defined by the qualifying word. But in nine passages, including ours, it is used absolutely. This is the group which interests us. If we examine the individual occurrences within it we shall find that the word carries the same broad meaning in them all, though not one that can be readily rendered by a single English word. In *Sept.* 807 it is quite clear from the context that it means being rational and avoiding panic. This (rather than the more general 'be prudent') seems to be the force of the word in its three occurrences at the beginning of the *Supplices* (176, 204). To wake up and be alert is the point in *Eum.* 115. In *Ch.* 517 it is a synonym for being alive. In *fr.* 677 (Mette) and our *Agamemnon* passage the word is used for what men do or may do. The concept which would seem to explain all these occurrences is that of using one's faculties as a grown-up human being, which is of course very close to how we have seen the word used by Heraclitus.

It is also exactly how the word is used by the Nurse in the *Choephoroe* when she says of the infant Orestes (*Ch.* 753):

> τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερεὶ βοτὸν
> τρέφειν ἀνάγκη . . .

Sophocles uses the word in connexion with another infant, Eurysakes. Envying his lack of awareness Ajax says of him (*Ajax* 554–5):

> ἐν τῷ φρονεῖν γὰρ μηδὲν ἥδιστος βίος
> ἕως τὸ χαίρειν καὶ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι μάθῃς

The distinction between the adult human on the one hand and the infant or animal on the other is familiar enough to us. But it is not made here in quite the way that we, or the later Greeks, would have made it. Our habit of dividing the world between mind and matter would lead us to describe the difference in terms of reasoning capacity alone. But in the Sophocles passage φρονεῖν clearly embraces the ability to experience joy and sorrow as well.

Now Aeschylus makes exactly the same lexical distinction, though with φρένες instead of φρονεῖν, in the passage where Prometheus paints for us the picture of man before he became fully human (*Prom.* 443–4, 447–50):

νηπίους [sc. βροτοὺς] ὄντας τὸ πρὶν
ἔννους ἔθηκα καὶ φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους . . .
οἱ πρῶτα μὲν βλέποντες ἔβλεπον μάτην,
κλύοντες οὐκ ἤκουον, ἀλλ' ὀνειράτων
ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι τὸν μακρὸν βίον
ἔφυρον εἰκῇ πάντα . . .

and these lines may in their turn remind us of the beginning of the first chorus of the *Agamemnon* (81–2) where the dreamlike existence of old men is compared to that of children.

The passages show a consistent pattern of ideas, and in it the word φρονεῖν plays a consistent part. We may now return to the main object of our enquiry. Does Ζῆνα . . . τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώσαντα in *Ag.* 176 mean 'Zeus who has put men on the road to wisdom', as is usually alleged, or does it mean something less dramatic like 'Zeus who has put men in the way of being men', that is to say 'who has given us consciousness?' Various reasons join in forcing us to decide in favour of the second of these alternatives.

1. φρονεῖν used by itself and without an adverb meaning 'rightly' never implies wisdom elsewhere in Aeschylus. (In *Prom.* 385 the sense of the second φρονεῖν is clearly coloured by the εὖ qualifying the first.)
2. The translation 'Zeus has put men on the road to wisdom' necessitates understanding the present infinitive φρονεῖν in a future significance. We cannot tell how likely this may be since ὁδόω is never found elsewhere with an infinitive. But there can be no doubt that a translation which enables us to take φρονεῖν as present in sense as well as in form has a higher chance of being correct.
3. The idea that Zeus has put mankind on the road to a New Atlantis is both novel and bold. If it is really the meaning of the passage, it is cardinal to our whole understanding of the trilogy. Yet its implications are not spelt out here or anywhere else. The confident brevity with which the alleged doctrine is stated is too breathtaking to be true.
4. The alternative translation, according to which men have become men under the reign of Zeus squares perfectly with Aeschylus's view of human history as we know it from the *Prometheus*, as well as letting us understand φρονεῖν in the sense of exercising one's full adult faculties that it bears elsewhere in Aeschylus.

Perhaps the reader will now concede me the point. Under Zeus man possesses conscious awareness, or so the chorus say. But why, it may be asked, do they say it? The easiest answer is by another question. What else can they say? They are trying to explain the human world as having been patterned by the divine. They cannot, as a Hebrew author could, say that god created man in his own image, for in Greek myth it was not Zeus, or for that matter any of the other gods, who created man. What did happen under Zeus, as we know from the *Prometheus*, is that men ceased to be νήπιοι and became φρενῶν ἐπήβολοι, so this must be what is meant by τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώσαντα. It was necessary for the chorus to explain the relationship between Zeus and mankind in view of their next statement that Zeus has established the principle of learning through suffering. This is intimately connected with our capacity to φρονεῖν. Without that capacity we should live out our lives in a sort of dream state, like infants or animals. The lion-cub in *Ag.* 726 acts from the necessity of its stomach, γαστρὸς ἀνάγκαις. Man is different. The happy man, according to the Furies, is the man who is virtuous of his own free will, ἑκὼν ἀνάγκας ἄτερ δίκαιος ὤν (*Eum.* 550). It is of course possible to be caught up in the processes of necessity, for instance through slavery (*Ag.* 1042, 1071), or even as a result of a personal decision as when Agamemnon resolved to carry out the sacrifice of Iphigenia. But in principle the possession of freedom is characteristic of humanity. Thus φρονεῖν βροτοὺς implies not only that we

have consciousness but that we also have something which, without being too philosophical about it, we may call free will. If so, its relevance to the law of *πάθει μάθος* is easy to see. Infants and animals are governed by immediate necessity. Mankind, in Zeus's dispensation, is governed by the indirect rule of suffering, or rather, since its operation is not instantaneous, remembered suffering (*μνησιπήμων πόνος*). Ultimately and with reluctance we shall be forced to submit. But what else can one expect in a universe ruled by force?

This is, I believe, the sequence of thought in the strophê. And I believe it forms a natural conclusion, indeed the only natural conclusion, to the so-called 'hymn to Zeus' taken as a whole.

Let us now turn to the three stanzas, lines 160–83. Our problem is no longer one of detailed verbal analysis but to decide which of two general interpretations is the more plausible. There is a technique recommended by some modern philosophers for the dispassionate consideration of emotive questions—to consider the case in abstract summary and without proper names. If we adopt this technique we shall find ourselves having to choose between the following two trains of thought about a well-known dynasty:

1. A was a terror. He was gruesomely deposed by B. Eventually B was in his turn disposed of by C. There can be no comfort in living under such a violent system of government.
2. A was a terror. He was gruesomely deposed by B. Eventually B was in his turn disposed of by C. There is, I suppose, some comfort in living under such a violent system of government.

It only remains to add that we are required to select the train of thought which passed through the mind of an elderly and revered poet and not through the mind of a young and ambitious gunman. Put like this, there can be no hesitation. Credulity would die on the rack before accepting the second alternative.

And is there any reason to put it differently? There might be if there was a single word spoken to say that C, despite his treatment of B, was a mild and merciful character in his other dealings. But nothing of the sort is said or suggested. There might be a reason to put it differently if on restoring the correct proper names and discovering them to be those of gods we could exclaim with horror at the putative blasphemy. But we cannot. There is no blasphemy, no denial of the power of the gods, only a restatement of the traditional account of them. Finally, we might hesitate if the pessimist interpretation was in flagrant breach of the context. But it is not, as consideration of the context will very rapidly show.

The lines occur as a digression in a narrative. The old men of Argos, in whose mouth Aeschylus puts them, have been reflecting on the recent grim history of their country. The seduction of one unfaithful wife has resulted in a protracted war, which has brought loss and agony to both sides alike. But before the fighting started, indeed before it could start, there took place an even more terrible event, apparently as a result of the direct will of the gods. In order to obtain a wind favourable for sailing, the king and commander-in-chief, Agamemnon, was required to sacrifice his own first-born and much-loved daughter in the prime of her life.

It is in this context that the chorus turn to consider how the world as a whole is governed. The moment at which they interrupt their narrative to do so is after the priest has spoken and before the king has decided. Their purpose is to arrive at an understanding of why such apparently senseless things should happen (lines 165–6—they express a similar desire to understand why things happen as they do later on in the play in lines 368–72). They point out that power in heaven is now held by Zeus, who achieved it, as did his predecessor, by a violent *coup d'état*, and it is under Zeus that we live. It is at this point, just before they tell us of Agamemnon's heart-rending decision to slay his own daughter and just before their own poignant description of her death, that, according to the optimistic interpretation, they

choose to say that sufferings of this kind are in the long run a blessing, a χάρις. According to the pessimist interpretation on the other hand they say that there is no comfort to be expected from the gods. To those who like their tragedies stark there could be nothing more inappropriate, nothing more calculated to lessen the impact of the impending climax, than the first comment, whereas nothing could be more natural or more appropriate than the second.

But there is a less subjective way of considering the matter. Instead of asking which comment is artistically more appropriate we may ask which is more satisfying as an explanation. For what the chorus claim to be doing is to explain why such terrible events happen. If their object is simply to say that terrible events have an educational value when considered *sub specie aeternitatis*, what is the relevance in mentioning Ouranos and Kronos? Are we to suppose them to mean that such useful experiences as the sacrifice of Iphigenia were denied to mankind in the bad old days? The thought is grotesque. Or are we to suppose that such experiences were taking place all the time but that nobody learned anything from them? The thought is less grotesque, but it is a very complicated one to have to think. On the other hand the thought-sequence in the pessimist interpretation is natural and easy. Things have always been like this. In a violent universe we must expect violence, for it is by violence that the gods have come to power.

I have now tried to show that the pessimist interpretation of the 'Hymn to Zeus' is not only internally consistent in itself but that it fits the context of the first chorus of the *Agamemnon* very much more naturally than does the theologically optimistic one. But those who read the play in translation may still be dissatisfied. For towards its end where Clytaemestra and the Chorus have at last reached some agreement on the moral to be drawn from what has happened and where we read in the Greek (*Ag.* 1562–3):

μίμνει δὲ μίμνοντος ἐν θρόνῳ Διὸς
παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα · θέσμιον γάρ.

the translators, or many of them, suddenly and wantonly import quite alien notions of their own. I quote a sample handful. 'For wrong done, penance' (Headlam), 'Au coupable le châtiment' (Mazon), 'The sinner must suffer' (Thomson, and in their commentary Denniston and Page), 'The sinner dies' (Vellacott). That they should write like this is of course a great testimonial to the strength of the orthodox interpretation of Aeschylus. The mention of sin at this point is necessary if the *Agamemnon* is to be a sort of dramatic sermon with Zeus as the high court judge. The interpretation is an optimistic one because according to it all we have to do to be safe is to be innocent. But the tragic mood is quite the opposite of this: the mention of sin would be a disruptive intrusion. And in the Greek there is no mention of sin. παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα are words which have nothing to do with moral merit or moral guilt.

To come now to the broader canvas of the trilogy as a whole. For even if the optimists abandon the *Agamemnon* they may still take refuge in the *Eumenides*. Frequent attempts have been made to interpret the *Eumenides* as a dramatisation of an ethical or sociological advance in the evolution of mankind—the replacement of the mailed fist by the negotiating table, or even, in the imagination of some romantic anthropologists, the replacement of the matriarchal by the patriarchal principle. This last theory is evident fantasy. To have any credibility at all it would have to show us that the society depicted in the *Agamemnon* was a matriarchal one. It cannot do this, and so need not detain us. But the case for it as the dramatisation of an ethical advance is really no stronger. The virtues of justice, persuasion, and negotiation exist for the characters of the *Agamemnon* and of the *Prometheus* (which on the alleged Aeschylean concept of ethical evolution should belong to an even earlier stage) just as much as they exist in the *Eumenides*. They are not therefore introduced by Athena or by the Olympian gods. On the other side of the scale too there is an equally

grave embarrassment. Brute force is by no means abjured by the new gods in the *Eumenides*, let alone by Athena. She threatens to use the ultimate deterrent, her father's thunderbolt, if the Furies do not agree to comply with her wishes: and she positively welcomes the prospect of future wars for her Athenian citizens (826–9; 864–5). But Athena never pretends that she is ushering in any ethical advance. She gives her casting vote for Orestes for reasons which are limited to his particular case: she does not base it on any universal ground such as compassion or mercy or benefit of doubt. In short the *Eumenides* describes what it purports to describe, the establishment of a new court of justice, not the introduction of new abstract principles of justice. It cannot therefore be used to cast a rosy moral glow back on the events of the *Agamemnon*.

Finally I must say a word about the other great choral odes of the *Agamemnon* in which much is said about the justice of Zeus, and where we are often invited to hear the poet's own voice speaking. In my view this is an invitation which should be firmly declined. It is true of course that choruses frequently comment in a generalising way on the actions of the individual characters in the story and that their comments are frequently full of common-sense. But this still does not mean that they are the comments of the poet. To judge from the little evidence we have (for example Aristotle *Poetics* 1456a, Horace *A.P.* 193) antiquity did not think it the function of the chorus to represent the dramatist, and in some cases it is manifestly not so. For instance in the *Prometheus* and the *Eumenides*, nobody supposes that either the beautiful daughters of the sea or the hideous daughters of night are Aeschylus in disguise. In the *Agamemnon* though the assumption is at first sight more plausible. The chorus are old men full of years and honour. So at the time he wrote their words was the poet. But on a further look the equation is less attractive. For one thing it is impossible to maintain it throughout the play. In their scene with Cassandra the chorus are blind, at the crisis moment of Agamemnon's murder they are divided, in their subsequent altercation with Clytaemestra they change their opinion, and when at the end of the play they are humiliated by Aigisthos they threaten to fight. Clearly they cannot be the author in any of these scenes. But in the great odes of the first half of the play it is tempting to suppose that the situation is different and that here at least they speak with the voice of the poet. But there is no evidence that they do, and considerable evidence that they do not. For one thing they very distinctly assert their own identity at their first appearance. For another when it comes to delivering their own opinion, they contradict themselves. For instance in their second ode they begin with the grateful reflection that Zeus has at last executed judgement on Paris and the Trojans for the abduction of Helen. In doing so they mention the grief of the abandoned Menelaos, which reminds them of the similar grief of all the households whose menfolk have gone to Troy, many never to return alive. This brings them to comment on the dangerous growth of public resentment against the leaders who have led the country to war. They are killers on a mass scale, and are likely to be struck down by Zeus. So a summary of the chorus's lucubrations in a single sentence would run something like this. Agamemnon, having successfully completed the mission entrusted to him by Zeus, has for his reward the likelihood of being the next victim of Zeus's thunderbolt. Such an apparent theological about-turn is unconvincing as the mature expression of the poet's own conclusions. On the other hand if we suppose that the chorus are what they claim to be, senior citizens of Argos, there is no difficulty. The thoughts expressed are perfectly appropriate to public opinion, as is the changing mood. True, the time-scale is compressed. Nor, in everyday life, would public opinion express itself in balanced metrical stanzas. But acceptance of the formal conventions of the Greek theatre is the only concession to realism that we need make.

Similarly for the first chorus then. Once we agree that it is no longer the voice of Aeschylus we shall no longer hanker after the 'Hymn to Zeus'. Such a hymn would only be appropriate if it were Aeschylus himself speaking. Why should the Argive elders choose

this of all moments to say that human suffering was a blessing conferred by Zeus? On the other hand it is quite natural for them when telling the story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia to reflect on the cruelty of a heaven that not only allowed such an atrocious thing to happen but positively demanded it.

Our excursion has taken us into the realms of interpretation. Its aim has been to show that the *Agamemnon* as a whole can be understood in a way that harmonises with the pessimist mood demanded by the reading *πού* in *Ag.* 182.

It only remains to say a brief word to introduce the person of Aeschylus Tragicus whom I would like to see revered in place of the Aeschylus Theologus of present cult. First, I would point out that there is no need for the change to lower Aeschylus' reputation. After all every devotee of Aeschylus, optimist and pessimist alike, admires him primarily on account of his power as a poet and dramatist, not for his theology. *νουθεσία*, didacticism, is an attribute of the Aristophanic Aeschylus, not necessarily of the real one. Nor does the real Aeschylus ever tell us his private views about the world, whether he entertains any Great Hope or whether he agrees with his own Prometheus that all human hopes are illusory. Indeed his private views, even if he could tell us what they were, would be irrelevant. For the task of a tragic poet, as Aristotle saw, was to give us the proper pleasure of tragedy, the excitement of having our fear and anxiety roused. This has to be done by a story, normally in the case of tragedy a story from history or pre-history, but none the less a story. All else, presentation, music, the intellectual and ethical quality of the characters, exists to make the story plausible and gripping. It follows that what matters in a dramatist is not his consistency to a personal philosophy, but his consistency to the story. If it has a happy ending, then it can be set in a world where divine justice rules and virtue is rewarded at last. If it has an unhappy ending, that is to say if it ends with disaster overtaking characters who do not deserve disaster, then there can be no mention of divine justice. If we want a practical illustration of this we need look no further than Homer. In the *Iliad*, which has an unhappy ending, Zeus has no concern to see that impartial justice is done on earth. But he does have such a concern and expresses it very clearly in the *Odyssey* which has a happy ending. In this respect the *Agamemnon* is clearly an Iliad and not an Odyssey. It is serious and it ends unhappily. The edge of the tragedy would be quite blunted if at the very beginning of it we were comforted with an assurance that it was all being played out under the eyes of a merciful heaven.[3]

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