TRIUMPH OF THE ΠΑΝΤΟΠΟΡΟΣ?
THE IMAGE OF THE SELF-INVENTED AND SELF-INVENTING ΔΕΙΝΟΝ IN ANTIGONE’S FIRST STASIMON

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Abstract: This paper focuses on Antigone’s first stasimon and tries to work out its meaning. The key question to be answered is: what image of man underlies the famous choral ode? This key question can be divided into several sub-questions: 1) In what sense is man said to be δεινόν and indeed the most δεινόν thing of all? 2) What is the connection between this feature and the self-invented and self-inventing being (viz. the self-invented and self-inventing empire) the first three stanzas of Antigone’s first stasimon are all about? 3) What does “παντοπόρος” stand for? Is this the key notion for understanding man? 4) Is man really παντοπόρος? 5) Why do the Theban elders claim that, even if the epithet fits like a glove, “παντοπόρος” is far from being the last word on man?

Key-words: Sophocles, Antigone, First Stasimon, Ode to Man, “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ”, δεινόν, εὕρεσις, τέχνη, Man, Philosophical Anthropology, Ancient Greek Thought, Kulturentstehungslehre.

Resumo: Este estudo incide sobre o primeiro estátimo da Antígona de Sófocles e procura analisar o seu significado. A questão a que tenta responder é a seguinte: que imagem do ser humano se encontra expressa nesta ode coral? Tal questão encerra várias outras: 1) Em que sentido se diz que o homem é algo δεινόν – e mesmo até o mais δεινόν de tudo? 2) Qual a relação entre esta característica e o ser auto-inventado ou auto-inventor (o “império auto-inventado ou auto-inventor) de que falam as três pri-

Résumé: Cet exposé porte sur le premier stasimon de l’Antigone et cherche à cerner son sens. La question-clé est la suivante: quelle image de l’être humain nous offre cette ode chorale? Cette question-clé renferme plusieurs sous-questions: 1) En quel sens l’homme est-il δεινόν, voire ce qu’il y a de plus δεινόν ? 2) Quel est le rapport entre δεινόν (voire le comble du δεινόν) et l’être inventé par lui-même et s’inventant soi-même (ou l’«empire» inventé par lui-même et s’inventant

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meiras estâncias deste estáximo? 3) Que significa exactamente παντοπόρος? É este conceito decisivo para se entender o ser humano? 4) É o homem efectivamente παντοπόρος? 5) Por que razão os anciãos de Tebas sustentam que, ainda que o epíteto “assente como uma luva”, παντοπόρος está longe de ser a última palavra sobre o ser humano?


1. A few introductory remarks

Sophocles’ Antigone is cryptic (both in its single components and as a whole) and poses an “enigma” of its own. The first stasimon is no exception to this. On the one hand, it is a piece of the puzzle; on the other hand, it is itself a puzzle (and not an easy one at that). But the problem is that in this case you cannot deal first with the smaller puzzle, as if it were independent of the whole. The first stasimon is deeply embedded in the rest of the play; it presupposes the preceding scenes and indeed the other Theban plays (it alludes to and refers back to them); and at the same time, it points ahead to the events that follow. To use the well-known Homeric formula, it looks “ἅμα πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω”2. To be sure, the first stasimon has its own meaning and contributes its mite to the “final result”: to the Antigone as a whole (to what V. Woolf once termed the “complete statement” every literary work is all about).3 But the fact remains that in its connection with the rest of the play the first stasimon is pretty much like a word or a part of a sentence in its connection with the whole sentence: though it has a meaning of its own, everything depends on the other words – and indeed on all the words; for the meaning conveyed by each word can be significantly changed (and what is

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2 See notably Il. I, 343, III, 109, XVIII, 250, Od. XXIV, 452.
more: it can be \textit{completely changed} by the rest of the sentence. Hence, any separate consideration of the first stasimon is almost inevitably doomed to be inadequate and seriously distorted. Without the rest of the play, the first stasimon finds itself out of context and pretty much like a fish out of water.

Having said this, it must be added that we cannot afford to follow this principle here, for space does not allow us to study the whole play (let alone the whole sequence of the Theban plays). We must therefore concentrate on the first stasimon. That is, we must leap \textit{in medias res}; we must start literally \textit{in the middle} of the \textit{Antigone} and \textit{leave out the rest of the play}. In short, we must resign ourselves to dealing with “a fish out of water”.

However, in order to make up for this severe shortcoming, we can recall a few essential points, and – given the limitations of space – paying some attention to them is our next best alternative.

First, we must remind ourselves of the tremendous \textit{pressure} (of the “\textit{high voltage}” \textit{atmosphere}) that characterizes the Theban plays – and in particular the \textit{Antigone}. The extraordinary sequence of events that provides the framework for the play is \textit{the very opposite of life as usual} (of what V. Woolf once called the “nondescript cotton wool”\textsuperscript{4} of daily life). The protagonists in these plays are confronted with life and its bewildering mysteriousness. “What is what?” “What means what?” “How is all this possible?” “How to make sense of what happens?” “How can this be happening to me?” “What to do?” “What to expect?” “What can be done?” “What is and is not in one’s power?” – the protagonists of the Theban plays experience these questions, as Keats once put it, “upon their pulses”.\textsuperscript{5} They are living emblems of these questions or of answers to these questions, and of how all our answers to them turn out to have feet of clay. On the one hand, what we are dealing with in Sophocles’ Theban plays is not idle questions asked in quiet reflection (in “quiet corners”). They are \textit{pressing} questions: life itself raises them and puts them at the very centre of the protagonists’ lives. It is a matter of knowing (or not knowing) what you are dealing with, where you stand – it is a matter of \textit{desperate need for some compass in uncharted waters}. And on the other hand, what is at stake in these plays is \textit{comprehensive questions regarding life itself}, in all its puzzling intricacies and inconsistencies, in all its staggering horror: the equation of life and death – “What are we?” “Where are we? “What are we to do?” “What to expect?” “How do we connect the dots?” In other words, the tremendous pressure (the “high voltage” atmosphere) that characterizes the Theban plays has to do to do with an acute awareness a) that life is all about


trying to figure out enigmas viz. an overall enigma, b) that we are constantly at a crossroads, c) that everything can turn out to be very different from (and indeed the exact opposite of) what it seems to be, and d) that what we do can turn out to have consequences that are very different from (and indeed the very opposite of) those hoped for or expected.

In short, the Theban plays stand for a picture of life in which everything is at stake, everything is the question, and everything is ἐπὶ ξυροῦ ἀκμῆς. They stand for the whole thing – the “panoply of life” – throbbing with questions. Or, to express it in musical terms, they stand for a “tutti fortissimo” of questions. Their protagonists face the thunderstorm of life, as Hölderlin puts it, “mit entblößtem Haupte” (“without a head covering”). And the plays remind us that there is such a thing as this “tutti fortissimo” of questions, that there is such a thing as a thunderstorm of life, in which one finds oneself “without a head covering” – indeed, that life may turn out to be this thunderstorm in disguise, this total thunderstorm, this capricious thunderstorm that strikes when least expected.

The first stasimon is set against this background. To be sure, in the parodos there seems to be some relief from this tension. The chorus seems to believe that the worst is over, and that one can go back to “life as usual”. But both the opening scene and the first epeisodion show dark clouds gathering in the horizon. And on the other hand the very relief viz. the confident atmosphere of relief that characterizes the parodos may remind the viewer (or the reader) that in the earlier stages of the Theban saga similar changes for the better have turned out to be illusory. More than anything else, they showed human blindness and proved to be the epitome of the proverbial calm before the storm. These previous changes for the better suggest that when everything seems to be all right, when the problems seem to be solved, they do not necessarily vanish without trace. They may continue to pile up unnoticed – so that lurking beneath the gleaming surface lies the very opposite of it. Put another way, the previous events cast a shadow upon the very alternative to the “high voltage atmosphere” we have spoken of. They draw attention to the fact that the very belief that life as usual can go on may be unfounded, and that big troubles often come in innocent-looking packages. In sum, they remind us that there is a particularly dangerous kind of clouded sight, namely the type that does not seem to be so.

Secondly, we must bear in mind that what we are dealing with here is a tragic choral ode, and that this kind of ode is supposed to meet some formal requirements, and to play a particular role in the framework of an ancient

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6 Il. X, 173.
tragedy. This is not the place to discuss this question in any detail. But we should not forget that this form is anything but irrelevant and pay attention to certain main features that may help us understand what Antigone’s first stasimon is all about.

On the one hand, there is a connection between a choral ode and the surrounding parts of the play. On the other hand, a choral ode has very little to do with the development of the plot. One of its distinctive features is what might be described as a certain “prise de recul”, a certain degree of detachment from what is going on in the play. The chorus may well be involved in what is going on and affected by it, but it does not take part in the action the way the protagonists do. In this sense, the chorus provides a view from outside – from a “witness point of view” or “from a third person point of view”: from a point of view other than the protagonists’. It can also be said that choral odes express at least some degree of reflection on what is going on in the play. They present a “comment” on the events on stage and they are usually characterized by a more or less contemplative attitude. This does not mean that the chorus does not react to the development of the plot: it only means that its reaction has what might be called a rather contemplative or reflective nature.

This feature is closely connected with the fact that choral odes usually put events in a wider context. Contrary to the protagonists, the chorus keeps some distance from the immediate context, and tries to put the plot into perspective. Hence, choral odes usually involve some shift from the particular to the general, from the immediate events to a meditation on them and to the larger picture. They look beyond the immediate circumstances – they look for interrelationships, analogies, common patterns and the like. They let themselves take a sideways glance at other dots, as it were (and indeed both within and outside the framework of the play). They concentrate on the connection between the dots and try to make sense of it. In this sense, choral odes are all about fathoming the significance of (or extracting some meaning from) what is going on in the play. In short, they give voice to a panoramic view, both in the sense of a bird’s eye view encompassing other realities and events outside the play and in the sense of some comprehensive insight into how things are in general.

This brings us to another important aspect. In each play the chorus is composed of a certain kind of people (in this case it is a chorus of Theban elders, and not – say – of captive enemies or whatever). And the fact that it is composed of a certain kind of people means that what they say is not fully unbiased, for they are an “interested party” and view things from a certain angle. But, on the other hand, as pointed out above, choral odes are characterized by a certain degree of “prise de recul” or detachment; they often take the form of a general examination and seem to lay claim to a universal vali-
In other words, choral odes often seem to present a broader view both a) because their scope is wider than the immediate circumstances of a play and b) because of the seeming universality of the point of view from which things are observed. More often than not it is difficult to determine how far the view they take is relative to who they are – or whether the choral odes serve as a mouthpiece of the author, whether they want to be understood as the expression of universal truth claims, etc. Thus, the very form of choral odes casts a shadow of uncertainty over their meaning and purport.

But this is not all. In addition, it should be borne in mind that if there is a connection between choral odes and the surrounding parts of a play, it is not exactly the kind of connection one might expect. Above all, it is not a direct and straightforward connection. Often enough, there is no simple thread of continuity, no smooth and seamless transition from the scene or scenes preceding the choral ode. It is quite the reverse: more often than not the transition is volatile; it goes “by leaps and bounds”. And it is no exaggeration to speak of a somewhat “cubist” juxtaposition of perspectives and differently scaled objects, and of a dynamic collision of different angles.

It is thus not unusual for choral odes to be somewhere between a comment on what is going on in a play and a self-contained entity. Furthermore, as far as the comment is concerned, it is often difficult to determine what exactly the chorus is referring to. For example, if we take the connection between Antigone’s first stasimon and the preceding scenes, there is a considerable amount of uncertainty as to where the Theban elders’ sympathies lie, and what exactly they have in mind. Are they referring to the unknown breaker of Creon’s edict? Or are their words aimed at Creon himself – at his “haughty consciousness of power” viz. at his “stern determination to direct and shape nature and human beings as expertly as one might a boat or a piece of metal”? Is the first stasimon to be understood only from the point of view of what the Theban elders are likely to know? Or are their words to be understood both from their own point of view and in the light of what the audience knows (so that the chorus’ words are aimed not only at the unknown man who perpetrated the illegal burial, but at Antigone whom the audience suspects – or “knows” – to be the author of the deed)?

What is more, if the first stasimon looks “ἅμα πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω”, is it not so that it could also be referring to what happens later in the play (i.e. to further events that fit in with what the Theban elders say and substantiate their view about man)? And is it not so that the first stasimon is also subject to the possibility of being seen in a new light and of taking on quite a dif-

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8 That is, at his τέχνη-like understanding of state power. The words between quotation marks are taken from M. Griffith (ed.), *Sophocles Antigone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), on 162-163.
different significance when compared to what happens in the rest of the play? And this in turn is closely connected with a further possibility, namely that the rest of the play somehow calls into question the validity of what the first stasimon claims to be true. In other words, can one exclude that the views expressed in the first stasimon are only what might be called partial truth, a one-sided view, or indeed a particular stage of understanding (that can—and should be—revised) rather than a final assertion of truth? If this proved to be the case, then the whole point of the first stasimon would be not so much that it is in line with both what happens before and what happens after, but rather the tension or conflict between what it says and the rest of the play.

In the final analysis, there is this whole range of possibilities. One does not know which of them applies. And it should be borne in mind that this is not necessarily an either/or issue. It is also possible that the question is more complex than this, and that it turns out to be a both/and issue. I.e. it is also possible that the first stasimon has different aspects to it, and that its relationship to the rest of the play is so intricate that several of these possibilities apply at the same time. But be that as it may, the point is that there is this whole range of possibilities, and that the question is far from settled. The result being that for these various reasons a choral ode can be complex and puzzling even if its content is relatively plain. In other words, a choral ode— in this case Antigone’s first stasimon— can be sibylline for purely formal reasons: owing to the nature of a choral ode as such and to the complexity of its relationship to the rest of a play. Thus, in the final analysis, if made in the context of a choral ode, even the plainest statement is not entirely plain. And, to top it all, most of what the Theban elders say in Antigone’s first stasimon is, as we shall see, anything but plain; so that what we are dealing with here is the very opposite of a clear-cut view—of univocal meaning.

2. Several important allusions

Having said this, let us turn our attention to the content of Antigone’s first stasimon. Before anything else, we should not forget that the opening lines contain a double allusion. The moment they come into play they evoke something else, and, what is more, something not belonging to the Antigone (or, for that matter, to Sophocles’ Theban plays): on the one hand they contain a “formal allusion” to a common stylistic device and link the first stasimon to the ancient tradition of the stylistic device in question (which, incidentally, was a very rich one); on the other hand, they seem to be an almost verbatim allusion to one well-known instance of the said stylistic device. These two allusions may escape the modern viewer (or reader), but it is safe to assume that they would not have escaped the ancient Athenian theatre spectator.
First, one should keep in mind that the opening lines bear the well-known form of what German philological Forschung termed a Priamel. This word has taken root, and a Priamel is a series of parallel statements or listed alternatives that are used to single out one point of interest by contrast and comparison, so that they serve as foils for enhancing a claim, the subject of a literary work (or of a new section within such a work, etc.).

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precise, the opening lines of the first stasimon bear the form of a specific kind of Priamel, namely of what might be termed a superlative-Priamel. A superlative-Priamel focuses on a certain range of comparison (on different things that are characterized by a certain quality or common denominator) within which something is said to be superlative. In other words, a superlative-Priamel focuses on something (a given reality, an activity, some kind of good, some kind of evil, etc., etc.) and singles it out as being the nec plus ultra, either in general or within a given range of comparison. It often takes the shape of a list of goods or evils that climaxes in a superlative.

Sometimes a superlative-Priamel does more than just single out a culmination point: it takes the form of an order of rank and names the second best good or the second worst evil, the third best good or the third worst evil, as if it were awarding the first, the second and the third prize in a competition. There are also cases in which a superlative-Priamel, while calling our attention to the fact that different people take different views on certain issues, tries to settle the matter and presents either a “personal”, more or less idiosyncratic opinion or what claims to be the last word on the matter.

In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether a superlative-Priamel is anything more than a rhetorical or stylistic device, meant for emphasis and intensification. But on the other hand, there seems to be more to it than that. There seems to be an essential connection between the superlative-Priamel and the very structure of human non-indifference viz. of our concern for ourselves. As a matter of fact, human non-indifference always seeks the best: nothing less than the superlative; if the superlative turns out to be beyond reach (and compromise seems unavoidable), then it seeks the second best; if this proves to be unattainable, then it seeks the third best, and so on and so forth. And pretty much the same applies to the negative superlative: our life is all about avoiding the worst; the second-worst scenario is preferable to the worst, and the third-worst scenario is preferable to the second-worst, and so forth. And pretty much the same applies to the negative superlative: our life is all about avoiding the worst; the second-worst scenario is preferable to the worst, and the third-worst scenario is preferable to the second-worst, and so forth.

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10 On the rhetorical value of superlatives (viz. on what he terms “la retorica dei superlativi”), see notably L. Battezzato, Linguistica e retorica della tragedia greca, op. cit., 53ff.
on and so forth. All this means that the “map of life” or the “moral compass” we need in order not to live in “uncharted waters” has pretty much the same structure as a superlative-Priamel. It is a very complex superlative-Priamel (or, to be more precise, a very complex set of superlative-Priamel). And on closer inspection it emerges that most instances of superlative-Priamel we find in Ancient Greek Literature are, as it were, contributions to this “map of life itself” (contributions to the complex set of superlative-Priamel) without which there is no “moral compass” and life remains terra incognita.

This brings us to a further point. As previously mentioned, some well-known instances of superlative-Priamel indicate that different people take disparate views on these matters. But even when no emphasis is put on this, the fact that there is a variety of dissenting superlative-Priamel on the same subject-matters looms in the background of any superlative-Priamel and reminds us that the “map of life” or the “moral compass” superlative-Priamel are all about is anything but self-evident – that this is the realm of ἀμφισβητήσιμον (…) καὶ οὐδέν πω σαφές, as Plato puts it in the Gorgias, and indeed the realm of the ἀμφισβητήσιμον par excellence. The problem with the much needed “map of life” (or with the much needed “moral compass”) is that there is no such thing as an indisputable and absolutely reliable superlative-Priamel (or an indisputable and absolutely reliable set of superlative-Priamel) – and that, as far as the conduct of life is concerned, even the most obvious “cardinal points” can turn out to be deceptive, so that, as Sophocles’ Theban plays do not cease to remind us, “life is uncharted”.

Now, the very form of the opening lines “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἄνθρωπον δεινότερον πέλει” – the simple fact that these words link the first stasimon to the said tradition of superlative-Priamel – alludes to this whole complex. On the one hand, this connection evokes the intrinsically controversial nature of superlative-Priamel – how they have to do with life’s opacity and with the fact that every major moral-compass issue is difficult to judge and open to debate. On the other hand, this connection raises

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13 This is even more the case as it was a very common practice (viz. a very common literary device) to present a certain event or a certain action (and indeed all sorts of things) as δεινότατον, πάντων δεινότατον or δεινότατον ἁπάντων (viz. δεινότατον πάντων). In a
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a series of questions: Is the Theban elders’ superlative-Priamel just a stylistic or rhetorical device (is it only a matter of emphasis) on which we should not waste our time and energy? Or are the Theban elders making a serious claim to truth? Are these people expressing just an idiosyncratic opinion (and indeed just making a comment in passing on a rather specific situation)? Are they saying that, though other people may think otherwise, for them “οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει”? Or are they making a “full-blooded” universal claim about the essential nature of human beings? And is the culmination statement of the Priamel to be understood literally (so that there really is nothing more δεινόν than man)? Or is it just an emphatic way of saying that man is extremely δεινόν?

In short, on the one hand, the superlative-Priamel-form links the opening lines of the first stasimon to the whole complex of “moral-compass” questions superlative Priameln are very often associated with. On the other hand, the superlative-Priamel-form renders these lines ambiguous. As pointed out above, the very fact that we are dealing with a choral ode creates a certain amount of ambiguity. But the superlative-Priamel-form endows these opening lines with an additional touch of ambiguity they would have even if they were otherwise quite plain.

way, the Theban elders join a long list of people who have their say on this matter. See notably Herodotus, Historiae VII, 10. 65, Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus, 1298, Thucydides, Historiae 2.51.4, 3.37.3, 3.43.2, 3.59.2, 3.82.2, 5.93.1, 6.49.2, 7.42.3, Aristophanes, Aves 514, Thesmophoriazusae 478, Platus 429, 445, 1112 (see also Vespe 908, 1032, and Ecclesiazusae 471), Euripides, Medea 658, Electra 1226, Isocrates, In Callimachum 18.4, In Lchoitem 20.1, De bigis 11.7, Trapezitius 12.3 and 14.6, Panegyricus 128.2, Plataicus 18.1, 45.1 and 52.1, Nicocles 14.2, Evagoras 64.5, Archidamus 55.6 and 83.2, De pace 14.5, Areopagiticus 59.7, Antidosis 23.2, 35.4, 165.6, 213.1, 250.1, 294.3, Philippus 52.2, Ps.-Plato, Demococ 381.8, Isaeus, De Cleonymo 38.2, 43.7 and 51.3, De Dicaeogene 11.2, De Philoctomeone 35.2, De Aristarcho 5.3 and 23.5, Andocides, De mysterii 19.8, 24.5, 39.2 and 51.3, De reditu suo 1.5, De pace 1.6, Lysias, Areopagiticus 23.1, In Agoratum 94.3, Υπερ των Αριστοφάνους χρημάτων 33.3, In Nicomachum 29.1, In Diogitonen 24.2, Fragmenta 3.2, 344.16, Demosthenes (viz. Ps.- Demosthenes), De falsa legatione, 2.6, 103.3, 149.2, 201.4, Adversus Leptinem, 48.4, 126.4, 133.2, In Midiam, 15.7, 79.8, 141.6, 215.2, Adversus Andronionem, 74.1, In Aristocratem, 90.3, In Timocratem, 72.3, 187.7, 194.9, In Aristogitonem 2, 7.1, In Aphobum 1, 53.3, Contra Phormionem, 6.5, 45.5, Contra Lacritum, 28.1, Contra Pantaenetum 60.5, Contra Naumachum et Xenopeithae, 22.8, Contra Leocharem, 41.1, 53.6, In Stephanum 1, 57.1, Contra Nicostratum 2.3, Contra Calliclem, 20.3, In Dionysodorum, 17.1, and Contra Eubulidem, 59.1, 65.2.

14 As we have just seen, the very nature of the stylistic device we are dealing with here – the Priamel – leaves room for ambiguity and doubt. But then again, this ambiguity does not weaken the impact of what the Theban elders are saying; for, be that as it may, they are putting man at the top list of δεινά – and this alone is already a striking and indeed an extraordinary claim.

Revista Filosófica de Coimbra—n.º 55 (2019)
So much for what we have termed the “formal allusion” and the link between the first stasimon and the ancient tradition of superlative-Priamel. Let us now turn our attention to the second point: the concrete instance of superlative-Priamel the first lines of this choral ode are alluding to. When you think of it, the Theban elders are not simply presenting a superlative-Priamel of their own. It is virtually certain that their words are a recognizable paraphrase or variation on the opening lines of another famous choral ode, namely the first stasimon of Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*: πολλὰ μὲν γὰ τρέφει / δεινὰ δειμάτων ἄχη / ποντιαί τ’ ἀγκάλαι κνωδάλων / ἀνταίοις βροτοῖς πλῆθ. θουσι βλάπτουσι καὶ πεδαίμοι / λαμπάδεις πεδάοροι πτανά τε καὶ πεδοβάμονα· κάνειμόντεν’ ἀν / αἰγίδων φράσαι κότων. ἀλλ’ ὑπέρτολμον ἀνθρώποι / δρὸς φρόνημα τίς λέγοι / κατειχετοίσι συννόμους βροτῶν.”

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15 585ff.
larity between the two texts makes it highly unlikely that we are not dealing here with an intentional quote from the well-known Aeschylean parallel text.

On the one hand, the opening lines of the two choral odes take the form of a superlative Priamel on the very same subject, namely τὰ δεινά. On the other hand, they share the same way of expression or the same diction: “πολλὰ μὲν γὰ τρέφει δεινά” viz. “πολλὰ τὰ δεινά”, followed by a contrast-
ing clause: “ἄλλ’ ὑπέρτολμον ἄνδρός φρόνημα τίς λέγοι κτλ.” viz. “κοῦδέν ἄνθρωπον δεινότερον πέλει”. This particular way of expression creates a very emphatic superlative; for if there are πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ (viz. if πολλὰ γὰ τρέφει δεινά), it is very significant that the thing in question somehow manages to be δεινότερον, and indeed τὸ δεινότατον (the superlative). In other words, if there were not that many things that were δεινά (and a fortiori if there were only very few), then it would not take much to be τὸ δεινότατον. But, on the contrary, if there are many things that are δεινά (and in particular if many of them are δεινὰ in a very high degree), then the thing in question must be outstandingly δεινόν in order for it to surpass everything else in δεινότης.

Last but not least, the opening lines of the two stasima we are talking about share the same view as to what is δεινότερον, and indeed τὸ δεινότατον; for both of them come up with the idea that human beings are τὸ δεινότατον.\textsuperscript{17} Now, this comes as a bit of a surprise, mainly for two reasons.

First, the very nature of what is at stake in superlative-Priameln calls other things to mind, namely external things or, to be more precise, things that come to our lives: whatever shapes one’s life and determines what becomes of it; things that happen to us or fall upon us; things one can achieve, fates one can suffer and the like. But both the citizens of Argos in Aeschylus’ Choephori and the Theban elders in Sophocles’ Antigone seem to share the view that in this case we ourselves are the superlative (the quintessence of δεινόν, the paragon of δεινόν – the most δεινόν thing of all), and that if we really want to know where we stand and what we are dealing with, we must realize this.

As for the second reason why this view comes as a bit of a surprise, it has to do with the fact that the semantics of ἄνθρωπος differs significantly from our common idea of human beings or mankind. This is not the place to discuss this question in any detail. But it should be borne in mind that, among other things, the ancient Greek notion of ἄνθρωπος – or, to be more precise (for such generalizations are dangerous), what might be described as the ancient mainstream understanding of what this word stands for – is shaped by the negative contrast with the θεοὶ ῥεῖα ζώοντες\textsuperscript{18} and by an acute awareness of human fragility and weakness: of human limitation, dependence and failure. To put it in a nutshell, more often than not ἄνθρωπος – viz. what we are – is closely associated with the idea of ἀσθένεια φύσεως (of η σύμπασα

\textsuperscript{17} Strictly speaking, the Theban elders do not mention τὸ δεινότατον; but since their claim is that οὐδέν ἄνθρωπον δεινότερον πέλει, it is more than plain that they have in mind the superlative and are depicting mankind as τὸ δεινότατον.

\textsuperscript{18} Il. VI, 138, Od. IV, 805, V, 122.
τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ἀσθένεια, as the Athenian in Plato’s Laws puts it). But, if this is so, then to think of human beings as something superlative, and indeed as the most δεινόν thing of all – marks a significant shift from this traditional mainstream approach. To be sure, this shift is much more pronounced in the case of Antigone’s first stasimon than in the case of the Choephoroi – and we take the opportunity to emphasize that nothing we have said means that the two stasima say pretty much the same thing. As mentioned above, Antigone’s first stasimon begins with a variation on the opening lines of the first stasimon of the Choephoroi – and variation is the key word here. Sophocles’ Theban elders refer to Aeschylus’ words – but this does not mean that they cannot use the allusion as a starting point to say something quite different.

But this is not all. As pointed out by G. A. Staley and J. Davidson, the opening lines of the first stasimon in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi provide an easily recognizable allusion to several Homeric passages. And the same holds for the opening of Antigone’s first stasimon. Among the Homeric passages in question two are particularly important, namely:

a) Od XVIII, 129-131: “τοῦνεκά τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δὲ σύνθεο καὶ μευ ἄκουσον / οὐδὲν άκιδνότερον γαϊα τρέφει ἀνθρώποιο / [πάντων δόσσα τε γαῖαν ἐπὶ πνεῖει τε καὶ ἐρπει]”

and

b) Il XVII, 446-447: “ὀυ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν οἰζυρώτερον / ἀνδρὸς πάντων, δόσσα τε γαῖαν ἐπὶ πνεῖει τε καὶ ἐρπεται”.

It is not difficult to see that there is a common pattern between all these passages (Od. XVIII, 129-131, Il. XVII, 446-7, Choephoroi, 585ff. and Anti-

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20 As we will see in a moment, δεινόν is equivocal. But at any rate its semantic field has little to do with the idea of ἀσθένεια: pretty much in any of its meanings the word suggests something very different from – and indeed the very opposite of – ἀσθένεια.
21 For several reasons and not least because in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi the chorus refers not to the human race but to unrestrained human passion: according to the citizens of Argos unrestrained human passion – i.e. ἄρως (that is, something that can be understood as an external force) – is τὸ δεινότατον.
24 Davidson also refers to Od XI, 427 (“δόκειν αἰνότερον καὶ κύντερον δίλλο γνακοκός”) and Pindar, O 1, 28-29 (“ἡ θαύματα πολλά, καὶ ποῦ τι καὶ βροτῶν φάτις υπέρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον δεδαιδαλμένοι γεύσεις ποικίλος εξεπατάντι μυθοί”).

gone, 332f.). This common pattern includes several components. To be sure, not all of them are present in all four passages; but there is a set of “metonymic” connections between all of them. On the one hand, as pointed out above, the opening lines of Antigone’s first stasimon inevitably evoke the passage of the Choephori. On the other hand, what the Theban elders say also evokes the Homeric lines in question. But this allusion is further reinforced by the fact that the opening lines of Aeschylus’ choral ode echo the very same Homeric passages – and indeed in such a way that they have yet other points of contact with them. One can therefore speak of an intricate net of allusions and of a multi-layered foil for the opening lines of Antigone’s first stasimon.

Of the several components of the common pattern we are talking about the one that interests us most here is the obvious structural parallelism: either a) οὐδὲν (or something similar) + comparative and a second term of comparison (namely mankind or something human) or b) the other way around (as in the Choephori), namely: the suggestion that a “human phenomenon” – female ἔρως – is second to nothing else. And the result is what might be called a similar “sound bite”: “οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον”, “ὀυ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν οἰζυρώτερον”, “οὐδὲν δεινότερον”.

But the point is that this formal parallelism evokes a yet deeper connection among all the passages we are talking about.

On the one hand, these four texts show mankind in a very different light. The two Homeric passages speak of man’s frailty (they belong to the above-mentioned tradition of the discourse on human fragility and ἀσθένεια φύσεως). According to them, a) there is nothing weaker or feebler, and b) there is nothing more wretched, more miserable, and more woeful than man. Aeschylus’ citizens of Argos refer to ἔρως (and in particular to women in love). But they strike a very different tone – for they stress not human frailty (not οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον viz. οὐδὲν οἰζυρώτερον) but rather “οὐδὲν δεινότερον”. Sophocles’ Theban elders represent a further step in this direction and state quite plainly: “οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον”. In a way, the four passages we are talking about rectify or amend each other. They form a series of contrasting images of man. The very fact that there is a striking formal similarity between them only makes this divergence all the more obvious. All in all, the point is that the opening lines of Antigone’s first stasimon could not fail to evoke this series of contrasting images of man as the background against which the Theban elders make their statement.

But, having said that, it should also be kept in mind that, on the other hand, there is a common denominator or a line of continuity between the contrasting statements (viz. the contrasting images of man) we are talking about. This common denominator or line of continuity has to do with the idea of what might be termed a negative prominence of man. In other words, both
the two Homeric passages in question and the opening lines of the first stasimon in Aeschylus’ *Choephori* suggest that man is exceptional *in a negative sense*: that we surpass everything else and *are outstanding in a negative way*. Whether this is also the case with the first stasimon of Sophocles’ *Antigone* remains to be seen – for everything depends on the sense in which the Theban elders claim that οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει. To be sure, the opening lines of the first stasimon cannot fail to evoke this common denominator – and thereby the idea of the negative prominence of man – as the background against which the Theban elders make their statement. But, as pointed out above, by the same token they also evoke a series of contrast- ing claims (of claims that seem to *rectify or amend each other*) – and thereby the possibility of a further correction (namely one that breaks free of the idea of negative prominence).

In short, the very wording of the opening lines – and the fact that they are enmeshed in this intricate net of allusions – makes them fraught with tension among various possibilities and indeed full of “suspense”.

### 3. What about δεινός?

But here we face a problem: what do the Theban elders have in mind when they speak of τὰ δεινά? One would think that there is a clear and straightforward answer to this question. But in fact there is not. And here is where the problem lies. In other words, from the very beginning it is perfectly clear that we are dealing with τὸ δεινὸν, τὰ δεινά, τὸ δεινότερον, τὸ δεινότατον and the like. And it is also perfectly clear that the Theban elders are presenting a superlative-Priamel within this range of comparison – that they have a definite view on what is the most δεινὸν thing of all. But the problem is a) that the words in question have a very wide range of meanings and b) that the opening lines of the stasimon do not show *what meaning of δεινὸν, τὰ δεινά, τὸ δεινότερον, etc., is being used* – the result being that in the final analysis we simply do not know what the superlative-Priamel we are dealing with is all about.

Let us take a closer look at this question. It is not possible in this short account to give more than a brief outline, which makes no claim to be exhaustive and does not try to discuss the connection between the various senses, the primary meaning, etc.

On the one hand, δεινός denotes something fearful or fearsome, terrible, or grievous, something dreadful, terrifying, scary or frightening, such as the violence of monstrous beings and elemental nature or the violence of shocking misdeeds and the like. It conveys the idea of terror and horror, of something shocking, disturbing, devastating, outrageous or ghastly. On
the other hand, it can also designate *dangers, ills, sufferings* (the hard, harsh and cruel – things difficult to endure, etc.). In addition, the word can also be used in the sense of something *formidable, tremendous, prodigious, or colossal*, of something *stupendously great or marvellously strong or powerful*. It is used to describe whatever has a *wonderful effect* – things of *extraordinary magnitude, the mighty or the awful*. Furthermore, δεινός can convey the idea of something *strange, uncanny, or “unheimlich”*. But the word is also often used for anything *overwhelming, wondrous, marvellous or incredible* – for any source of *astonishment, amazement or admiration*. But this is not all, for δεινός can also refer to *extraordinary skills* – i.e. to something *outstandingly skilful, able, ingenious or clever*, to a high degree of *resourcefulness, inventiveness* and the like. Last but not least, this shade of meaning can be used *pejoratively* in the sense of *too clever, over-clever*, etc.

Hence, δεινός covers a vast spectrum of meanings, and indeed so much so that it can have not only the *worst possible* but also rather *positive* connotations. It is used both to express *distaste, disapproval or horror*, and as a *word of praise and commendation.*

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To be sure, it should also be borne in mind that there are certain aspects that may suggest a narrower understanding of “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει” and indeed that these lines are to be taken in a negative sense.

First, as Gregory Crane has shown, πολλὰ καὶ δεινά was a regular phrase used to express the idea of “many bad experiences” (“terrible things that someone has done or suffered”) and the like. There is no denying that the association between πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ and this stereotype phrase was pretty natural. And this leads one to understand “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ” in this light. But even so this is not enough to make one sure, right from the start, that this specific meaning (or, for that matter, a negative nuance of δεινός) is what the Theban elders’ words are all about.

Secondly, as mentioned before, the opening lines of Antigone’s first stasimon allude to the opening lines of the first stasimon in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi. Now this background has two major effects. On the one hand, it

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suggests that τὰ δεινά is to be taken pejoratively – that what is at stake in the superlative-Priamel we are talking about has something to do with the δεινά δειμάτων ἄγη (with the terrible fearful woes) or with the κνώδαλα ἀνταῖα βροτοῖς (with the wild creatures hostile and hateful to mortals) that populate Aeschylus’ choral ode. To be sure, this suggestion does not carry enough weight to settle the matter; for it is not clear whether Sophocles’ Theban elders follow in the footsteps of Aeschylus’ citizens of Argos in every respect. But be that as it may, it certainly adds weight to those possible meanings of δεινός that correspond to what Aeschylus’ choral ode is all about. On the other hand, given the fact that Aeschylus’ text presents our ὑπέρτολμον φρόνημα (that which is πάντολμον – i. e., pride and arrogance, our all-daring boldness and over-boldness) as the nec plus ultra of δεινότης, the semantic background against which Sophocles’ “πολλὰ τὰ δεινά” is set encompasses other components besides the various meanings of δεινός we have spoken of. It is, as it were, a metonymic or synecdochic framework that includes, among other things, this essential component of Aeschylus’ superlative-Priamel: the τόλμα / πάντολμα / ὑπέρτολμα-element.27 Or rather the allusion to the opening lines of the first stasimon in Aeschylus’ Choephoroi strengthens the connection between the semantic field of δεινός and the idea of boldness or audacity, which is one of the possible connotations of the word (one of the metonymic links of its semantic field).28


28 On this connection between δεινός and audacity see notably A. H. Sommerstein (ed.), The Comedies of Aristophanes, vol. 11: Wealth (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2001), on 445. As far as Antigone’s first stasimon is concerned, this connection is reinforced by the fact that, when speaking of the unknown breaker of Creon’s edict, the first episodion emphasizes the idea of audacity. See notably 248: “Τί φῄς; τις ἀνδρῶν ἦν τὸ τολμήσας τάδε:”. See also 371.
In short, in the opening lines of *Antigone*’s first stasimon there is no basis on which to decide which sense of δεινόν is at stake.

We are now in a position to understand the above-mentioned problem in all its complexity: What exactly are the Theban elders saying in the opening lines of the first stasimon? a) Are they saying that there are many fearsome, terrible, terrifying and violent things, but that we ourselves are the most fearsome, terrible, terrifying and violent thing of all? b) Are they saying that there are many dangers, ills and sufferings (many things that are hard, difficult to endure, etc.) but that we ourselves are the greatest of all? c) Are they saying that there are many tremendous, prodigious, colossal, marvellously strong or powerful things, but that we ourselves are the most tremendous, colossal, marvellously strong or powerful thing of all? d) Are they saying that there are many strange, uncanny and “unheimliche” things, but that we ourselves are the strangest, uncanniest and “unheimlichste” thing of all? e) Are they saying that there are many wondrous or marvellous – many amazing, astonishing, wonderful and admirable – things, but that we ourselves are the most wondrous, the most marvellous, the most amazing and admirable thing of all? f) Are they saying that there are many skilled, able, ingenious, clever, resourceful and inventive things, but that we ourselves are the most skilled, able, ingenious, clever, resourceful and inventive thing of all? g) Are they saying that there are many too-clever, over-clever things, but that we ourselves are the most over-clever thing of all? h) Are they saying that there are many haughty and audacious, bold and daring, reckless and ruthless beings, but that we ourselves are the haughtiest, boldest, most daring and ruthless of all?

Now, my claim is that, contrary to appearances, at the starting point – namely in the opening lines of the first stasimon – all these possible meanings of δεινός and all these possible interpretations of “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει” are there, for they belong to the semantic field of δεινός, and there is nothing to exclude any of them. Δεινός stands for a vast range of meanings (this vast range of meanings is there if one understands the language), and in the opening lines it is not yet clear what segments of this range are applicable or not. Put another way, in the opening lines “δεινός” (τὰ δεινά, δεινότερον) does not have a clear-cut semantic value. All possible meanings of the word are involved (all “pêle-mêle” – all in a jumble, as it were). And we cannot rely on the immediate context to guide us, for the immediate context does not provide any clues as to what particular meaning of the word the Theban elders have in mind. The opening lines thus remain enigmatic (or as said above: sibylline). There is something shimmering, shifty and slippery – allow me to use a Greek word: αἰόλον – about them. And there is no point in trying to tie them to the Procrustean bed of an either/or, of a clear-cut view (of a univocal sense), for they are all about a “both/and”, i.e., about ambiguity and complexity.

And pretty much the same holds good for a closely connected question,
namely: For whom are we something δεινόν and indeed the nec plus ultra of δεινόν: τὸ δεινότατον? In whose eyes are we τὸ δεινότατον? Are we τὸ δεινότατον for ourselves and in our own eyes? Or is it that we are δεινόν only for other beings and in their eyes? Or is this question pointless, for we are δεινόν in a sense which does not depend on the point of view? The answer to all these questions depends largely on the sense in which we are said to be not only something δεινόν, but τὸ δεινότατον. The two questions are closely linked to one another. But in this respect, too, the opening lines of the first stasimon say nothing at all.

So everything depends upon what the Theban elders say to substantiate their initial claim – i.e. upon the rest of the first stasimon. There is nothing special in the fact that the first two lines leave these matters open. After all, the rest of the first stasimon is anything but laconic, and it is to be expected that it provides a clear answer to all these questions and enables one to determine which sense of δεινόν is at stake when the Theban elders say “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει”. Or so it seems, for the problem is that on closer inspection it emerges that the rest of the first stasimon provides absolutely no clue as to what particular meaning(s) of δεινόν the Theban elders have in mind. Contrary to appearances, nothing they say narrows down the meaning of δεινόν to a clear-cut and unequivocal semantic value. As a matter of fact, nothing they say is enough to whittle down the semantic field of δεινόν to a shortlist of meanings. In this respect everything remains unchanged (and this means: everything remains open) from the beginning to the end.

To be sure, much of what the Theban elders say places some of the semantic values in question centre stage. For instance, it is pretty obvious that they are referring to the fact that mankind is a tremendous, prodigious, colossal, strong or powerful thing. It is also obvious that they present mankind as a wondrous or marvellous – as an amazing, astonishing, wonderful and admirable – thing. And it is no less obvious that in their eyes mankind is a prodigiously skilled, able, ingenious, clever, resourceful and inventive thing. But the point is that nothing they say excludes that the human race is δεινόν in the other senses of the word. I. e., nothing they say excludes any of the above-mentioned possible interpretations of “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει”. The fact that some possible interpretations of these words may seem more plausible than others does not eliminate the presence of the whole set of meanings we have tried to highlight. They all keep lurking in the background. And they play what might be described as a “chess-match” (with “moves and countermoves”) with each other.

For instance, if one assumes that δεινόν is charged with negative associations (say, with the kind of negative associations suggested both by the connection with the first stasimon of Aeschylus’ Choephoroi and by the connection with the stereotype phrase “πολλὰ καὶ δεινὰ”), one soon comes up against the fact that the Theban elders are also speaking of δεινόν in the sense of an outs-
tanding ability – of resourcefulness, cleverness and the like.29 Conversely, if

29 P. Friedländer, “πολλά τά δεινά”, op. cit., 58f., provides a typical example of this. He begins by stressing that δεινά stands for “ungeheuer” (“unheimich”, “furchtbar”) and thereby suggests that this is the meaning of the word in the first stasimon: “Das Aischyleische Vorbild lehrt in der Tat, daß Sophokles den Ursinn in δεινός nicht vergessen haben kann. Noch gewisser lehrt es Sophokles selbst. Es gibt wenige Fälle bei ihm, in denen δεινός, durch Infinitiv oder Dativ oder Nomen klar bestimmt, die bekannte Sonderbedeutung des in einem bestimmten Bezirk Fähigen hat (...).” But then he qualifies his claim: “Aber von dieser Sonderverwendung abgesehen, fehlt dem δεινός bei Sophocles nie ein Zuschuß des Furchtbaren, des ‘Ungehiuren’, am allerwenigsten dem Neutrum: δεινά τολμάν, δεινά θεσπίσας, ἐργα δεινά, πέπονθα δεινά, τά δεινά γάρ τοι προστίθης’δκνον πολόν, τά δειν’έκειν’ἐπηπειλημένου und vieles.” And a few lines further down he is forced to admit that other meanings of the word play a pivotal role in the following strophes: “Auch in den beiden folgenden Strophen muß dieser Klang des Gefährlichen gehört warden, wenngleich die δεινότης im Sinn des δεινὸς άγειν, κρατεῖν, λέγει zu überwiegen scheint”. Pretty much the same holds true for J. C. Collins, Jebb’s Antigone (Diss. Queen’s University Kingston, Ontario, 2015), 49ff. Collins presents a survey of “δεινός in all of Sophocles’” (49) and tries to show that in the majority of cases the word means terrible, dreadful, dread, and the like. But she finds herself forced to admit “uses of δεινός in the Antigone and other plays of Sophocles where something other than ‘terrible’ suits the context more” (58ff.). According to her, in most of these other cases δεινός means ‘clever’ and the like – and only in one case (O.C. 1127) does it stand for a ‘miracle’ or ‘something wonderful’. “A look at some uses Aeschylus makes of δεινός” (61ff.) and a similar attempt regarding Herodotus (63ff.) confirm that in most cases terrible and strange – “dark and negative terms” (63) – are the best translation for δεινόν and the like. But then again Collins sees herself forced to admit that in a significant number of cases δεινόν stands inter alia not only a) for terrible, formidable, dangerous, but also b) for hard, harsh, cruel, severe, and c) for keen, sharp, clever. All in all, Collins resorts to a statistical argument: she claims that the “textual evidence in Sophocles, Aeschylus and Herodotus is overwhelmingly in favour of the translation ‘terrible’ or, perhaps, ‘strange.’” (65). This claim is then reinforced by the notion that “all of Sophocles’ work supports a very gloomy view of mankind” (68) – which would be inconsistent with “οὐδὲν δεινότερον ἀνθρώπου” having anything but a dark and negative meaning. However, none of this is conclusive. On the one hand, Collins’ survey shows that δεινόν covers a wide gamut of meanings – and the audience viz. the reader has no way of knowing for sure which meaning the Theban elders have in mind when they start singing πολλά τά δεινά κοὐδὲν κτλ. After all the audience and the reader will not have bothered to study Sophocles’, Aeschylus’ and Herodotus’ vocabulary. And even if they had, they would still be unable to settle this issue immediately, for they would realize a) that δεινόν has a variety of meanings, and b) that this kind of questions cannot be solved on a statistical basis. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the chorus is not just a mouthpiece for the playwright. It, too, is a kind of character (with its own views, its own relation to the plot, its own strategy, etc.). It, too, modifies its outlook and thinking according to the circumstances, etc. And the fact that a playwright takes a gloomy view on mankind does not imply that everyone in his or her plays takes a similar view (let alone takes a similar view in all circumstances).
one assumes that the first stasimon is all about ability, resourcefulness, cleverness and the like, one comes up against the fact that the negative nuances (the negative and ominous associations) are there from the very beginning.

Thus, the first stasimon has a shadow of helpless ambiguity about it. As far as the semantic field of δεινόν is concerned, conjunction, not disjunction – a “both/and”, not an “either/or” – is its signature. And, as we shall see, on closer inspection it emerges that this helpless ambiguity (the fact that mankind is δεινόν in all possible meanings of the word, and that this – precisely this – is what makes of us τὸ δεινότατον: the most δεινόν thing of all) is perhaps what the first stasimon is all about.

And pretty much the same holds for the question regarding the point of view from which the human race is said to be the most δεινόν thing of all. Admittedly the first stasimon does not breathe a word about this. But the point is that it raises the question. On the one hand, it seems to present mankind as seen from outside, from what might be termed a “witness point of view”. The Theban elders behold the whole “pageant” – the whole “adventure”, as it were – of mankind, and the effect it has on everything else. In other words, we are seen as we usually see other things or other beings. On the other hand, the first stasimon puts us in the shoes of other beings – i. e., it presents us as we are seen by them (or as we would be seen by them if they were able to understand things the way we do). But this is not all. At the same time these “external points of view” are fused with our own. And this means something altogether different from the external points of view in question. What is at stake is not only how other beings (viz. a witness point of view) see us; it is rather a question of ourselves seeing ourselves as seen from outside. In other words, it is a question of something which is at the same time an inside and an outside view of human race. Furthermore, the “inside view” we are talking about is intrinsically complex, for it encompasses both a) our usual point of view (our usual unreflective and self-centred point of view) and b) the broader view taken by the Theban elders.

All this is closely connected with the question: for whom is the human race δεινόν and indeed τὸ δεινότατον? The Theban elder’s words suggest that we are δεινόν and indeed τὸ δεινότατον for other beings, but they do not exclude (and on closer inspection it emerges that they also suggest) that we are δεινόν and indeed τὸ δεινότατον for ourselves. Furthermore, given the fact that they leave undecided in which sense(s) οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει, it is also possible that their claim is that the human race is the most δεινόν thing of all in some sense that does not depend upon the point of view. What we are dealing with here is thus a kaleidoscope, a complex alloy of various perspectives. In this respect, too, the first stasimon is all about conjunction, not disjunction: a “both/and” (not an “either/or”) is its signature.

30 For this point of view does not vanish without a trace, but remains.
Let us now turn our attention to the lines that hold the key to understanding what the Theban elders have in mind: their attempt to substantiate the claim that “πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει”.

First, it should be borne in mind that their description of the human race is centred on power, and on what might be described as the relations of forces between mankind and other beings. The Theban elders speak not only of man but, in a way, of everything around us. The human race is measured against everything else, and the question is: who has power over whom? Who has control over whom? Who prevails over whom? In other words, the chorus focuses on what kind of power each of the elements has or does not have over the others. The choral ode describes – sit venia verbo – a “war of being” (the “γιγαντομαχία” of it all), or rather the outcome of this war. The human race has prevailed against other beings – and this is why the first stasimon has a ring of a triumph song to it.

The Theban elders’ depiction of the said “γιγαντομαχία” highlights the following aspects:

First, they speak of the human triumph over distance and danger. They stress the fact that the human race is on the move, and that it is not deterred by natural barriers. Man defies all natural limits, stops at nothing, and overcomes all obstacles. He is, as it were, a creature of distance. He travels far and wide and eventually reaches everywhere. In the eyes of the Theban elders the crossing of the seas (the fact that human beings risk storm and shipwreck) is the emblem of this essential feature: τοῦτο καὶ πολιοῦ πέραν / πόντου χειμερίῳ νότῳ/ χωρεὶ, περιβρυχίοισιν /περῶν ὑπ’ οἴδμασιν (…)

Secondly, man subdues everything around him to his use. And he does so on land, sea and air. On the one hand, he turns over the soil and vexes the earth. He rubs her away for his own purposes. To express the extraordinary extent to which he does so, the Theban elders resort to an oxymoron: however inexhaustible and untiring (or unwaning and unwearying) the earth is, mankind still manages to wear her out (θεῶν / τε τὰν ὑπερτάταν, Γᾶν / ἀφθιτον, ἀκαμάταν ἀποτρύεται, / ἰλλομένων ἀρότρων ἔτος εἰς ἔτος, / ἱππείῳ

31 T. C. W. Oudemans, P. M. H. Lardinois, Tragic Ambiguity Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles’ Antigone (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 126, incisively highlights that extreme and far reaching mobility (“expansion”, “going beyond”) serves as a Leitmotiv in the first stasimon: man “goes across the sea (πέραν), traversing the waves (περῶν – 337), he moves (πέλει – 333), he strides (χωρεῖ – 336), he travels towards the future (ἐπ’ […] ἔρχεται τὸ μέλλον – 360-61)”.

32 334-37.
On the other hand, man captures the other animals. Some of them he makes captive – he uses them for his own service, tames and trains them, making them work for him. In short, with regard to other animals, man turns the balance of power in his favour and calls all the shots. The human race dominates other species – it breaks them, gets a firm hold upon them and reduces them to subjection. In the eyes of the Theban elders, hunting viz. fishing nets and the yoke are the emblem of this essential com-

ponent of man’s triumph: κουφόνων τε φῦλον ὅρ / νίθων ἀμφιβαλὼν ἄγει / καὶ θηρῶν ἀγρίων ἔθνη / πόντου τ’εἰναλίαν φύσιν / σπείρα δικτυκλώστοις / περιφραδὴς ἀνήρ· κρατεῖ / δὲ μηχαναῖς ἀγραύλου / θηρὸς ὀρεσσιβάτα, λασιαύχενα θ’ / ἵππον ὑπαγάγετ’ἀμφίλοφον ζυγὸν/ οὔρειόν τ’ἀκμῆτα

ταῦρον. 35

But, thirdly, all this has to do with the fact that man creates his own space, filling it with new kinds of reality that strengthen his position and help him prevail: language, reasoning and thought, housing, cities and city-life (viz. living in society, with all that this entails), medical knowledge – all sorts of innovations. The point is that the human species changes the way things are. Man invents means of escaping from inanimate threats, and indeed from whatever weakens him or is hard and uncomfortable. He has the ability to improve his living conditions, by turning weakness into strength, creating ever new resources and arranging everything to his convenience. Here, too, man tips the balance of power to his favour. In the eyes of the Theban elders, two words say it all – “παντοπόρος” and the opposite of ἄπορος (ἄπορος ἐπ’ οὐδέν). We will return to these terms later, but for now let it suffice to say that they put everything in a nutshell, generalize the claim and convey the idea of nothing less than universal resourcefulness – man is an all-providing creature: ταῦρον καὶ ἀνεμόεν /φρόνημα καὶ ἀστυνόμους / ὀργὰς ἐδιδάξατο, καὶ δυσαύλων / πάγων ὑπαίθρεια καὶ / δύσομβρα φεύγειν βέλη, / παντοπόρος· ἄπορος ἐπ’ οὐδέν έργεται / τὸ μέλλον· (…) νόσων δ’ἀμηχάνων φυγὰς / ξυμπέφρασται. 36

It is therefore no exaggeration to speak of the first stasimon as a “triumph of man”. It is perhaps not the whole truth, but certainly part of it. This is closely connected with the fact that the first stasimon features a list of achievements, namely of our achievements; for on closer inspection it emerges that, in fact, it is more than just a list of achievements: it is the description of a realm or an empire. And this is one of the main features of the image of man presented by the Theban elders: it describes the race of man as a realm or an empire. It does not speak of mankind just as a group of be-

35 342-352.
36 354-364.
ings among many other beings. It presents us as a *global power* – interfering with other beings, *prevailing* over other beings, *shaping* other beings, *changing* other beings, etc. This power to *shape things*, to get *what one wants*, to *impose one’s control*, to *win* and to *subdue* – and indeed not only a certain amount of this power, but the ability to achieve this with regard to *everything around us*, including the most *difficult* and most *strong* and *powerful*, and also with regard to the *distant* – is, according to the Theban elders, the main feature of mankind.\(^{37}\)

Let us take a closer look at how the Theban elders present this view in the first stasimon. As pointed out above, the chorus reviews the triumph of man over each of his opponents, one by one. It highlights the fact that the human race prevails over the *elements of nature* (the sea, the earth, etc.). It then calls our attention to the fact that pretty much the same holds good for our relation to *other living beings*.*\(^{38}\) The point is the idea of *totality*. In other words, the point is the idea of *total triumph over everything else* – the point is that the “empire” we are talking about is nothing less than a *massive* sphere of power, extending all around us in all directions (not a scattered archipelago of little islands, but the very opposite: a *sea* of power, as it were).\(^{39}\)

\(^{37}\) It should be noted that the Theban elders do not speak of man as an *individual*. They speak of mankind in a *collective* sense and describe its *common achievements*. The point is the relative strength of the human race in comparison with everything else – and they do not have in mind the individual human being, but rather the *whole species*. To be sure, two human beings cannot merge together: there is no such thing as a *real fusion* of selves or individuals. As Aristotle points out in his *Política*, 1262b, referring to Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, it is impossible for two human beings to grow together and both become one instead of being two (συμφῦναι καὶ γενέσθαι ἐκ δύο ὄντων ἀμφιτέρους ἐνα); for in such a union both of them, or at least one, would inevitably be destroyed (ἐνταῦθα μὲν οὖν ἀνάγκη ἀμφατέρους ἐφθάρθαι ἢ τὸν ἐνα). The result being that, in a way, everything the Theban elders are referring to (all *collective* achievements of mankind) is the work of *individuals*. And, of course, collective achievements reflect the qualities and shortcomings of the individuals who made them possible: mankind would not have “triumphed” if individual human beings were not suitably equipped for the purpose. But, on the other hand, no single individual would be able to accomplish any of the said deeds single-handedly: the triumph evoked by the Theban elders has an intrinsically collective nature. Which, in turn, should not blind us to the fact that *each of us* (each “present-day” individual – and by this we mean both the Theban elders’ or Sophocles’ “present-day” and ours) is himself the product of the collective achievements of mankind (and would be very different without them).

\(^{38}\) For a more detailed discussion of the categories of beings the Theban elders refer to, see T. C. W. Oudemans, P. M. H. Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity*. Anthropology, Philosophy and Sophocles’ *Antigone*, *op. cit.*, 121ff.

\(^{39}\) To be sure, it cannot be excluded that there are more things than the chorus lists, so that the totality they are talking about does not cover everything (is not the “complete
But here one should pay attention not only to what the Theban elders say, but to their *diction* or *form of expression* – and in particular to the fact that here, too, they are alluding to something. It goes without saying that these lines are an instance of so-called “polar expression”, namely of “polar expression” of totality).

Polar expression of totality does not require any totality”: *all things that exist*. In particular, the gods are conspicuous by their absence – and one can ask the meaning of this. Are the Theban elders just leaving out those beings that are, as it were, the mirror of man’s ἀσθένεια? Are they assuming that there are no gods – that *it is just us* and the other beings mentioned in the ode? Or is their point that, even if there are yet other beings and the balance of forces between them and man is not favourable to us, there is a whole sphere (and indeed a very vast one) in which mankind “calls all the shots” – so that it still makes sense to celebrate the extraordinary extent of man’s power? Or is it that they are not expressing their own view, but a particular way of seeing that focuses exclusively on the sphere in which mankind “calls all the shots” – so that everything else falls out of one’s field of vision? Whatever the case, the point seems to be that there is this massive sphere of power: the “sea of power” we have spoken of.

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pp. 105-196
explicit mention of the whole in question. Nor does it require that each and every part of it is expressly referred to. Polar expression highlights a series of contrasting and complementary elements and thereby conveys the idea of totality. In other words, it includes, as it were, a dynamic *rounding-up-procedure* or a *pars pro toto* effect. And that is exactly what the Theban elders’ list of achievements is all about.

But there is more. On closer inspection it emerges that what we are dealing with here is a very particular case of polar expression: “Such polar expressions involving sea and land (see also *Choepori*, 585-8) go back to Hesiod (*Theogony*, 582) and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (5-6); the goddess subdues ‘all creatures that dry land nurtures, and all reared by the sea’ (more examples in Barrett’s edition of *Euripides Hippolytus*, on 1277-80)”.

In other words, it is not just another case of so-called “polar expression”. Sophocles’ wording is a conscious paraphrase and variation of a topos: the topos of Ἐρως and Aphrodite’s omnipresence and irresistible power. We find other expressions of this topos, say, in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, 120ff., in *Antigone*’s third stasimon, in Sophocles’ Fragments 684 and 941, in the fourth stasimon of Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, and in Euripides’ Fragment 433. In sum, the Theban elders let mankind play the role of the ἀνίκατος μάχαν (Sophocles’ words in *Antigone*’s third stasimon) viz. of Euripides’ πάντων δυσμαχώτατος.

They present what might be described as a “demytholo-
vised” version of Ἐρως’ universal supremacy – the main difference being that Ἐρως is replaced by the human race, that the gods do not intervene one way or the other, and that therefore nothing is said about the human empire prevailing over them. The fact that the topos in question originally has to do with Ἐρως and ἄμαχος Ἀφροδίτα is not the decisive factor here. The point is that one could hardly be more emphatic in asserting the idea of invincibility, for the wording suggests nothing less than some kind of godlike omnipresence and universal supremacy.

But this is not all. The chorus’ characterization of mankind has a second important feature, namely what they say concerning the origin of this universal supremacy (where all this power comes from). The Theban elders do not just say that we are that powerful: they try to determine what makes this power possible; for it is not only a question of power, it is rather a question of a very particular kind of power – namely, a power that has to do with mental capacity, intelligence, skillfulness, craftiness. It is all a question of being περιφραδής, of μηχαναί, of φρόνημα; it has all to do with the fact that man has taught himself (ἐδιδάξατο, or as Jebb puts it: ἀυτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐδίδαξε) and that the human race contrives plans (ξυμπέφρασται); or, as the Theban elders also say, it has all to do with the fact that man has “this resourceful quality of inventiveness – that defines τέχνη – as something clever beyond expectation” (Griffith’s paraphrase of σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας ὑπὲρ ἐλπιδὰ ἔχων) – or, in Jebb’s paraphrase of this passage: “possessing, in his resourceful skill, a thing subtle beyond belief”. And this – not anything else – is what makes human beings so extraordinarily powerful. In short, according to the chorus, intelligence is power – the supreme kind of power. The “human empire” is based on intelligence. And what we have termed the “triumph of man” turns out to be a “triumph of intelligence”.


47 799f.
48 347
49 348.
50 355.
51 355.
53 362.
But before we go any further let us take a closer look at the vocabulary used by the Theban elders to express this cognitive component.

First, περιφραδής is a seldom used adjective. Elsewhere the word occurs only in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes (In Mercurium, 464). Homer always uses the adverb περιφραδέως (Il. I, 466, II, 429, VII, 318, XXIV, 624, Od. XIV, 431, XIX, 423) in the formulaic sequence “ὁπτησάν τε περιφραδέως, ἑρύσαντο τε πάντα”. Hesiod varies this formula: “ὁπτησαν μὲν πρῶτα, περιφραδέως δ’ ἑρύσαντο” – an unfortunate change, according to the Scolia: “οὐδεὶς δὲ περιφραδέως ἐξέλκει κρέα, ἄλλα μᾶλλον ὀπτᾶ”. It is a matter of dispute whether the verbal prefix (περι‑) a) has an intensive value, b) expresses the idea of superiority or excellence (to a greater degree than others – that is, the idea of outstanding expertise or outstanding skills) or rather c) the idea of some kind of “circumspection” (“looking around” and “looking about”), i. e. the cautious and watchful attitude of one who takes heed – who pays attention to all the facts, details and circumstances, viz. to all the possibilities and probable consequences, in order to determine the correct or safe course of conduct, etc. But the verbal prefix may also suggest d) the possession of outstanding skills (or having this kind of attitude) in all possible directions, in every regard – i. e. the idea of what might be termed all-round skills (viz. all-round watchfulness) or of an extraordinary combination of many specific abilities. But this is not all. Last but not least, it is also possible that P. Joos is right in pointing out that e) περιφραδής can also convey the idea of “being too clever” (“zum ‘Überausklugen’, ja sogar – in leise mitschwingender Bedeutung – zum ‘Allzuklugen’”). In other words, περιφραδής can suggest that man outwits himself, and that, in the final analysis, his intelligence causes harm either to other beings or to himself (so that he is, as it were, too clever for his own good). Joos does not elaborate on the subject, but this may be related to the fact that both in Lesbian and in other dialects (in particular in Attic) περι‑ can mean pretty much the same

58 See, for instance, M. W. Humphreys (ed.), The Antigone of Sophocles (N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1891), on 348: “περ‑ intensive; φραδ‑ in the early sense ponder; hence very thoughtful, full of cunning.”
60 P. Joos, ΤΥΧΗ, ΦΥΣΙΣ, ΤΕΧΝΗ, 46.
as ὑπερ-, so that περιφραδής may be as ambivalent as περίφρων. Due to this ambivalence, περίφρων = ὑπέρφρων, περιφρονεῖν = ὑπερφρονεῖν, etc., and the adjective can take a negative shade of meaning, namely “haughty, overweening” (LSJ) and the like. Cf., for example, Hesiod, Theogonia, 894, Aeschylus, Agamemnon, 1426, and Supplices, 757, Thucydides, I, 25. 4, perhaps also Aristophanes, Nubes, 225f. Now the bottom line is that the same may be the case with περιφραδής, so that this word can also convey the idea that man is full of himself (arrogant, proud, conceited, etc.). In short, this relatively rare word is open to all these different interpretations; and it is thus left up to the reader to decide what the Theban elders’ περιφραδής stands for. This very fact reinforces the suggestion of an ambiguous combination of all the above-mentioned meanings (here again a “chord”, not a single note). But, be that as it may, the fact remains that περιφραδής conveys the idea of a high degree of sagacity viz. of outstanding intellectual and knowledge skills. The old scholiast says it all when he writes: “περιφραδής πάντα εἰδώς”.

The second key word is μηχανή. This is hardly the place to discuss in any detail the semantic field of μηχανή (μῆχος, μηχανάομαι and the like). So let it suffice to say this much: a) this family of words denotes the idea of “means”, “expedient”, “contrivance” and “remedy” – of knowing how to help oneself, and providing either a device for escaping a difficulty or a means of achieving an end (or, as LSJ puts it: “any artificial means or contrivance for doing a thing”; b) μηχανή (μῆχος, μηχανάομαι and the like) denotes both the idea of something clever, ingenious, crafty, resourceful or artful (of some kind of intellectual breakthrough) and the ability to implement – that is, both planning and successful execution of a plan; in other words, this family of words


On the connection between περι and υπέρ viz. on the pejorative sense of περίφρων, see Appendix I.
stands both for the intellectual process as such (for the intellectual and cognitive breakthrough) and for the ability to execute according to a plan (i.e. to the intellectual or cognitive breakthrough); the emphasis can change, so that in some cases μηχανή means something like a “bright idea”, while in other cases the word stands for “clever” or “crafty” “actions” and even for the “implements”, “instruments” or “engines” devised to achieve a certain goal; c) this family of words can convey the idea not only of “device” (of expedient and “remedy”, etc.), but also of “ruse”, of something “shrewd” or “sly” – i.e., of cunning, of stratagems and the like; d) the semantic field of μηχανή suggests a particular kind of power, which has to do with creative inventiveness – it is, as it were, the “power of the powerless” (or the particular kind of way the powerless manage to acquire power); e) μηχανή (εὐμηχανός, εὐμηχανία, ἀμηχανία) are closely associated with πόρος (εὔπορος, εὐπορία, ἀπορία), and indeed in such a way that these terms can be used as synonyms; and last but not least, f) this family of words can have both positive (or at any rate neutral) and not only negative, but utterly negative connotations, so that μηχανή, μηχανάομαι, etc., can be words “of dubious moral significance” and convey the idea of “machination”, “plot” or “deception”, and even of “criminal plotting”, of “evil devices” and the like.

The third key word is φρόνημα. It should be borne in mind that φρόνημα suggests more than the idea of cognitive or intellectual activity (or its “products”). On the one hand, this word can mean both “one’s mind” (“disposition of spirit”, “mentality” and the like) and the result of the working of one’s mind (“thought, “purpose”, “counsel”, etc). On the other hand, φρόνημα can be used a) in a neutral sense, but it can also be used either b) with a positive connotation (“resolution”, “spirit”, “resolve”), or c) in a pejorative sense (“presumption”, “pride”, “arrogance”, “proud or arrogant thought”, “presumptuous imagination”, etc.). Given the context, it is probable that the Theban elders are speaking of “far-reaching thoughts” and the like. But it is also very likely that they are suggesting the idea of resolve, ambition, etc. But it is hard to tell whether they want the word to be understood in a neutral, in a positive or in a pejorative sense.

However, we must not forget the epithet – for the Theban elders speak of an ἀνεμόεν φρόνημα. In their eyes the thought they are referring to is “windy” or “windlike”. But the problem is that the epithet is anything but unequivocal. Does it really mean “windy” or “windlike”? Or is it rather that the chorus is stressing the similarity between thought and air viz. between thought and breath?\textsuperscript{65} And if wind is really what the Theban elders have in mind, what wind-related meaning of ἀνεμόεις is at stake here? This adjective can be used either in an active sense\textsuperscript{66} or passively.\textsuperscript{67} But since the literal sense is excluded, what is the tertium comparationis? The most plausible candidate seems to be quickness or swiftness: the speed of thought (the fact that thought is wind-swind).\textsuperscript{68} In other words, the Theban elders seem to be


\textsuperscript{66} “Windlike” i. e. in some way “behaving like the wind”.


resorting to the time-honoured topos of wind-swift thought – viz. of wind-swift νόος, νόημα and the like. This topos is as old as Homer. And as a matter of fact, the comparison goes both ways: thought is compared with wind and vice versa. The most common version of this topos emphasizes the idea of thought-like speed. The Theban elders go the other way around and seem to speak of wind-like thought. But there is another very plausible candidate for the tertium comparationis, namely strength, impetuousness, strenuousness, fierceness. For winds are the very paragon of all this. And


the power of thought (and for that matter, of pride, etc.) might be described as very strong, gusty, impetuous, fierce – as sweeping all resistance before it, etc., just like a stormy wind. In short, it is by no means unlikely that the Theban elders are speaking of the "hurricane" of thought (viz. of the "hurricane" of pride, ambition and haughtiness, etc.). Finally, it is also possible that the comparison takes into account the nimbleness of thought viz. the fact that it is free (as free as the wind: that it "goes its own ways", etc.)

It cannot be excluded, however, that ἀνεμόεν stands for the idea of something very high, either in the literal or in the figurative sense. Jebb claims that the word can be said only of high places (in the literal sense). But Müller has a point when he contends that nothing prevented Sophocles from using it to express a "moral" (or "psychological") quality. If this is true, ἀνεμόεν might express a) "the heights to which man’s intelligence reaches" or b) the heights to which human "pride, ambition and haughtiness" reach – in which case it means something like "lofty", "high-flying", "high-flown", "high-soaring".

Another important aspect is the fact that most of these possible shades of meaning can have either a positive or a negative connotation. What is more,
there is a possible connection between the semantic ambiguity of ἀνεμόεν and the above-mentioned ambivalence of φρόνημα. The negative sense of the former could be related to the negative sense of the latter. However, it should be borne in mind that what we are dealing with here is not necessarily an “either/or”: either this or that shade of meaning, either a) positive φρόνημα + positive ἀνεμόεν, or b) negative φρόνημα + negative ἀνεμόεν. In this case, too, there is room for conjunction viz. for a conflation of various meanings: φρόνημα/thought can be at the same time swift and lofty (viz. high-soaring), etc.; and φρόνημα/pride can be at the same time swift and lofty (viz. high-soaring), etc. In short, we can mimic Sophocles’ compressed form of expression and say: “thought/pride can be swift/lofty (viz. high-soaring), etc.”.

Last but not least, it should be noted that ἀνεμόεν might also express the fact that φρόνημα (man’s thought – but also man’s pride and arrogance) is something rather unsubstantial, both in a pejorative sense (it is unstable, changeable, fleeting, etc.) and in the sense that it is intangible and invisible (with stress on the fact that, as Brown puts it, φρόνημα is “very powerful though invisible”).

The fourth key word is ἐδιδάξατο. As mentioned before, Jebb claims that it is equivalent to ἀυτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐδίδαξε. The translation should therefore be: “he taught himself”. As a matter of fact, this line of interpretation – and the paraphrase “αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐδίδαξε” – can already be found in the Prodromus of Korais’ Greek Library, which is already cited by Erfurdt. Dindorf translates “se docuit i.e. suopte ingenio didicit”.

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77 Incidentally both φρόνημα and ἀνεμόεν have their counterpart in the first stasimon of Aeschylus’ Choephoroi (591 and 594-5), where both words are rather negatively connotated.
78 D. Cairns, Sophocles: Antigone, op. cit., 60.
79 A. Brown (ed.), Sophocles: Antigone, op. cit., on 354. Hoppe, loc. cit., highlights the connection between the different shades of meaning. And he hits the mark when he writes: “Aptissimum vero ἀνεμόεν diximus, nam si epitheton cogitationi apponendum poeta quaerebat, unde, cum e rerum natura similitudinem desumere vellet, aptius potuit, quam ab auris, quibus nec levius nec mobilius nec subtlius quidquam homines noverint?”
80 356.
82 A. Κοραής, Πρόδρομος Ελληνικής Βιβλιοθήκης (Εν Παρισίων: Εκ της Τυπογραφίας Φ. Διδότου,1805), 36.
84 C. W. Dindorf, Ad Sophoclis tragœdias annotationes (Oxonii: Typogr. Academicco, 1836), on 356.
lows in his footsteps and translates: “suopte sibi ingenio didicit”.85 Campbell offers a similar translation: “he taught himself”86 – and so do Bruhn (“er lehrte sich dies”),87 Mette (“gewann er sich ab”),88 Schadewaldt (“bracht er sich bei”),89 Kamerbeek.90 Moorhouse,91 Segal and Griffith (“‘he taught himself’ or ‘they taught one another’”), Jouanna and Leclerc (“s’est enseigné à lui-même”)92, Susanetti (“ha insegnato a sé stesso”)93 – to name but a few. There is, of course, a grammatical problem with this line of interpretation. Jebb admits a) that he can find “no parallel for the use of the aor. midd. here” and also b) that “it is rare for any midd. form, without a reflexive pron., to denote that the subject acts on (and not for) himself”.94 The problem is the so-called directly reflexive medium – or to be more precise the transitive use of the directly reflexive medium without a reflexive pronomen. This kind of construction is not absolutely unheard of. But it is very rare – and even more so given the fact that the verb in question here (namely διδάσκειν) is neither a verb of bodily activity (of “natural and habitual actions”)95 nor a verbum affectuum – in which case the construction would be relatively more common.96 Campbell offers a list of instances of a “pointedly reflexive” middle

91 A. C. Moorhouse, The Syntax of Sophocles (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 178
95 A so-called verb of “grooming or body care”.
voice. But the problem remains. On the one hand, “he taught himself” seems to be the only possible understanding of ἐδιδάξατο. On the other hand, there is no ultimate clarity on the grammatical issues so far. Are the parallel passages conclusive? If they are not, is ἐδιδάξατο to be understood as a further case of “poetic license” in choral lyric? Are the grammatical rules on the so-called direct reflexive middle too rigid and sweeping? Or are there other ways of understanding Sophocles’ syntax?


97 See his “Introductory Essay on the Language of Sophocles,” § 31, 52f., and also Moorhouse, 178.


99 Matthiä, for instance, takes ἐδιδάξατο to be a case of middle for passive: “Soph. Antig. 354 καὶ θέματι καὶ ἴμμονοι φόντιμα καὶ ἀστυνόμους ὀργὰς ἐδιδάξατο, wo nach dem gewöhnlichen Sprachgebrauche ἐδιδάχθη stehen sollte. Aber ἐδιδάχθη heißt, er lernte von anderen passive, ἐδιδάξατο, er lernte durch eigene Thätigkeit.” Cf. A. Matthiä,
As for the meaning of ἐδιδάξατο, the point seems to be that man taught himself – or, as Mitchel puts it, that he “learned by his own agency”.\textsuperscript{100} For some interpreters Sophocles’ words have a mainly collective and reciprocal meaning: “mankind have taught one another”.\textsuperscript{101} In principle, there is nothing wrong with this. But this collective and reciprocal shade of meaning should not make us forget something else, namely that ἐδιδάξατο also refers to the origin of the “cognitive conquests” in question. The point does not seem to be just the transmission of cognitive skills (that human beings “teach one another”), but also the original acquisition of the said skills (how they were initially acquired) – and the fact that man is the sole author of his own cognitive performance. In other words, the Theban elders highlight the fact that the cognitive skills in question were learned “by man’s own agency” in the sense that they are entirely self-taught: he learned them all by himself. This seems to be the main point. We can also express this by saying that the human race was at the same time the teacher and the pupil. And this holds true for each and every cognitive skill: in each case, somewhere along the line someone must have been his own pupil-teacher. And hence the ancient scholiasts were not far from the truth when they interpreted ἐδιδάξατο as “discovered or invented” (ἐφεύρεν).\textsuperscript{102}

The fifth key word is ξυμπέφρασται.\textsuperscript{103} Two preliminary remarks should be made. First, as Matthiä, R. Major and Jebb observe, the verb is used as a


\textsuperscript{103} 364.
perfect middle. Secondly, it is important to bear in mind that the verb is in the perfect tense. As Kamerbeek points out, “the perfect emphasizes the fact that such remedies” – the object of ξυμπέφρασται – exist”. In this passage συμφράζομαι means something like “to contrive” (Jebb’s and Brown’s translation) or “to devise”. And Campbell translates: “he hath gathered to him by his thought (…)”. As for the verbal prefix (συν-), Kamerbeek takes the

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view that it is “a case of συν- in the function of con- in e. g. conficio (…)”. 107
His point seems to be that, as Ernout and Meillet put it, the prefix “con-” (and in this case “συν-”) denotes “l’aspect déterminé: achever”, so that it has a “perfective” meaning. 108 Bruhn takes a similar line: “συν bezeichnet die Vollendung wie in συννοεῖν.” 109 G. Müller emphasizes the fact that the preverb may suggest either “consultation with others” (Beratung mit anderen) or a consultation or conversation with one’s Thumos (Beratung mit dem eigenen Thumos), i. e., a “consultation with oneself” (some kind of “thinking to oneself” process). 110

The sixth key word or rather expression is σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’ ἔχων. 111

Bayfield renders these lines as follows: “Possessed of his gift of ingenious skill, cunning beyond imagination (…) Literal, having this inventiveness (inventive quality) of his skill as a gift (τι, a something) cunning beyond expectation” 112 L. Campbell translates: “His power of artful contriv-
ance is a miracle of unimaginable skill (…)”. 113 Jebb’s translation runs thus: “Possessing, in his resourceful skill, a thing subtle beyond belief” 114 Kamerbeek speaks of the “resourcefulness of his technical skill” “as a thing subtle beyond expectation (i.e more subtle or more ingenious than may be expected in mortal Man)”. 115 According to Burton, “Sophocles’ words (…) mean that his [man’s] technical ingenuity is skilful or clever beyond belief.” 116 Schmid translates almost word for word: “an den Hilfsmitteln der Techné (τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας, prosaisch ausgedrückt: τὴν ἐκ τῆς τέχνης εὐμηχανίαν) eine Art von (τι) über blosse Hoffnungen erhebender σοφία besitzend”. 117 Schadewaldt writes: “In dem Erfinderischen der Kunst eine nie erhoffte Gewalt besitzend”. 118 Gundert renders the two lines thus: “als etwas Gescheites die Erfindungskraft der Kunst über Erwarten besitzend”. 119 Griffith gives the following literal translation: “Having this resourceful <quality>of invention <as> something clever beyond expectation (…)”. 120 And Jouanna’s French translation runs as follows: “Tout en possédant dans cette invention des arts une science au-dessus de toute attente (…)”. 121

First of all, it should be kept in mind that the syntax of these lines is ambiguous and puzzling. What we are dealing with here is rather sibylline, and it is no exaggeration to speak of grammatical looseness: the connection between the words is more paratactic than syntactic, and the paratactic dots can be connected in different ways. Kitzinger hits the mark when she speaks of a “disjointed” and “semantically ambiguous syntax” 122 and criticizes translations for attempting “to naturalize or erase the strangeness of the wording and syntax here.” 123

117 W. Schmid, “Probleme der sophokleïschen Antigone”, Philologus 62 (1903), 1-34, 17
120 M. Griffith (ed.), Sophocles Antigone, on 365-7.
This is hardly the place to discuss these matters in detail. We will therefore make just a few remarks here.

Τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας underscores the fact that the μηχαναί the Theban elders are talking about (i.e. human expediency and resourcefulness: man’s ability to turn things to his advantage) are rooted a) in knowledge, and indeed b) in a very particular kind of knowledge, namely τέχνη-knowledge – not the common, trivial, everyday knowledge, immediately available to all. The Theban elders are clearly referring to outstanding, exceptional knowledge: to extraordinary cognitive skills. For that is what τέχνη is all about. And this idea is reinforced by σοφόν τι (σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας). For σοφόν suggests the idea of something subtle, sophisticated, inventive, ingenious – viz of something “with limited access” and that requires unusual intellectual abilities (so that it is available only for a few).

In other words, the point is that man is capable of expanding his “cognitive territory” beyond its “natural” boundaries (and indeed beyond the result of previous expansions). To put it in a nutshell, it is all about what might be termed “prosthetic (artificial) knowledge” viz. “prosthetic (artificial) cognitive skills”, as opposed to “natural knowledge” viz. to “natural cognitive skills”.

Finally, this idea is further reinforced by ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’. It is not only a question of man being endowed with some degree of cognitive expansion. The point is that man is endowed with an undreamed-of, absolutely incredible and amazing amount of it. The Theban elders do not elaborate on how this is so. But their previous remarks strongly suggest both a) cognitive expansion in many different directions and b) successive waves of cognitive expansion. And that is what σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’ ἔχων is all about: an “explosion” of resourcefulness beyond all bounds caused by an “explosion” of cognitive expansion beyond all bounds.124

To these we should add a seventh word, namely ἐπάξεται. Strictly speaking, it is not a cognitive term. And it could also be objected that it does not

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124 Here we do not take into account the fact that ἐλπίδ’ is ambivalent. As Oudemans and Lardinois put it (Tragic Ambiguity, 129, see also 137), “this not only means ‘beyond expectation’, but also ‘beyond hope’: it exceeds the limits that could be wished for. The fundamental ambiguity of hope will be abundantly underscored n the other stasima. Here Sophocles has confined himself to a dark undertone.” The ambivalence of ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’ is yet another aspect of what Kitzinger termed the “ironic undermining by Sophocles of the chorus’ point of view”. As a matter of fact, it is no exaggeration to say that this “ironic undermining” is an almost constant feature of the first stasimon. See M. R. Kitzinger, The Choruses of Sophokles’ Antigone and Philoktetes, 23, and cf. G. Müller, Sophokles Antigone, 83, R. Coleman, “The Role of the Chorus in Sophocles’ Antigone”, Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society 18 (1972), 4-27, in particular 9ff., and T. C. W. Oudemans, P. M. H. Lardinois, Tragic Ambiguity, 120ff.
stand for a defining feature of human beings: it is rather used to describe what the human race is (and will always be) unable to achieve. But both objections prove to be too hasty and indeed ill-founded. For, on the one hand, even if it is not a cognitive term sensu strictiore, this verb is used to describe what human “cognitive abilities” (or at least the kind of “cognitive abilities” the Theban elders are referring to) are all about. And, on the other hand, precisely because they say that man is incapable of ἐπάγεσθαι in one single case, their claim is that ἐπάγεσθαι is the very thing man manages to achieve (or will eventually manage to achieve) in all other cases. In short, according to the Theban elders ἐπάγεσθαι is “the rule” – the typical activity of human race and indeed one of its main defining features.

Having said that, let us take a closer look at the word itself.

First, it should be noted that some commentators have questioned the reading and taken the view that this word should be emended. But on closer inspection it emerges that it is perfectly sound and, as Lloyd-Jones and Wilson put it, “makes excellent sense”.125 For the most part, the two parties do not quarrel over the basic meaning of ἐπάγεσθαι in this line.126 Wecklein paraphrases “ab aliquo loco adducere.”127 Donaldson speaks of “the common sense of calling in succours (Thuc I.3); with which is coupled the notion of getting aid of any kind”.128 Bayfield recalls “the common use of ἐπάγεσθαι


126 The most notable exception is G. Vollgraff, “Ad Sophoclis Antigonam (Continued)”, Mnemosyne 48 (1920), 366-387, in particular 367. Vollgraff alters the text. He reads: “Αἶδᾳ μόνῳ (sive adverbialiter μόνον) φεῦξιν ὡκ ἐπάξεται”. In his view, what we are dealing with here is a well-known construction, namely “ἐπάγειν sive tui δίκην, κινδύνον, νόσον, πῆμα, πόλεμον, δουλείαν”, πλήγην, and the like. In other words, according to him ἐπάγεσθαι means “to lay on”, “to apply something to something” – and in this case φεῦξιν ἐπάγεσθαι tui stands for φωγήν ἐπιβάλλειν τινι (i.e. for “fugare”, “in fugam dare”, “abigere” and the like). See also W. M. A. van de Wijnpersse, De Terminologie van het jachtwezen bij Sophocles (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1929), 33., C. J. Classen, Untersuchungen zu Platons Jagdbildern (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft, 25) (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960), 24, and W. S. Barrett (ed.), Euripides Hippolytos (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), on 1194-7.


of bringing in foreign troops to one’s assistance; and Thuc. 1.81 ἐκ θαλάσσης ὧν δέονται ἐπάξονται (‘will import’). Schneidewin speaks of “sich zur Stelle schaffen”, and Bruhn of “sich heranholen”. Humphreys paraphrases: “will achieve or procure; the lit. sense is import, bring in (to one’s aid)”. And Jebb writes: “to bring into one’s own country”; usually said of calling in allies to help one; or of importing foreign products. (…) Then often fig., of calling in anything to one’s aid.

This is not the place to discuss these matters in detail. However, there is another important point that should not be overlooked. In all the above-mentioned cases, ἐπάγεσθαι denotes the idea of “getting”, “fetching”, “procuring”, “obtaining”, “calling in”, or “introducing” something already known. This holds true both a) in the case of “importing foreign products”, b) in the case of “calling in allies to help one”, and c) in the general case of “bringing in anything to one’s aid”. In all these cases ἐπάγεσθαι is all about “cognitively available things”: it seems intrinsically related to the realm of the already known. It is only a question of getting hold of the cognitively available things in question. But the Theban elders speak of a very particular way of “importing”, “bringing in one’s aid”, or “introducing” (of a very particular kind of “foreign exchange”) – namely an essentially cognition-related ἐπάγεσθαι. It is all about importing (bringing in to one’s aid) from the realm of the unknown. That is, it is all about crossing the border between the realm of the known and the realm of the unknown; it is all about expanding the former and diminishing the latter.

In other words: on the one hand, the knowledge the Theban elders refer to is essentially related to “getting things done” (attaining what one needs or wants, etc.) – and that is what ἐπάγεσθαι is all about; but on the other hand, the “getting things done”, etc., the Theban elders are talking about is essentially knowledge-related. Knowledge is the key to getting things done. To sum up: a peculiar kind of ἐπάγεσθαι – cognitive ἐπάγεσθαι – is the key

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129 M. A. Bayfield (ed.), The Antigone of Sophokles, on 360f.
130 F. W. Schneidewin (ed.), Sophokles IV, Antigone (Berlin: Weidmann, 18563), on 362
131 E. Bruhn (ed.), Sophokles erkl. v. F. W. Schneidewin u. A. Nauck, IV Antigone, on 361f.

to ἐπάγεσθαι in general (viz. the specifically human kind of ἐπάγεσθαι).\footnote{And this is one of the reasons why some interpreters find it difficult to accept and take the view that this word should be emended. The Theban elders use the verb to express a very specific kind of “acquisition” – and the context shows that, if the reading is right, “discovery”/“invention” viz. a cognitively related kind of “acquisition” is what they have in mind. However, there is no direct connection between and “discovery”/“invention”. As Seyffert puts it in his attempt to refute those who claim that ἐπάγεσθαι makes perfect sense: “non vident inveniendi vim a verbo ἐπάγειν alienam esse” – cf. M. Seyffert, Sophoclis Antigona (Berlin: Weidmann, 1865), on 361. But the point is that the use of ἐπάγεσθαι in this context highlights both a) that there is an ἐπάγεσθαι-component in every discovery or invention and b) that this “cognitive ἐπάγεσθαι” is essential to virtually all human ἐπάγεσθαι.}

This brief overview of their “cognitive” vocabulary can help us better understand the first three strophes and what they are all about.

Let us now return to the main thread of our remarks.

As mentioned before, the point is that the Theban elders are talking of a very particular kind of power – for in the case of man, power has to do with mental capacity, intelligence, skillfulness, craftiness. This – not anything else – is what makes human beings so extraordinarily powerful. In short, according to the chorus, intelligence is power – the supreme kind of power. The “human empire” is based on intelligence. And what we have termed the “triumph of man” turns out to be a “triumph of intelligence”.

Here it is important to bear in mind that in this respect too what the chorus says makes reference to something outside the play.

As a matter of fact, their words evoke characteristic traits of a whole set of well-known views that were “in the air”, so to speak, in the 5th century B.C. To be sure, the first stasimon has nothing to do with a detailed and comprehensive presentation of these views. The point is that it was bound to remind the ancient audience of them; the result being that the views in question (or at least some hazy recollection of them) function as a backdrop against which the Theban elders present their description of the human race.

We are referring to what might be termed the ancient “anthropology of discovery or invention” (εὕρεσις), according to which human beings are a very particular kind of reality – for a) they define themselves by the fact that they give rise to εὕρεσις, b) in the final analysis, their mode of being is based on εὕρεσις, c) they change everything around them through εὕρεσις, d) they become themselves a product of εὕρεσις (an invented – self-invented and self-inventing – animal, as it were) and e) they bring about a whole world of intrinsically εὕρεσις-related beings.\footnote{In this regard, two aspects deserve specific attention. First, strictly speaking, εὕρεσις denotes both discovery and invention. It can mean both – and indeed something halfway between them: the general idea of “cognitive expansion” (so that the contrast between discovery and invention remains unstressed). Second, in Ancient Greece what
This is not the place to discuss this matter in any detail. Such a discussion would have to a) substantiate the claim that the first stasimon alludes to these views, b) analyse their content c) determine how they developed, d) discuss whether there is a thread of continuity between them, e) discuss who played a role in their development, and f) clarify their connection with the develop-

we have termed the “anthropology of discovery or invention” takes various shapes. This is not the place to discuss this subject in any detail. But it should be kept in mind that not all of them develop the idea that we ourselves are the discoverers or the inventors. The common denominator between all the varieties of this particular kind of anthropology is an acute sensitivity to the fact that most of what shapes our usual life is εὑρέσις-related: it results from εὑρέσις and would not have been possible without εὑρέσις. In other words, the common denominator is an acute sensitivity to the fact that most of what shapes our usual life must have been discovered or invented – that it was not there from the beginning and would not be there if the gap between ignorance and knowledge had not been bridged. In some cases, this acute sense of discontinuity between ignorance and knowledge expresses itself in the idea that the εὑρέσις were a gift of the gods (or demigods) – that they are the product of some kind of divine “revelation”. This is often linked with the idea of a composite gift, encompassing a variety of cognitive skills, so that this variety of skills is acquired at the same time. But in some cases, the emphasis is different. On the one hand, the human race has discovered and invented by itself. We are on our own, and mankind is the result of a complex process of “self-education”: it has had to work its way up, turning its weakness into strength. In short, we are the product of ourselves (viz. of the work done by our ancestors). On the other hand, this “self-education” takes time. It is a long series of gradual and minute steps, and ἀνάγκη – χρειά, χρεία, ἐνδεία, πενία and the like – can be described as the essential catalyst for this gradual development. In yet other cases, the two models (the idea of “divine revelation” and the idea of what we have termed “self-education”) are combined. To be sure, Sophocles’ Theban elders do not breathe a word about this. And one would think that they do not take sides on the issue. But, on the other hand, as pointed out above, in the first stasimon the gods are conspicuous by their absence. The choral ode is all about mankind, the natural elements and other animals. And everything seems to suggest the idea of “autonomous skills”, and that the focus is on what human beings are capable of doing by themselves.

This is, of course, a matter of interpretation. But if we are not mistaken what the Theban elders say tends clearly in this direction. See, for example, B. Knox, Word and Action. Essays on the Ancient Theatre, (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 171: “In fact, what distinguishes this particular Kulturgeschichte from its fellows is precisely its secular tone: man “taught himself” – no Prometheus or Zeus was needed – and the list of what he taught himself does not include, as other accounts do, sacrifice and divination.” And Riemer basically says it all when he speaks of a “dezente Anonymität göttlichen Wirkens” – cf. P. Riemer, “Nichts gewaltiger als der Mensch? Zu Sophokles’ Kritik an der zeitgenössischen Kulturentstehungslehre”, Gymnasium 114, 2007, 305-315, in particular 313. See also Idem, Sophokles, Antigone – Götterwille und menschliche Freiheit (Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, 1991, 12.) (Mainz/Stuttgart: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur/Franz Steiner, 1991).
ment of ancient Greek views on τέχνη. It need scarcely be said that all this goes far beyond the scope of this paper. So let it suffice to say that the views in question have to do with the topos of the πρῶτος εὑρετής and the so called εὐρήματα-catalogues, and that the Homeric Hymn in Vulcanum\(^\text{136}\), The Pho-
ronis (Fr. 2)\(^\text{137}\), Hesiod,\(^\text{138}\) Democritus,\(^\text{139}\) Xenophanes,\(^\text{140}\) The Anonymus Iamblich,\(^\text{141}\) the De antiqua medicina\(^\text{142}\) and the De arte,\(^\text{143}\) Aeschylus’ Pal-
amedes Fragment,\(^\text{144}\) the Prometheus Vinctus,\(^\text{145}\) Sophocles’ Fragments Fr. 432 and 479\(^\text{146}\), Moschion\(^\text{147}\), Anaxagoras,\(^\text{148}\) Archelaos,\(^\text{149}\) Protagoras,\(^\text{150}\) Euripides,\(^\text{151}\) the Sisyphus fragment,\(^\text{152}\) Gorgias,\(^\text{153}\) Isocrates\(^\text{154}\) and Plato\(^\text{155}\) are among the sources for their study.\(^\text{156}\)

In addition, let us take a closer look at a few key aspects.


\(^{138}\) Opera, 42ff.

\(^{139}\) DK 68 B5, B16, B 33, B 144, B 148, B154.

\(^{140}\) In particular DK 21, A 52, B 18.

\(^{141}\) DK 89, B 6.

\(^{142}\) In particular 1.2, 2.1, 3.1-3.4, 5.3, 7, 14.3.

\(^{143}\) The De arte does not focus specifically on what we have termed the “anthropology of discovery or invention”, but it is one of the main sources for the ancient Greek idea of εὑρέσις. See in particular 1.3-4, 1.6-7, 1.8, 1.9, 5.18-19, 6.11-12, 9.11-12, 11.32-34, 12.4-5, 12.9-11, and 12.19-20.

\(^{144}\) Fr. 181aR, Adesp Fr. 470 Nauck2. Fr 438 Nauck (=479 Radt).

\(^{145}\) Fr 436ff.


\(^{147}\) Fr. 7 (Nauck). TGF Snell 6.

\(^{148}\) DK 59, A 15, A 102, B4, B21b.

\(^{149}\) DK 60, A 1, A 4.

\(^{150}\) DK 80, A a, B 8. As a matter of fact, none of the extant fragments of Protagoras provides any detailed insight into his views on these questions. But it seems safe to assume that his Περὶ τῆς ἐν ἀρχῇ καταστάσεως dealt with these matters and played a major role in the development of what we have termed the ancient “anthropology of discovery or invention”. The crucial, but controversial source for reconstructing his doctrine is Plato’s Protagoras.

\(^{151}\) Notably Supplices, 195ff.

\(^{152}\) Cf. DK 88 B 25, Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta 43F 19 Snell.

\(^{153}\) DK 82, B 11 A.

\(^{154}\) In particular Panegyricus, 28ff., Antidosis, 253-4, and Nicocles (Oratio III), 6.

\(^{155}\) Cf. notably Plato, Protagoras 319a8ff. But see also, for example, Apologia 41b, Respublica 522, Philebus 17 and Leges 667.

\(^{156}\) For a general overview of studies on these matters see Appendix II.
First, the starting point of every εὕρεσις is cognitive ἀμηχανία or ἀπορία (and indeed any kind of ἀμηχανία or ἀπορία, since every ἀμηχανία or ἀπορία has to do with cognitive ἀμηχανία or ἀπορία viz. with the fact that one does not know how to overcome the ἀμηχανία or ἀπορία in question). And εὕρεσις stands for a cognitive breakthrough: the particular kind of change owing to which one manages to acquire knowledge, insight, understanding (understanding of how things are and of how things can be done\textsuperscript{157}). In other words, εὕρεσις stands for the fact that human knowledge is dynamic, changing through mechanisms of creativity and innovativeness. What was beyond reach becomes within reach, the unknown finds its way into our store of knowledge. Εὕρεσις thus stands for the extraordinary fact that we somehow manage to bridge the discontinuity between what we know and what we do not know (viz. what we understand and what we do not understand). It is the genesis of new insight(s) – the amazing miracle Jonathan Swift calls our attention to in one of his Thoughts on Various Subjects: “Vision is the art of seeing things invisible”\textsuperscript{158}.

As Swift points out, vision emerges out of blindness: there is no vision prior to vision, and vision must invent itself in a medium of blindness. In other words, vision is always, as it were, sightlessness that has taught itself to see. But what holds good for vision in the literal sense also applies to knowledge and insight – to the mysterious dawning of intelligence the Greek word “εὕρεσις” stands for: insight emerging from the lack of it. Here, too, we are dealing with some kind of self-invention or self-positing of knowledge in the middle of its absence. Here, too, “sightlessness” teaches itself to “see”. And mankind is where this process (namely the extraordinary process by means of which sightlessness gives way to insight and transforms itself into insight) is constantly taking place. The human race is, as it were, the epicentre of this.

Secondly, the particular kind of cognitive change – of “eruption of knowledge” – human beings are capable of paves the way for a second kind of change: the change of ἀμηχανία or ἀπορία into their opposite: μηχανή and εὐπορία. Cognitive change, i.e. the acquisition of knowledge, insight or understanding (grasping how things are and how things can be done) – all this can be used for getting things done (i.e., for getting things changed). That is, it can be used in improving the human environment, in inventing technical skills, etc. In short, acquired knowledge – acquired insight – generates power and might. Pushing forward the boundaries of knowledge thus brings about considerable changes in the relation of forces or rather an inversion of the balance of power between man and other beings. The weaker becomes

\textsuperscript{157} Viz. of how things can be changed.

the stronger and vice versa. And this is how man prevails over everything else around him. The ancients never ceased to marvel at the fact that the tiniest and subllest of all things (such a seemingly weak thing as intelligence or knowledge: the most immaterial, the most intangible, the most unsubstantial, the most “unmuscled” thing of all) should be such an extraordinary source of strength and power (of a radically new kind of overwhelming strength and power). This inversion in the balance of power is what the first stasimon is all about.

Thirdly, the change in the relation of forces – or rather the inversion in the balance of power we are referring to – is not brought about by one single insight or a few scattered insights. It requires much more, namely nothing less than an extraordinary multiplication and accumulation of εὑρέσεις and μηχαναί, a flood of εὑρέσεις and μηχαναί, a flood of inventions and discoveries and a massive field of εὑρέσεις-related powers, and εὑρέσεις-related beings, all of them made possible only by discoveries and inventions. This is what

mankind is really made of: gradual acquisition and accumulation of insights, “generations” and “generations” of insights, a whole realm of transformed reality – or, to be more precise, a vast and a thick realm (a “sea”, not a scattered archipelago) of transformed reality, so that most of what surrounds us is either simply the product of what might be described as a “cognitive conquest” or something radically changed by “cognitive conquest”. This is what the Theban elders are talking about: the result of an extraordinary burst of insights, mankind as an “empire of insights”, as it were, viz. an “empire made of insights”.

And this brings us to one of the key words in the first stasimon: παντοπόρος. The Theban elders say: παντοπόρος· ἄπορος ἐπ' οὐδέν ἔρχεται τὸ μέλλον; in Jebb’s translation: “yea, he has resource for all; without

160 That is, on the one hand, through εὑρεσις (téchnη, etc.) survival becomes “viable” for the “unviable” being: man. But this is not all. On the other hand, εὑρεσις (téchnη, etc.) sets the bar much higher: it opens the way for nothing less than an empire, in the truest sense of the word.

161 360f. The paratactic maze of 360-361 leaves room for an almost Escher-like tangle of possible interpretations. This is not the place to discuss them. But the following should be borne in mind:

1) Everything depends on the punctuation – and in particular on whether τὸ μέλλον belongs to ἄπορος ἔρχεται ἐπ’ οὐδέν or to hat follows (Ἀίδα μόνον φεύξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται).

2) On the one hand, ἐπί can be taken with ἔρχεται – in which case what we are dealing with here is either a) ἔρχεται + ἐπί or b) ἐπέρχεται used in tmesis (the view held by van de Wijnperse – this line is one more instance of the use of ἐπιέναι as a hunting metaphor: “niets wat hij najaagt, is voor hem onbereikbaar”). But ἐπί can also be connected with ἄπορος (ἄπορος ἐπί οὐδὲν + ἔρχεται τὸ μέλλον). Schneidewin among others, follows this line of interpretation: “Doch ist vielleicht richtiger zu verbinden: ἄπορος ἐπί οὐδέν (O. R. 665 ἄπορος ἐπὶ φρόνιμα), keiner Sache gegenüber rathlos, ἔρχεται τὸ μέλλον, tritt er an die Zukunft, an das, was seiner harrt, heran”.

3) On the other hand, ἐπί can be connected either with οὐδέν τὸ μέλλον or just with οὐδέν, in which case τὸ μέλλον plays an adverbial role (analogous to τὸ πρίν, τὸ νῦν, etc.) or functions as an accusative of relation. Donaldson doubts “whether the Greek syntax would bear such a construction as ἐπ’ οὐδέν τὸ μέλλον”. He takes τὸ μέλλον adverbially: “in regard to the future, he comes to nothing without resources”. Ceschi takes a similar approach. In his view τὸ μέλλον is an accusative of relation: “quanto al futuro, (l’uomo) non è impreparato di fronte a nulla.”

4) Be that as it may, if ἐπ’ οὐδέν and τὸ μέλλον do belong together, G. Hermann’s observation should not be forgotten:“Haec postrema vero non recte scholiastes explicat, ἐπ’ οὐδέν τὸν μελλόντον. Aliud est enim ἐπ’ οὐδέν μέλλον, ad nullam rem futuram infinitum dictum, quam finite, ad eorum, quae futura sunt, nihil. Quorum alterum est: ad nihil, si quid futurum est; alterum: ad nihil, quod est futurum.”

5) Hence, “ἄπορος ἐπ’ οὐδέν ἔρχεται τὸ μέλλον” can be given an ominous reading – so that there is a touch of tragic irony, and what the Theban elders say suggests that “man comes to nothing – to the ‘nothing’ that is his future”. This line of reading is
resource he meets nothing that must come (or nothing that will rise) – or, in Andrew Brown’s translation: “resourceful in all and resourceless he goes to meet nothing that is to come”. As Jebb points out, παντοπόρος is “at once a comment on the achievements already enumerated (...) and a general expression absolving the poet from further detail: ‘yes, there is nothing that he cannot provide’.

followed by Heidegger, Müller and Oudemans/Lardinois, to name but a few. Knox argues against this kind of interpretation. He points out that “although syntactically speaking the words ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ... τὸ μέλλον may be read ambiguously, in context they may not, for the simple reason that unless they are read” as referring to mankind’s indefinitely continued progress, “the following μῶνον (...) makes no conceivable kind of sense”. It surely must be admitted that Knox has a point here. But the fact remains that, even if the Theban elders are unequivocally referring to man’s unstoppable achievements (that is, even if they are saying the exact opposite of the ominous interpretation), their wording leaves room for involuntary double-entendre viz. for hearing or reading ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ἔρχεται τὸ μέλλον in the said ominous way. See C. G. A. Erfurdt (ed.) Sophoclis Tragoediae ad optimorum librorum fidei recensuit, vol. I., Antigona, editio tertia cum adnotationibus G. Hermanni (Lipsiae: Fleischer, 1830), on 355 (pp. 82f.), F. W. Schneidewin (ed.), Sophokles IV, Antigone, op. cit, on 356, J. W. Donaldson (ed.), loc. cit., M. A. van de Wijnpersse, De Terminologie van het jachtwezen bij Sophocles (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1929), 30ff., M. Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik, 115ff., Idem, Hölderlins Hymne „Der Ister“, 72ff., 82, 90, 92f., 94, 104, G. Müller, Sophokles Antigone, 95, B. Knox, Word and Action. Essays on the Ancient Theatre, (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 170, T. C. W. Oudemans, P. M. H. Lardinois, Tragic Ambiguity, 127, G. Ceschi, Il vocabolario medico di Sofocle. Analisi dei contatti con il Corpus Hippocraticum nel lessico anatomo-fisiologico, patologico e terapeutico (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2009), 160.

J. C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles Commentaries III The Antigone, on 360. Cf. G. A. Christodoulous (ed.), Scholia in Sophoclis tragoedias vetera (Lipsiae: Teubner 1888), on Ant. 359: “παντοπόρος· εἰς πάντας μηχανὰς ἐξευρίσκων καὶ ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ἄπορος τῶν μελλόντων (...).” C. Schindler, De Sophocle verborum inventore. Particula I: de nominum compositione (Vratislaviae: Typis F. W. Jungferi, 1877), 70, sees two ways of interpreting παντοπόρος: either a) providing all remedies or b) providing remedies for everything: “παντοπόρος omnia remedia possidens, nisi praestat priore vocabuli membro substantive sumpto interpretatari: omnium (malorum) remedium (confugium) habens vel sibi parans”. But it would be hair-splitting to press this point, for at the end of the day a) and b) amount to the same thing.


R. C. Jebb (ed.), on 360. This line of interpretation is already adumbrated in Gottfried Hermann’s notes on the Antigone, on 355: “Refertur illud παντοπόρος ad omnia, quae ante commemorata erant.” See also E. Wunder (ed.), Sophoclis Antigone (Gothae: Hennings, 18564), on 357, and N. Wecklein (ed.), Sophocles Tragoediae recens. et explan. E. Wunderus, on 357: “Referendum hoc ad ea, quae ante commemorata sunt, similiterque adiectum atque v. 347 περιφραδὴς ἄνηρ positum est”. Cf. F. W.
could not be more apt. But the reason why he is absolutely right is because παντοπόρος sums up everything the Theban elders are talking about. Their point is that the human race is all-inventive, that its ability to discover and invent knows no limits, and that this in turn means nothing less than unlimited resourcefulness. In short, the point is the all-embracing character of human inventiveness and human resourcefulness – the fact that it develops in all directions and seems to be unstoppable.

However, this does not necessarily mean that mankind has already exhausted all possible εὑρέσεις, that there is nothing left to discover or to invent (that it has conquered everything, so that there is nothing left to conquer) – in short, that nothing remains to be achieved. This does not seem to be what the Theban elders actually have in mind. The point is rather that, if there is still work to be done, human beings will not sit back and relax. No, they are bound to do something about it; they will not rest until they have solved the problem. And sooner or later they will work something out; they will discover or invent something and thereby achieve success.

In other words, παντοπόρος should be understood in a dynamic sense. The Theban elders’ words are all about a dynamic realm. The “human empire” is an empire in expansion. And even if there is no mention of this in the first stasimon (and, what is more, even if everything seems to suggest that the views the Theban elders are alluding to assume that most εὑρέσεις lie behind us, not before us), the kind of model we are dealing with here leaves room for Schneidewin (ed.), Sophokles IV, Antigone, on 347 (“περιφραδὴς ἀνὴρ fast schliesslich das Einzelne, das zur Bewunderung der Meschennatur veranlasst, zusammen und dient als Abschluss der Bewältigung der Thiere, indem der Chor nun zur Zähmung übergeht”), E. Bruhn (ed.), Sophokles erkl. v. F. W. Schneidewin u. A. Nauck, IV Antigone, on 360 (“παντοπόρος drückt wie περιφραδής ἀνήρ, 348, das aus der Betrachtung der einzelnen Erfindungen entspringende Staunen aus”), M. J. Smead (ed.), The Antigone of Sophocles, on 360, M. W. Humphreys (ed.), The Antigone of Sophocles, on 359, G. Ronnet, “Sur le premier stasimon d’Antigone”, Revue des Études Grecques 80 (1967), 100-105, in particular 101. Other interpreters take a different view. See, for instance, A. Boeckh (ed.), Des Sophokles Antigone Griechisch und Deutsch (Berlin: Veit & Co, 1843), 236. But the fact is that Wecklein and those who follow his line of approach have a point; for παντοπόρος plays a role similar to περιφραδής in line 347: a) it sums up what precedes (i.e., man’s accomplishments) and b) it involves some amount of generalization – with the difference that παντοπόρος is, as it were, περιφραδής raised to the second or third power. But this does not mean that there is no strong connection between παντοπόρος and what follows. The opposite is true: on the one hand, there is high tension between παντοπόρος and ἄπωρος, for the juxtaposition of these two words suggests an oxymoron (cf. T. C. W. Oudemans, P. M. H. Lardinois, Tragic Ambiguity. 127); and on the other hand, παντοπόρος and ἄπωρος ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ἔχεται τὸ μέλλον are closely connected in the sense that one of the possible senses of the latter explains what the former is all about.

Schneidewin (ed.), Sophokles IV, Antigone, on 347 (“περιφραδὴς ἀνήρ fast schliesslich das Einzelne, das zur Bewunderung der Meschennatur veranlasst, zusammen und dient als Abschluss der Bewältigung der Thiere, indem der Chor nun zur Zähmung übergeht”), E. Bruhn (ed.), Sophokles erkl. v. F. W. Schneidewin u. A. Nauck, IV Antigone, on 360 (“παντοπόρος drückt wie περιφραδής ἀνήρ, 348, das aus der Betrachtung der einzelnen Erfindungen entspringende Staunen aus”), M. J. Smead (ed.), The Antigone of Sophocles, on 360, M. W. Humphreys (ed.), The Antigone of Sophocles, on 359, G. Ronnet, “Sur le premier stasimon d’Antigone”, Revue des Études Grecques 80 (1967), 100-105, in particular 101. Other interpreters take a different view. See, for instance, A. Boeckh (ed.), Des Sophokles Antigone Griechisch und Deutsch (Berlin: Veit & Co, 1843), 236. But the fact is that Wecklein and those who follow his line of approach have a point; for παντοπόρος plays a role similar to περιφραδής in line 347: a) it sums up what precedes (i.e., man’s accomplishments) and b) it involves some amount of generalization – with the difference that παντοπόρος is, as it were, περιφραδής raised to the second or third power. But this does not mean that there is no strong connection between παντοπόρος and what follows. The opposite is true: on the one hand, there is high tension between παντοπόρος and ἄπωρος, for the juxtaposition of these two words suggests an oxymoron (cf. T. C. W. Oudemans, P. M. H. Lardinois, Tragic Ambiguity. 127); and on the other hand, παντοπόρος and ἄπωρος ἐπ’ οὐδὲν ἔχεται τὸ μέλλον are closely connected in the sense that one of the possible senses of the latter explains what the former is all about.
the possibility that the expansion (the cognitive expansion and the expansion of power) turns out to be continuous, ceaseless and endless.

To sum up: mankind is παντοπόρος because it is always able to find a way out or because man always has his way. The word does not describe something already achieved or something already accomplished. It is rather the description of a mode of being. The human race is constituted in such a way that for it to be = to be procuring the means to achieve something (finding, inventing, discovering μηχαναί). Or, to paraphrase Pessoa’s famous line: man is of such a nature, that “weaving the meshes of an empire” or “weaving the meshes the empire weaves” ¹⁶⁵ is what human life is all about.

However, it should be borne in mind that the above does not do full justice to the multilayered structure of what Antigone’s first stasimon is all about. On closer inspection it emerges that it is not only a question of εὑρέσεις and the power they give us. The first stasimon also draws attention to something else: even if there were no εὑρέσεις and they gave us no power (i.e. even if we had to carry the burden of life in complete ἀμηχανία and with extreme vulnerability), we would still be the failed project of the kind of empire (viz. of the kind of triumph) the first stasimon is all about. Each and every one of us is somehow the project of this: of supremacy of some kind and of absolute control over a dominion of some sort. And the story of our lives could read “ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν” (in the beginning was) this very project, without which the εὑρέσεις and the power they give us would be pointless. Hence, this is the first layer: the παντοπόρος in spe, so to speak.¹⁶⁶


¹⁶⁶ Let us insist on this point. From the very beginning man is a project of power – of complete gratification of all his needs and desires. That is, from the very beginning man is all about “triumph” and “empire” – not in re (not really, not fully and in point of fact), but just in desire or in spe. In short, man is the παντοπόρος in spe. And being a παντοπόρος in spe means: having the desire of being παντοπόρος not just in spe, but in re (not just in desire, but also in fact). Put another way: man has a natural vocation to become παντοπόρος. He is the would-be παντοπόρος: someone who would become παντοπόρος if he only could. And this “natural vocation” to become παντοπόρος is the fons et origo of it all. Now, this means that the link between “man” and “παντοπόρος” does not depend on whether man manages to achieve his aim (or whether he almost achieves it – and becomes in any case “almost παντοπόρος”). The point is that “παντοπόρος” (what this word stands for) defines mankind because it is, as it were, man’s measure: the natural “yardstick” for measuring oneself, one’s life, etc. And this is why man is παντοπόρος by his very nature, regardless of whether he really manages to make his παντοπόρος-dream come true. For this very reason, if a human being/mankind fails to achieve this aim, being a failed παντοπόρος becomes one of its main defining features.
But the fact that human beings are constituted in such a way that something in them “dreams” of this is only part of the complex nature of man. Among other things, all this is closely connected with τόλμα viz. with the all-daring (with the ύπερτολμος and πάντολμος) element in human nature. To be sure, there is only one mention of τόλμα in the whole stasimon. But the idea of τόλμα looms in the background, not least because of the above-mentioned connection with the first stasimon of Aeschylus’ Choephoroi. And on closer inspection it emerges that τόλμα plays a major role in the “empire” the Theban elders are talking about. On the one hand, the project itself (the project of supremacy) is intrinsically τόλμα-related. On the other hand, man could dream of supremacy – and have all the knowledge and all the power needed to achieve it (i.e. what might be described as a second and a third layer of what constitutes the “human empire”) – and still lack the nerve. But the point is that human kind does not lack the nerve.

In short, this is the complete “formula” for the “human empire”, as the Theban elders describe it (the complete “composition” of the παντοπόρος): a) a project of supremacy and domination, b) the knowledge (εὑρέσεις and

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167 371.
168 This is an important point. But G. Ronnet seems to go too far when she writes: “(...) l’idée dominante est bien celle d’audace et de bravade, non celle d’habileté: l’expression περιφραδὴς ἀνήρ n’apparaît qu’au v. 347, amenée par l’évocation des fillets qui servent à la capture des bêtes; l’ingéniosité n’est que le moyen par lequel l’homme a pu faire triompher son audace, affirmer sa domination”. Cf. G. Ronnet, “Sur le premier stasimon d’Antigone”, Revue des Études Grecques 80 (1967), 100-105, in particular 103. First, Ronnet overlooks the fact that, as mentioned before, περιφραδὴς summarizes everything the Theban elders have said. As F. W. Schneidewin (ed.), Sophokles IV, Antigone, on 347, puts it: “περιφραδὴς ἀνήρ fasst schliesslich das Einzelne, das zur Bewunderung der Menschennatur veranlasst, zusammen (...).” Secondly, and most importantly, the idea of what Ronnet calls “habileté” and “ingéniosité” is there from the very moment the Theban elders start to list man’s accomplishments. From the very beginning, the first stasimon is all about man’s skills – and none of what the Theban elders say would make any sense (none of man’s accomplishments could have taken place) if human beings were audacious (and indeed very audacious) but lacked the necessary skills (and this means: the cognitive expertise) to triumph. Here, of course, it can be argued that τόλμα is also key to developing man’s cognitive skills. This is true – but it does not change the fact that τόλμα alone does not produce cognitive skills (let alone the extraordinary cognitive proficiency in question). In other words, both if human beings a) had the cognitive skills but lacked the nerve and b) had the nerve but lacked the cognitive skills, they would not be δεινόν in the sense the Theban elders are talking about. In short, these two aspects (what Ronnet’s “audace” stands for and what she terms “habileté” or “ingéniosité”) go hand in hand. It is a mistake to separate them. For the Theban elders (and indeed in re) what characterizes mankind is a particular combination of these two factors – not one of them without the other.
μηχαναί) needed to implement it, c) the power given by the latter, and d) the τόλμα without which nothing of this is translated into action (the τόλμα without which there would be nothing of the amazing cognitive expansion and of the amazing expansion of power man is all about). And that is why this single word – “παντοπόρος” – seems tailor-made for capturing man’s nature (or at least one of its most essential features).

Now, if we are not mistaken, this is what the Theban elders are talking about – this is their “image of man”. And this is what they claim to be not only δεινόν, but indeed the most δεινόν thing of all. And, if we are not mistaken, their point is that this “human empire” is δεινόν in all possible senses of the word. Not just one meaning (not just one segment of the semantic range: not a single “note”), but all meanings at once (the whole semantic range of δεινόν – that is, as it were, a “chord”) are apt to characterize the “human empire”. We can also express this by saying that the chorus’ claim that οὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει holds good not only in the sense that nothing is more δεινόν than the “human empire”, but also in the sense that the “human empire” is the thing that best fits all possible meanings of δεινόν. Put another way, the point is also that the semantic complexity and ambivalence of the one finds a perfect match in the complexity and ambivalence of the other – so that δεινόν is the word that best characterizes human beings viz. the human empire.

Consequently, if we are not mistaken, the Theban elders are saying uno tenore all the following: that the “human empire” they are talking about a) is the most fearsome, terrible, terrifying and violent thing of all, b) is the greatest danger, ill and source of sufferings of all, c) is the most tremendous, colossal, marvellously strong or powerful thing of all, d) is the most strange, uncanny and “unheimlich” thing of all, e) is the most wondrous, the most marvellous, the most amazing and admirable thing of all, f) is the most skilled, able, ingenious, clever, resourceful and inventive thing of all, g) is the most over-clever thing of all, and h) is the haughtiest, boldest, most daring and ruthless thing of all.

5. Triumph of the παντοπόρος?

But this is not all. An important aspect of the complex image of man we are dealing with has to do with what the Theban elders highlight in the second strophe, namely the fact that the παντοπόρος they are talking about – the “human empire” – is not entirely παντοπόρος or fails to be παντοπόρος in the strictest sense of the word.

Let us take a closer look at this.
According to the chorus, the only thing that the human race will not achieve is to escape death (Ἅιδα μόνον φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται\(^{169}\)). What they say in this regard is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it represents a superlative expression of the “all-embracing” character of the “empire” they are talking about: nothing escapes human power (i.e., nothing escapes our inventiveness and our ability to discover), except one single thing. In other words, they turn their eye to mankind’s future prospects and predict that it is only a matter of time until the human race finds a way of achieving everything (N.B. everything) it needs or wants, with one single exception. And this means that virtually everything (I insist: everything), with one single exception, will be discovered or invented by human intelligence, ingenuity and inventiveness.\(^{170}\) But on the other hand, it should be borne in mind that this sole exception – namely the unavoidability of death – carries much weight; for, in a way, it counterbalances everything else: it undermines and jeopardizes everything else, it thwarts everything else. The result being that there is something seriously wrong with this “empire”, the human race.

To be sure the Theban elders seem to qualify their statement by admitting that the human race has devised escapes from intractable diseases (νόσων δ’ ἀμηχάνων φυγὰς ξυμπέφρασται).\(^{171}\) And this idea is given a very pointed expression, for they emphasize that the human race finds φυγάς (i.e. μηχανάς) even for the ἀμήχανον. Sophocles’ wording echoes jingles like πόροι ἐξ ἀπόρων, etc., which were (or at any rate were becoming) relatively

\(^{169}\) 361f.  
\(^{170}\) Sophocles’ Theban elders are far from being the only ones who speak of this subject.  
The idea that sooner or later every search is rewarded (and that εὕρεσις eventually triumphs and achieves all the desired results) was “in the air” and on the way to becoming a “topos”. See notably Creon’s lines in Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus 110-111 (“τὸ δὲ ζητούμενον / ἄλοιπον, ἐκρεῖσθαι τάμελοιμένον”), De prисca medicina 2. 1 (“Ηηρικὴ δὲ πάντα πάλαι ὑπάρχει, καὶ ἄρη καὶ ὁδὸς εὑρημένη, καθ’ ἥν καὶ τὰ εὑρημένα πολλά τα καὶ καλός ἔχοντα εὑρίσκει ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ εὑρίσκεται, ἢν τὸ ἰκανός τε ἐδώ καὶ τὰ εὑρημένα εἰδὼς, ἐκ τοῦτῶν ὀρμομένος ζητεῖ.”) and Archytas DK 47 B 3, 8-9 (“ἐξευρεῖν δὲ μὴ ζατοῦντα ἄπορον καὶ σπάνιον, ζατοῦντα δὲ εὐροφόρον καὶ ράδιον”). See also Chaeremon, Fr 21 (“Οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ὅτι οὐκ ἐν χρόνῳ ζητοῦσι ἐξευρίσκεται”), Tr. Fr. Adespot 526 = Menander, Fr. 935 = Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta (Kock), 1264 (“ἀπανθ’ ὁ τοῦ ζητούμενος εὑρίσκει πάνος”), Philemon Fr. 37 (“πάνθ’ ἔστιν ἐξευρεῖν, ἐὰν μὴ τὸν πόνον φεύγῃ τις, ὃς πρόσεστι τοῖς ζητούμενοις”) and Alexis, Fr. 31 Arnott, 30 Kock (“ὅτι πάντα τὰ ζητούμεν’ ἐξευρίσκεται δὲν μὴ προαποστῆς, μηδὲ τὸν πόνον φεύγης.”). Arnott writes on Alexis, Fr. 31 (30 K): “The theme of the fr., that ‘Nothing’s so hard, but search will find it out’, is a comic cliché”. Cf. W. G. Arnott, Alexis: The Fragments. A Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 129f. 
\(^{171}\) 362f.
The fact that there is something of an oxymoron emphasizes the extraordinary skills the Theban elders are talking about – and that, in a way, man’s outstanding skills manage to do wonders even with death. But it goes without saying that in the final analysis this does not change the main fact, namely a) that death remains inevitable (that it can only be postponed for some time, not eliminated) and b) that this alone is more than enough to show that the human race is anything but really παντοπόρος.

Having said this, it must be borne in mind that, if death is unavoidable, the ability to postpone it makes all the difference. It is, as it were, the second best – and even more so if it manages to find μηχαναί even for ἀμηχάνοι νόσοι. In the final analysis, man’s life revolves around this second best (and, once again, what we are dealing with here is what we have termed the superlative-Priamel structure). But the main point is that even in this regard

human intelligence endlessly gives rise to new resources and celebrates great triumphs.¹⁷³

This is why, after all, the third stanza ends on a largely positive note. And Friedländer hits the mark when he writes: „Am Ende dieser Strophe erhebt sich mit dem schweren Ἅιδα die Macht des Todes als einziges Hindernis. Aber das ist nur die äußerste Grenze, auf die der Blick gelenkt wird, ohne an ihr haften zu bleiben. So schließt denn die Strophe nicht damit, sondern mit dem Ungeheuren der Heilkunst (...) und mit dem menschlichen Ersinnen (ξυμπέφρασται). Es ist nicht dies, daß Sophokles den Tod nicht unbedingt genug sieht, wenn er ihn nicht ans Ende stellt: μόνον zeigt das Gegenteil. Aber er konnte diese Grenze der Menschheit nicht Ende der Strophe sein lassen, ohne die Richtung des Ganzen zu gefährden“¹⁷⁴. As a matter of fact, Friedländer hits the mark for two reasons. On the one hand, the third stanza seems designed to ensure that death does not have the last word. To be sure, the chorus’ mention of our inability to defeat death marks an unmistakable change in tone. But Friedländer is right: everything seems to suggest that Sophocles did not want the third stanza to end on a flat and discouraging note. On the other hand, one of the reasons why the Theban elders make their unsuccessful attempt to attenuate the shattering effect of man’s powerless ness in the face of death – and end the third stanza on a “semi-triumphant” note – is because, paradoxically enough, for them the big “but” lies not in death but in what the last stanza is all about.

But before tackling this question let us briefly review the tangled mix of positive and negative features (of positive and negative “notes”) that characterizes the third strophe.


¹⁷⁴ P. Friedländer, “πολλα τα δεινα», 60.
All in all, man is defined both by being παντοπόρος in spe and by failing to be παντοπόρος. Now, for the unsuccessful παντοπόρος in spe, it is at the same time small consolation and absolutely vital that death can be postponed. Thus, the Theban elders’ “argument” seems to be intentionally flimsy. It is not so much a matter of sound logic as of describing “life as it is”. In other words, their “argument” gives concise, almost paratactic expression to the complex structure of human life as a set of movements and countermovements, namely a) the παντοπόρος in spe and man’s almost complete triumph over everything else, b) man’s powerlessness in the face of death (giving checkmate, as it were, to a)), and c) the fact that death itself can be postponed – the point being that a) is countered by b), while b) in turn is countered by c) – so that the checkmate is postponed.

The Theban elders do not dwell on this; but then again, they do not need to, for what they say speaks volumes. There is this tremendous restriction, this extraordinary adversative component, this crushing “but”: death. And thus, the utmost triumph, the almost godlike universal supremacy we have spoken of is inextricably linked to the utmost defeat. The παντοπόρος turns out to be powerless and helplessly stuck in nothing less than the supreme ἀπορία.

One can, of course, say that the “race” – not the individual – triumphs (that the “race” – not the individual – is παντοπόρος), and that death affects individuals, not the “race”. And in a way this is true. But, on the other hand, the “race” is made of individuals. And in the end death triumphs over them (N. B.: over each and every one of them) – so that, for each and every one of us, everything achieved is sooner or later lost. Hence, when all is said and done, what characterizes mankind is this bewildering mix of supreme victory (being παντοπόρος) and supreme defeat (supreme ἀπορία).

There is no doubt that this powerlessness and supreme ἀπορία element is a defining-characteristic of human nature. And in the final analysis it cannot be excluded that this, too, is an essential component of what makes the “human empire” not only δεινόν, but indeed τὸ δεινότατον. The Theban elders do not say it explicitly, but the sibylline character of their words leaves it up to us to decide whether it is so or not. And we would venture to say that the answer must be «yes”; for if there is one thing that makes the “human empire” δεινόν (in more than one sense of the word), it is death and its paradoxical relation to everything the “empire” is all about.

But here we reach a critical point. Is this all? Is this the only limitation imposed on the „human empire”, or is there something else as well? If this is the only limitation, then the only problem – the only flaw – lies in the fact that the human race fails to be completely παντοπόρος: there is still something missing – a central εὕρεσις, a central μηχανή. And, what is more, according to the Theban elders, the human race will never manage to escape death: this
central εὕρεσις, this central μηχανή is forever excluded. But be that as it may, the point is that in either case human life is, after all, a question of εὕρεσις, a question of μηχανή in the above-mentioned sense – that is, a question of achieving or failing to achieve one sole aim: namely, being the perfect παντοπόρος.

6. An equivocal final stanza

However, this does not seem to be all the Theban elders have to say about man, for in the final stanza they apparently suggest that there are more things in human life than what the “human empire” is all about – that there is something above and beyond the “empire”, something somehow more important than the “empire” itself. They say that the εὑρέσεις and the μηχαναί now bring man to something κακόν, now to something ἐσθλόν (and the way they express themselves suggests that the difference they have in mind has nothing to do with the opposition between success and failure)\(^\text{175}\); they speak of νόμοι, of δίκη, and of τὸ καλὸν.

Let us take a closer look at this. The point is:

a) that the other things the Theban elders refer to in the last stanza (τὸ ἐσθλόν, τὸ καλὸν, νόμοι, and δίκη) are opposed not only to what turns out to be a “limited” παντοπόρος (namely, the “human empire” and all the “nets the human empire knots”) but also to the perfect παντοπόρος the human race can only dream of. In other words, the Theban elders seem to be referring to something completely foreign to the “human empire” and everything it is all about, and

\(^{175}\) Cf. 365-367: “σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν / τέχνας ὑπὲρ ἑλπίδ’ ἔχων / τότε μὲν κακόν, ἄλλοτ’ ἐπ’ ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει.” The syntax of these lines gives the chorus’ claim an additional touch of ambiguity; for, as Kamerbeek points out, “there may be some concessive-adversative force in the participle” (ἔχων). Or, as Kitzinger puts it: “In fact we cannot be sure whether the chorus means that man ‘progresses’ towards good and evil because of having, or in spite of having, this τέχνη which is also σοφὸν τι.” (emphasis added). Cf. J. C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles Commentaries III The Antigone, on 365-67, and M. R. Kitzinger, The Choruses of Sophokles’ Antigone and Philoktetes, 25. In other words, are the Theban elders saying that our inventiveness and the possession of τέχναs do not change the fact that man τότε μὲν κακόν, ἄλλοτ’ ἐπ’ ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει? Or is their claim that man’s extraordinary skills play an important role in leading human beings both in the way to κακόν and in the way to ἐσθλόν? There is no straightforward answer to this question.
b) that, on the other hand, this other realm they are referring to is supposed to be far more important than everything the “empire” and the struggle for supremacy stands for, so that, according to them, the empire (supremacy, being παντοπόρος) is by no means what one should strive for: this role is reserved for τὸ ἐσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, δίκη and the like.

This is what one might call the surprise ending of the first stasimon: when all is said and done, the Theban elders seem to relegate the role and importance of the “human empire”. Thus, what at first seemed to be a triumph of the almost godlike “empire” turns out to be the very opposite – or at least something far more nuanced and ambivalent. What is more, even if his synopsis of the first three stanzas is somewhat flat and simplistic, Paul Joos is perhaps not far from the truth when he writes: “Die drei ersten Strophen bilden, in der Metaphorik der Grammatik gesprochen, den Vorderteil einer adversativen Periode; „,... zwar ist der Mensch auf einem besonderen Kultur-Höhepunkt angelangt....“ Dazu gibt die letzte Antistrophos den Nachsatz, der den eigentlich zentralen Gedanken – und wir werden auch sagen dürfen: das Hauptanliegen des Dichters – ausdrückt (...).”

The same idea is expressed by Ivan Linforth: “The song of man’s triumph is, in effect, a long concessive clause.”

This line of interpretation goes back to Bruhn: “Jetzt erst kommt der Gedanke, der für den Dichter der wichtigste ist und zu dem alles Vorhergehende in einem konzessiven Verhältnis steht”.

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176 P. Joos, ΤΥΧΗ, ΦΥΣΙΣ, ΤΕΧΝΗ, 40.
178 E. Bruhn (ed.), Sophokles erkl. v. F. W. Schneidewin u. A. Nauck, IV, on 365ff. Cf. K. Strobel, Zur Komposition der sophokleischen Antigone (Mainz: O. Schneider, 1925), 18. See also J. C. Kamerbeek, The Plays of Sophocles Commentaries III The Antigone, on 365-67: “(...) there may be some concessive-adversative force in the participle” [namely ἔχων]. P. Friedländer, “πολλὰ τὰ δεινά”, 60, speaks against this line of approach: “Die Deutung, die man nachspricht, alles Vorhergehende stehe zu diesen Versen in konzessivem Gegensatz, und jetzt erst komme der für den Dichter wichtigste Gedanke führt auch von der grammatisch-logischen Formulierung abgesehen in die Irre.” Friedländer does not elaborate his claim. But his objection poses three different questions 1) whether ἔχων can have, as Kamerbeek puts it, a concessive-adversative force, 2) whether 365-367 marks a turning point in the whole stasimon, and 3) whether this turning point has to do with something like an adversative-concessive connection between 332-365 and 366-375. Now, if we are not mistaken, the first two questions should be answered in the affirmative. To be sure, ἔχων does not have an unequivocally concessive-adversative force: the latter is just one possible way of connecting the paratactic dots. But there is an unmistakable suggestion of this possibility: it simply cannot be dismissed. And the answer to the second
The key question is, of course: what are the Theban elders referring to in the final stanza of the first stasimon? What do they mean by τὸ ἐσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, and δίκη? What do they have in mind when they suggest that the latter – not supremacy, the “human empire” viz. being παντοπόρος – is the most important thing of all? And why is τὸ ἐσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, and δίκη the most important thing of all? In short, if “the song of man’s triumph is a long concessive clause”, what is the content of the “main sentence” in Antigone’s first stasimon?

It should be borne in mind that here, too, there may be hints not only at ancient Greek views on τὸ ἐσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like, but indeed at something closely connected to the content of the “concessive clause”. For it is possible that the contrast between the first three stanzas and the second antistrope alludes to the two-stage model Protagoras’ myth in Plato’s Protagoras is an expression of.\footnote{Cf. C. M. Bowra, Sophoclean Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), 84f.}

In other words, it is possible that the said contrast alludes to those versions of the so-called Kulturentstehungslehre that make a sharp contrast between other εὑρέσεις (namely the kind of εὑρέσεις the three first stanzas of the first stasimon are all about) and those which have to do with δίκη, οἰδώς.
and the like. In this version of the Kulturentstehungslehre the εὐπορία τοῦ βίου (viz. the περὶ τὸν βίον σοφία) is not sufficient for assuring the σωτηρία – let alone the supremacy – of the human race. On the one hand, what might be termed the first layer (or the first “wave”) of εὐρέσεις (εὐπορία τοῦ βίου-related εὐρέσεις) must be supplemented by a second layer (viz. by a second “wave” of εὐρέσεις). “Social life” – the πόλις and the like – is as much a key to survival (to σωτηρία) as the other μηχαναί which are mentioned in the first three stanzas – and indeed so much so that without “social life” all other skills would be to no avail. On the other hand, “social life” – the πόλις and the like – requires its own kind of insight (and in this sense its own kind of εὕρεσις). It, too, must be invented. Finally, this “second layer” of εὐρέσεις has a very different nature from the first (in Protagoras’ myth this different nature is also reflected in the fact that, contrary to what happens with most εὐπορία τοῦ βίου-related εὐρέσεις, every human being partakes of this second kind of insight or σοφία and has an equal share in it).

But here again none of this means that the Theban elders are saying exactly the same thing as the contemporary views they may be alluding to. Once again, the point is that the final lines of Antigone’s first stasimon are a variation on contemporary ideas – and variation (not repetition) is the word to keep in mind.

In other words, even if there is some resemblance between the Theban elders’ final lines and contemporary ideas, none of this is enough to make

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180 See notably Plato, Protagoras, 320c-323c.
181 Cf. Plato, Protagoras, 321e3-322a1.
182 I.e., the kind of inventiveness and resourcefulness we have previously alluded to. Cf. Plato, Protagoras, 321d4.
183 Some authors have suggested that the two-stage view we are talking about is present not only in Plato’s Protagoras but indeed in the Prometheus vinctus – or rather in the set of plays to which the Prometheus vinctus belonged. According to these authors, there is a similar omission of the “civic τέχναι” in Prometheus’ description of his activity in favour of mankind. In this case, too, Prometheus’ gift is incomplete, for it leaves out the “civic τέχναι” without which mankind cannot survive. In a concluding drama the “civic τέχναι” (and in particular δίκη) are given to mankind, not by Prometheus, but by Zeus – who reveals himself as the real benefactor of mankind. See notably H. Lloyd-Jones, The Justice of Zeus (Berkeley/LA/London: University of California Press, 1971), 97ff., D. J. Conacher, “Prometheus as Founder of the Arts”, Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies 18 (1977), 189-206, D. J. Conacher, Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound. A Literary Commentary (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 92ff. and S. des Bouvrie, “Aïskhylos, Prometheus. An Anthropological Approach”, Méïtis. Anthropologies des mondes grecs anciens 8 (1993), 187-216, in particular 197ff. and 206. See also S. White, “Io’s World: Intimations of Theodicy in Prometheus Bound”, The Journal of Hellenic Studies 121 (2001), 107-140.
the meaning of their words determinate. And on closer inspection it emerges that in this respect, too, what they say is sibylline. Is their point that the πόλις – and whatever is needed for the sake of the πόλις – is the be all and end all of human life, so that, given the fact that the πόλις cannot survive without τὸ ἑσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like, the latter are an in- dispensable condition not only for real supremacy, but indeed for σωτηρία? But, if this is the case, what they are saying is still all about power, success and effectiveness – they are just correcting a wrong view of how man can become παντοπόρος. In other words, if this is their point, they are not presenting τὸ ἑσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like as something opposed to power, success and effectiveness. They are just pointing out that τὸ ἑσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like are an essential condition for success and effectiveness. Or is it something else they have in mind, namely that τὸ ἑσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like are important (and indeed the most important thing of all) in their own right, even if they are in collision with success and effectiveness,184 with the πόλις, and with survival itself? If this is so, what is at stake in the final stanza is not the πόλις – neither success (viz. supremacy) nor survival – but something beyond the πόλις, beyond success and survival and all our struggle for them. But if this is the case, what exactly are τὸ ἑσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like –and why on earth are they more important than supremacy, success and even survival? This becomes the key question. However, this is precisely where the chorus leaves things open. Their words are rather vague and ambiguous.

That this is so is clearly evidenced by the fact that, depending on how they are interpreted, the chorus’ words can be invoked both in favor of Creon and in favor of the breaker of his edict, namely Antigone (and indeed in favor of what different interpreters believe Creon and Antigone to stand for). But, once again, it should be borne in mind that what we are dealing with here is not necessarily clear-cut and not necessarily an either/or issue. It is also possible that the question is more complex than this; for there may be yet other possibilities beyond the either/or between Creon and Antigone. Just to name one, it is perfectly possible that the Theban elders are expressing a general and rather inaccurate view on τὸ ἑσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like185 – the point being that such a view is not aware of what the conflict between Antigone and Creon is all about and proves incapable of settling the dispute between Creon and the breaker of his edict.

Let us take a closer look at this issue.

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184 I. e., with everything “παντοπόρος” stands for.
185 What might be termed an only-up-to-a-certain-point-understanding of these issues.
The Theban elders seem perfectly aware that there may be a serious conflict between everything παντοπόρος stands for, on the one hand, and the νόμοι χθονός viz. the θεῶν ἔνορκος δίκη (i.e. the “city” and the “gods”), on the other. Prima facie, it appears that they mention both a) the “laws of the land” and b) the “justice of the gods”. It therefore seems that they make some kind of distinction between both. But then again, they seem to assume that there is no conflict whatsoever between the two – that both are, as it were, “on the same side of the fence”. Or, as Griffith puts it, the Theban elders seem to assume that “the (human) ‘laws of the land’ and the ‘justice of the gods’ go hand in hand”. But this is not all, for the wording

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Triumph of the παντοπόρος?

is ambivalent: at the end of the day, it is even possible that “νόμους χθονὸς (...) θεῶν τ’ἔνορκον δίκην” is a “hendiadyoin” – so that the Theban elders are not making any real distinction between the two and in fact assume that they amount to pretty much the same thing. Kaibel takes this view: “chorus dum duo dicere videtur, νόμους πόλεως et θεῶν ἔνορκον δίκην (i.e. ius deiuratis sancitum), unum dicit: nam quod lege sancitum est, idem iustum est, τὸ μὴ καλὸν i. q. τὸ μὴ δίκαιον, τὸ παράνομον. Saepissime δίκη et νόμος vocabula consociata reperiuntur, etiam Antig. 23 (...).”

The above means that the Theban elders’ view is too undifferentiated. They lump different things together and fail to realize that this may prove to be too simple an approach. If this interpretation is correct, they have no idea that there may be a conflict between the “city” and the “gods”. In other words, the kind of conflict that arises between Creon and Antigone is, as it were, a blind spot for their “one-size-fits-all” approach. The result being that their words are ambivalent – for they can be construed as directed both at those who transgress the laws of the city and at those who transgress the “laws of the gods”. Hence, even if the Theban elders have in mind the unknown breaker of Creon’s edict, and only him, it nevertheless remains true that their twofold statement also applies to Creon. And those who claim that their words are meant only against the burier of Polynices miss the (possibly unintentional) ambivalence of the Theban elders’ remarks and the fact that Sophocles makes them say more than they mean.

But this is not all. The wording seems to be ambiguous in yet another way; for it leaves open the possibility that “νόμοι χθονὸς” stands for the prevention of μιάσμα, for the γέρας θανόντων viz. the burial duty and the care of the dead (and not for Creon’s edict).

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189 G. Kaibel, De Sophoclis Antigona (Gottingae: Officina academica Diechterichiana W. F. Kaestner, s.d.), 27.
berg puts it, “the νόμοι χθονός are to be closely connected with δίκη, the whole being a kind of hendiadyoion with the meaning of the ‘unwritten laws’.”

Ehrenberg has a good point. For “it is at least a possible interpretation to take the νόμοι χθονός as the laws of the soil in which the dead were buried. Creon’s decree violated the oldest laws of soil and country. The chorus, resenting the decree though too feeble to disobey (21ff.) and deeply impressed by the apparently miraculous burial of the body (278ff.), opposes Creon in general terms (…)”.

In which case, what we are dealing with here is not Sophocles’ intentional ambiguity, but rather the Theban elders’: they are not just saying more than they mean – they mean more than they say.

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193 Save for the fact that the written or unwritten character of the laws is not necessarily the decisive factor.

194 Ibid.

Now, the ambiguity we are talking about cannot be eliminated: the Theban elders’ words are too sibylline. And what we are dealing with here is a cluster of three closely connected components: 1) the said ambiguity or equivocity, 2) the fact that either the Theban elders, or Creon or the audience viz. the reader fail to detect it, and 3) the blurred and inaccurate understanding (the only-up-to-a-certain-point-understanding) of δίκη, νόμος and the like that makes the latter possible. This ambiguity or equivocity – viz. the said threefold cluster – is perhaps what this last stanza is all about. In other words, the point may be precisely to highlight the possibility of such general and rather inaccurate views and the fact that a) one may be guided by such vague and inaccurate views (in the belief that they are clear and accurate) and b) such views prove insufficient to settle matters one way or the other, for c) they are blind or short-sighted, as it were, and indeed so much so that they fail to see major questions concerning their own meaning – so that, when the “moment of truth” comes, it turns out that people who advocate and follow them are at a loss as to what to do, for they never really knew (they lacked a thorough understanding of) what they were talking about in the first place.

But it is time to conclude, and we must leave these questions unanswered. Instead, we will focus on one aspect. This last aspect has to do with the above-mentioned question concerning the sense in which the human race is said to be δεινόν viz. τὸ δεινότατον. If Bruhn, Strobel, Joos and Linforth are right and the “song of man’s triumph is, in effect, a long concessive clause”, do the opening lines (πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀνθρώπου δεινότερον πέλει) belong to the concessive clause alone (so that they have nothing to do with the final stanza), or is it that they stand for the whole stasimon – for the whole “equation”, as it were (i.e., both for the “concessive clause” and the “main sentence” in the final stanza)? Is the human race δεινόν (are we δεινόν) solely on account of the “human empire” the “concessive clause” is all about, or is humankind also δεινόν and indeed τὸ δεινότατον because of how it relates to τὸ ἐσθλόν, τὸ καλόν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like?


197 Even if they seem to be perfectly clear.

198 It should be borne in mind that none of this prevents the final lines of the first stasimon from being able to take on a new meaning (viz. new meanings) in the light of what happens in the rest of the play. I.e., it cannot be excluded that, even if what the Theban elders have in mind is rather vague and “shortsighted”, their words are fit to express other ways of understanding things and can appear in an entirely different light when read in the context of the whole play. In short, the last words of the first stasimon do not necessarily have “the last word” on their own meaning viz. on what they really say.
First, it should be borne in mind that the “human empire” we have spoken of (i.e., the struggle for control and supremacy, the kind of cares and concerns it has to do with, etc.) tends to play a leading role in our lives and to push everything else into the background. It monopolizes our attention, and indeed so much so that more often than not it appears to be “the only thing on stage”: the only thing life is about. The Theban elders do not address this point explicitly. But if you read between the lines, it turns out that this “protagonism” plays an important role in the first stasimon. The very structure of the choral ode bears witness to this: three stanzas in which the “human empire” is given full attention, and then a few distancing remarks in the second antistrophe. This does not mean that for the Theban elders the claims they make in the last stanza are not particularly important. In point of fact, they are what seems to matter most to them (and indeed the “conclusion” around which, as it turns out, everything else – the whole stasimon – revolves). But our point is that what we are dealing with here is a main feature of the very structure of human existence: it tends to concentrate on the struggle for supremacy and leave everything else out of the equation; the result being that everything else that can – and perhaps should – play a significant role in our lives has to struggle for our attention and comes into play only as “second thoughts” and, as it were, in an “adversative” position.

Secondly, both a) the fact that there are – and, if the Theban elders are right, there should be – more things in our lives than are dreamt of in the “human empire” (viz. in our struggle for supremacy) and b) the fact that we can – and in a way tend to – leave these other things out of the equation are perhaps part and parcel of what makes the human race δεινόν and indeed τὸ δεινότατον. It might be thought that δεινόν is used to characterize what we have termed the “human empire” – and this is true as far as the first three stanzas are concerned. But is it not δεινόν (and indeed δεινόν in more than one sense) that on top of everything else there may be this conflict between the “human empire” and something radically opposed to it? And, if these other things the final stanza of Antigone’s first stasimon refers to are as important as the chorus suggests (if they are important in their own right and even more important than the “empire” itself), is it not δεινόν (and indeed δεινόν in more than one sense) that human beings tend to leave them out of the equation? I, for one, would say that it is a rather distinctive feature of the whole thing and one of the main reasons why we humans are δεινόν and indeed τὸ δεινότατον.

Thirdly, if these other things the final stanza of Antigone’s first stasimon refers to are as important as the chorus seems to suggest (and if they are important in their own right and even more important than the “empire” itself), is it not δεινόν (and indeed δεινόν in more than one sense) that, even if one tries to comply with them, they prove to be so equivocal and open to misun-
derstanding? In other words, is it not δεινόν that, of all things, τὸ ἐσθλὸν, τὸ καλὸν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like turn out to be so elusive and difficult to grasp (so that one is subject to optical illusions – and can easily be fooled – as regards them)?

In other words, one of the reasons why the last lines change the whole meaning of the first stasimon is because they shed a new light on why we human beings are δεινόν and indeed nothing less than τὸ δεινότατον. They provide, as it were, another point of view from which man can be said to be δεινόν. This is closely connected with what we have termed the “point of view question”. The final lines of the choral ode consider mankind from what seems to be a new perspective (from the perspective of whatever τὸ ἐσθλὸν, τὸ καλὸν, νόμοι, δίκη and the like stand for). But they do not confine themselves to adding a further point of view from which mankind can be found to be δεινόν (and indeed τὸ δεινότατον). They remind us a) that there is more than one way of seeing what we are (what we should be, etc) – and indeed that the views on this matter can differ very considerably, b) that these divergent views can lead to the kind of conflict, loss and destruction Sophocles’ Theban plays are all about, so that c) in the final analysis the very fact that there is no clear and reliable view on what we are and should be – the very fact that our identity is elusive (and that, whether we are aware of it or not, we have perhaps insoluble identity issues) – is not the least reason why we can be said to be δεινόν (and indeed τὸ δεινότατον), not least for ourselves.

Appendix I (to note 60)

Appendix II (to note 155)

M. Jorge de Carvalho

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