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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rationality and Presocratic cosmology in Sophocles' *Antigone*

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Abstract

Scholars have occasionally noted that the *Antigone*'s abundant images of polar opposition bear resemblance to the fragments of Heraclitus and his doctrine of the 'unity of opposites'. The present essay develops this comparison and explores its implications for our interpretation of the play, presenting a test case for the value of the Presocratics in the study of Attic tragedy. It argues that Heraclitus' surviving work provides a valuable resource for elucidating the play's 'cosmology', a term here used in its anthropological sense to refer to presuppositions, rather than explicitly articulated theories, concerning the structure of the universe and humanity's place within it. This endeavour can affect our understanding of two points of intense interpretative disagreement: the rationality of the central protagonists and the role of polar oppositions in the play. A culturally sensitive evaluation of the characters' rationality must take account of the rules of the cosmos they inhabit. The polar oppositions hint at a regular and systematic cosmology, but its finer details are ultimately kept obscure to the audience, and only Teiresias displays a substantial understanding of this underlying framework. Heraclitus thus enriches our understanding of the epistemological predicament in which the characters find themselves.

Keywords: Sophocles; *Antigone*; Heraclitus; cosmology; rationality

> It is the story of the clash of opposites: male *versus* female, age *versus* youth, religion *versus* secularism, to list but a few.[1]

> Wouldn't it be liberating to live in a world in which plays that represent complex webs of human interaction were not reduced to the interplay of abstract categories?[2]

I. Introduction

For many critics, the *Antigone* primarily concerns a conflict between opposing, mutually exclusive, abstract forces.[3] An important objection to this reading is that it tends to underestimate

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[1] Stuttard (2017) 1.

[2] Heath (2018) 244.

[3] This position can be traced back to Hegel's view that the tragedy is a conflict of polis and *oikos* (*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 2.3; *Lectures on Aesthetics* 2.2). Scholars have often endorsed Hegel's view (for example, Knox (1964) 62–90; Reinhardt (1979) 65–66; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 119–20; Liapis (2013) 107) or seen the play more generally as presenting, in some form, a conflict between abstract oppositions (Segal (1981) 152–206; Goldhill (1986), 79–106; Griffith (1999) 43–54; Stuttard (2017) 1). The idea that Greek tragedy in general consists of conflicts and exchanges

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the complexity of Sophocles' characterization and his finely constructed plot.[4] But if some readers have been too eager to paint the play's events in terms of polar opposites, they take their cue from the characters themselves. Even by the standards of Classical Greek literature, *Antigone*'s language is rife with the imagery of oppositions.[5] It has occasionally been noted in passing that this use of imagery recalls the fragments of Heraclitus, and his notorious doctrine of the unity of opposites.[6] The present essay aims to develop this suggestion and to explore its implications for our reading of Sophocles' play, joining a burgeoning interest in the relationship between tragedy and Presocratic philosophy.[7] *Antigone* can serve as a test case for the value of the Presocratics in the study of Attic tragedy. I shall argue that the context of Presocratic cosmological speculation, as manifest above all in Heraclitus, can elucidate two of *Antigone*'s most contested interpretative problems: the role of opposite forces, and the rationality of the protagonists. I contend that the imagery of opposites hints at an overarching cosmology that governs the world of the play, and that it is within the context of this cosmology that the rationality of the characters' decisions should be evaluated. Before substantiating these suggestions with analysis of the evidence, it will first be necessary to clarify my use of the central terms.

II. Cosmology and rationality

Classical scholars and historians of philosophy habitually characterize the Presocratics as 'cosmologists' and their work as 'cosmology' in reference to their occupation with questions concerning the origins, structure and mechanisms of the universe, though it should be noted that the application of these terms is a modern phenomenon.[8] The usage serves to distinguish Presocratic philosophy both from what came before and from what followed. 'Cosmology', with its connotations of regularity and order, is often used in such a manner as to exclude the mythological stories of earlier poets.[9] At the other end of the timescale, the term has the effect of isolating Presocratic investigations from what might be termed the 'philosophy of humanity': according to a tradition which goes back to Plato and Xenophon, Socrates first introduced the question of how one ought to live one's life as a topic for philosophy after growing dissatisfied with the speculations concerning the composition of the universe that had preoccupied earlier thinkers.[10]

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between opposites was influentially articulated by Vernant in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988) 23–48 (originally published 1972). As Cairns (2016) 124–27 shows, Hegel's views were more complex than is usually acknowledged.

[4] Hester (1971) 14–17; Sourvinou-Inwood (1989) 139–40; Cairns (2016), 111–13; Heath (2018) 244. Foley (2001) 172–200 tends in this direction.

[5] On Greek polar expressions, see Kemmer (1903). On the figure in tragedy, see Rutherford (2012) 74, 207, 388, 389, 391. On the polar oppositions in *Antigone*, see section III.ii.

[6] Seaford (2004) 312; Seaford (2012) 331; Cairns (2013) xxxvi–xxxvii. From the other direction, Granger (2013) 188–89, on Heraclitus, briefly draws the contrast between D119 = B96 and the plot of the play.

[7] Crucial, here, is the work of Richard Seaford (2003), (2004), (2012), though I do not share his strongly Marxist framework that leads him to posit a close connection between Presocratic philosophy and monetization. See also Scapin (2020) and the overview of Allan (2007). For an early, and somewhat sceptical, contribution, see Rösler (1970). On Sophocles in particular, see Arp (2006).

[8] For example, Kahn (1960); Furley (1987); Lloyd (1991). Ion of Chios is credited with writing a work entitled Κοσμολογικός (schol. *ad* Ar. *Pax* 835) and Democritus, according to Diogenes Laertius (9.46), wrote a Κοσμογραφίη, but no such word as *κοσμολογία is attested in ancient or Byzantine Greek, nor does **cosmologia* appear in any of the classical, medieval or Renaissance Latin dictionaries. The earliest English examples provided by the *OED* date to the 17th century.

[9] Lloyd (1991) 146, 'in Greece, there is nothing we can describe as cosmology in the strictest and fullest sense before the philosophers'. Note also Kahn (1960) 94–98, 133–63. Furley's *The Greek Cosmologists* opens its cosmological narrative with the Milesians.

[10] For example, Pl. *Ap.* 19a8–d7, *Phd.* 96a5–100e4; Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.11; Diog. Laert. 1.18, 2.16, 2.20–22; Cic. *Tusc.* 5.10–11. On this tradition in both antiquity and modernity, see Laks (2018) 1–34, who refers to it as the 'philosophy of man'.

'Cosmology', when used in this way, denotes both a method and a topic of enquiry, a proto-scientific investigation into the composition of the universe that assumes regularity and knowability. By contrast, and without wishing to deny the important differences between the Presocratics and earlier or later thinkers, I use 'cosmology' here in the much broader, anthropological sense of 'any set of beliefs and assumptions concerning the structure of the universe and humanity's place within it'.[11] According to this sense, Hesiod's conception of a universe deriving from the often arbitrary sexual dalliances of anthropomorphic deities is no less a cosmology than the more regular worlds propounded by Anaximander or Empedocles. Almost any text may be used as evidence for cosmological attitudes, and such attitudes often fall under the category of the 'philosophy of humanity': the nature of a 'cosmos' may determine our obligations and the value of our actions, for instance if it features gods who are owed sacrifice and who punish impiety. Rather than treating 'cosmology' as a label that may or may not apply to any given text, I use it as a lens through which to read the evidence in order to bring certain aspects into focus. This approach has the advantage of facilitating comparison between the explicitly articulated cosmological views of the Presocratics and those which are presupposed in the world of a non-philosophical text such as a tragedy.

When discussing the varied evidence for cosmological attitudes within a particular culture, one can choose to stress the commonalities it presents in an attempt to identify an overarching system of popular belief, or one can choose instead to explore the distinctive features of each item, in order to interpret its significance within that context.[12] My present endeavour fits into the latter category.[13] To borrow the words of one distinguished anthropological theorist, my focus is 'on cosmology as a living tradition of knowledge—not as a set of abstract ideas enshrined in collective representations'.[14] As far as we can tell, *Antigone* does not adhere doctrinally to a theory of the universe advocated by any particular cosmologist; nor does it transparently reflect the popular beliefs of Sophocles' audience. After all, as has been widely noted, its central moral, that Polyneices should be buried, seems to run counter to contemporary Athenian legislation concerning the burial of traitors.[15] Rather, its cosmology is a unique permutation of some of the same, central components evident elsewhere in early Greek texts. Since the Presocratics present near-contemporary cosmological theories explicitly, they are a useful context against which to expose the ways in which *Antigone* creatively adapts existing cosmological ideas.

This approach can help to historicize the contested issue of the characters' rationality. Scholars vehemently disagree over the extent to which we should regard the actions and self-justifications of Creon and Antigone as 'rational'.[16] We have no reason to suspect that ancient audiences would have been any less divided than modern scholars over these points. But one difficulty for any modern attempt to reconstruct how they could have responded is the slipperiness of the vocabulary. After all, the Latinate term 'rationality', when applied to fifth-century Greece, is an 'etic' one; that is, one used by modern scholars, rather than by the culture under investigation.[17] If we are to proceed with caution, we should not assume *a priori* that Sophocles had a distinct concept that would map on to the modern terminology.

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[11] For the recent resurgence of the term in anthropology, see the collection Abramson and Holbraad (2014) and the overview, Abramson (2018). For the most sustained application of this concept to *Antigone*, see Oudemans and Lardinois (1987), though I differ from them in regarding the *Antigone* not as a product of a largely static Greek cosmology, but as a dynamic intervention within a complex contemporary cosmological discourse. Derron (2015) applies a broad sense of the term to the ancient world.

[12] On this distinction, see Barth (1987). It is far beyond the scope of this article to determine the precise extent to which we can identify a level of systematicity in Greek religious beliefs, but on this issue see Versnel (2011) 23–150.

[13] In this respect, I differ from Oudemans and Lardinois (1987), who regard *Antigone* as 'a typical product of Greek culture in that it is permeated with dichotomies and structural polarities' (pp. 13–14). I aim to be more precise in investigating the use Sophocles makes of such 'dichotomies and structural polarities'.

[14] Barth (1987) 84. As he later writes, 'creativity can only be understood as an interaction between the parts of a dynamic system; and nothing can be expected to spring ready-made from the forehead of the philosopher' (p. 87), or, in my case, playwright. In this respect I differ from the heavily structuralist approach of Segal (1981).

[15] For a full discussion of this issue, see Cerri (1979) 17–32. This point forms the basis of Sourvinou-Inwood's (1989) argument that Creon's exposure of Polyneices would not be regarded as wrong by the audience. As Cairns (2016) 38–44 argues, the audience is unlikely to have been unanimous on this issue.

[16] For example, Blundell (1989) 130–48 sees passion overriding reason in both Creon and Antigone. Nussbaum (2001) 51–82 argues that both Creon and Antigone display defective powers of practical reasoning. Foley (2001) 172–83 defends Antigone's rationality. Most recently, Scodel (2017) has applied 'attribution theory' to argue that Antigone presents herself as rational to her addressees, though Scodel does not commit herself to a position on

In English, to be rational is to possess 'reason' (for example, *OED s.v.*), but this can apply to a range of activities. As the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* puts it:

> Pieces of behaviour, beliefs, arguments, policies, and other exercises of the human mind may all be described as rational. To accept something as rational is to accept it as making sense, as appropriate, or required, or in accordance with some acknowledged goal, such as aiming at truth or aiming at the good.[18]

On this basis, 'rationality' would appear to be the somewhat vague quality of possessing good judgement, and such a general notion is in evidence from the time of our earliest Greek texts, denoted by such vocabulary as *sophia*, *mētis* and the like. Yet those who discuss the rationality of Creon or Antigone tend to apply the term in a more restricted sense by which it refers to the quality of deriving from logical ratiocination as opposed to emotions, instincts or unwarranted presuppositions.[19] Such a conception of rationality is familiar from later philosophy, notably in Plato's theory of a 'rational' (*logistikon*) part of the soul, distinct from more emotional, irrational part(s), which may guide or fail to guide our actions by working out syllogisms and correcting mistaken first impressions (for example, *Resp.* 4.439d). Some regard this conception of rationality as a philosophical construct that only emerged in the later fifth century,[20] but outside of philosophical discourse, there is good evidence for the existence in Classical Greece of a widespread vernacular notion that an individual's deliberative faculties are distinct from their emotions, and that the former are to be valued over the latter.[21] Already in Homer, the *thumos* distinguishes an emotional component of the self which can recommend courses of action that are then rejected through deliberation.[22] The attempt to identify a distinction between emotionally and rationally motivated behaviour in a fifth-century tragedy, then, is historically grounded. But one must be careful with the application of this language, as what would constitute a valid process of reasoning to fifth-century Athenians may look highly irrational or illogical from a modern philosophical or scientific perspective. It is ahistorical to argue that

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whether Antigone is actually rational. Segal (1981) 152–206 argues that Creon represents (ultimately inadequate) masculine rationality against Antigone's feminine religion.

[17] The anthropological terms 'etic' and its antonym 'emic' were coined by Kenneth Pike in 1954. See further Harris (1976) and the methodological discussion of Geertz (1984). For discussion of the cultural contingency of conceptions rationality, see, within Classics, Lloyd (1990) and Frede (1996); in anthropology more generally, Tambiah (1990); and in intellectual history, most recently, Smith (2019).

[18] Blackburn (2016) *s.v.*

[19] See n.16.

[20] Explicitly, Frede (1996) 5–19. Long (2009) sees Heraclitus as playing a crucial role in the articulation of the concept of rationality. The view that 'reason' only emerged in sixth- or fifth-century Greece was a cornerstone of the now-debunked scholarly narrative of a steady progression from '*muthos* to *logos*', that is, from mythological to rational forms of explanation, propounded by Nestle (1942), Snell (1953) and Fränkel (1975); for criticisms, see Buxton (1999) and for a recent reassessment of the terms *muthos* and *logos*, see Fowler (2011).

[21] Dover (1974) 116–26 discusses vernacular conceptions of practical reasoning in Classical Athens. For emotions defeating good judgement, note Antiph. 5.71; Lys. 3.4, 31; Isoc. 15.221; Isae. 1.13; Dem. 45.14.

[22] *Il.* 11.401–13, 17.90–107, 21.552–72, 22.98–131. Note also instances in which a hero 'yields' to his *thumos* in spite of good advice to the contrary: *Il.* 9.109–11, 24.40–42. On this much-discussed topic see, especially, Gill (1996) 46–60 and Cairns (2014) §3.2, who discusses earlier scholarship.

Antigone's concern for her brother's burial represents irrationality in contrast to Creon's rational arguments for civic justice simply because it derives from a belief in a supernatural framework to which modern readers would not subscribe:[23] a fifth-century Athenian audience is hardly likely to have distinguished arguments or dispositions that assume such a framework as *ipso facto* occupying a realm of the 'irrational' or failing to display sound judgement. As intellectual historians of ancient Greece have increasingly come to appreciate in recent decades, the new argumentative structures which come into view at the hands of Presocratic philosophers, Sophists, medical writers and orators, that is to say, the types of discourse which used to be taken as indicative of the triumph of 'reason' or *logos*, in no way involve a rejection of the divine.[24]

Sophocles certainly presents models of deliberation and good judgement. He occasionally uses *logos* in cases where 'reason' or 'rational reflection' seem appropriate translations, although not in *Antigone*.[25] More commonly, mental actions or qualities such as *gnomē*, *phronēma*, *nous* and their cognates are evaluated as good or bad throughout the corpus. This is especially the case in *Antigone*:[26] *euboulia*, 'good counsel', is repeatedly touted as a virtue (1050, 1098), with *dusboulia*, 'bad counsel' or 'folly' a vice (95, 1269). I take it, then, that we can legitimately talk about a conception of 'rationality' within the play, provided it is understood, initially, in the somewhat vague, vernacular sense of 'good thought' or 'judgement', though I shall proceed to argue that *Antigone* models a more precise form of good judgement which has much in common with Heraclitus' epistemology. Since different cultures regard different ends as 'good' and believe different things to be true, discussion of the rationality of characters in an ancient drama runs the risk of imposing values that would have been unfamiliar to author and audience. The evaluation of particular judgements and decisions depends on the rules of the cosmos one inhabits. A culturally sensitive analysis of the 'rationality' of the characters in *Antigone*, then, must take account of their understanding of how the play's cosmology works.

III. The *Antigone*'s cosmology and the Presocratics

The *Antigone* presents a world in which the exposure of a corpse sets in motion a chain of causation that leads to the pollution of a city and the destruction of a family. Though the gods never appear openly onstage, the influence of supernatural forces on these events is palpable, in the guard's report that Polyneices' body has, miraculously, not decomposed (257–58), in the numinous whirlwind that accompanies Antigone's return to the corpse (417–21) and in the fact that Teiresias is able to divine accurately the consequences of the exposure.[27] Furthermore, Teiresias' comment that the city is 'sick' as a consequence of Creon's decision (νοσεῖ πόλις, 1015) may imply that it suffers some disease or pestilence, as it does in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, especially given these other supernatural details.[28] But the events do not appear as a result of the capricious whim of erratic deities. This cosmos is rule-governed: Antigone famously claims that there are unwritten, divine *nomima* (454–55), 'established laws',[29] which prevail over mortal *nomoi*, and her claim is vindicated in the course of the narrative (*cf.* 1114–15). These *nomima* concern, at the most obvious level, the status of Polyneices' corpse. In many respects, this cosmological framework resembles the cosmologies advanced by Heraclitus and other Presocratics, though it also presents some conspicuous points of contrast. I outline here four salient points of comparison. To be clear from the outset, I do not wish to posit that *Antigone* alludes directly to Heraclitus; only that it reflects certain patterns of thinking, specifically concerning rationality and cosmology, of which Heraclitus is, for us, a relatively copious and explicit source.

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[23] Thus, Segal (1981) 152–206.

[24] See, in general Lloyd (1987), and on the Presocratics in particular, Broadie (1999); Trépanier (2010); Tor (2017), although note already Jaeger (1947).

[25] Note *El.* 466, and the related sense of 'value' or 'price' at *Aj.* 477 and *OC* 1163. One potential instance in *Antigone* is 603, where the chorus mention λόγου τ' ἄνοια καὶ φρενῶν Ἐρινύς as a cause of the destruction of the house of the Labdacids, but there commentators are unanimous in regarding the first part of the expression as referring to the 'madness' of someone's (probably Antigone's) 'speech'. See, for example, Jebb (1900) *ad loc.*; Long (1968) 109; Griffith (1999) *ad loc.*; Cairns (2016) 69. The absence of any clear instance of *logos* in the sense of 'reason' undermines the suggestion of Segal (1981) 165 that *logos* conflicts with *muthos* in the play.

[26] The examples are ubiquitous. For analysis, see Long (1968) 49–54, 82–86.

[27] *Cf.* the similar remarks of Parker (1983) 33.

[28] Scullion (1998) 114–22 argues that this 'sickness' refers specifically to a wider 'mental distress' that afflicts the city, but this seems to me too restrictive: the nature of the sickness is ominously unspecified, and we are left to ponder what wider repercussions the exposure and Antigone's execution may engender. Creon's pointedly

i. Law and justice

The emphasis on *nomoi/nomima* and the repeated occurrences of *dikē* render justice one of the play's major themes. Its system of divine laws can determine natural phenomena, such as the pestilence in the city and the miraculous preservation of Polyneices' corpse. Although this is an old idea, already evident in early hexameter poetry, it is expanded and developed by the Presocratics, whose treatments of the theme bear some more specific points of comparison with *Antigone*.

In Homer and Hesiod, *dikē* is a feature of relations among humans and gods. Other living things or what we would classify as inanimate objects are only incidentally involved as the instruments by which the gods reward and punish, for instance, by bringing plenteous harvests or ruinous floods.[30] With Anaximander, on the other hand, natural phenomena become agents which may themselves be guilty of injustice (D6 = B1):

> The things out of which birth happens for beings, into these too their destruction happens according to obligation: for they pay the penalty (δίκην) and retribution (τίσιν) to each other for their injustice (τῆς ἀδικίας) according to the order of time.

According to the most plausible interpretation, 'the things out of which birth happens' are, or at least predominately comprise, opposite qualities such as the wet and the dry, the hot and the cold and so on (D12 = A13).[31] Here, *dikē* has the sense of 'penalty' or 'retribution'.

The use of the term for a wider system of 'cosmic justice', involving natural phenomena as agents, comes into view in Heraclitus D63 = B80, a fragment some regard as a response to Anaximander:[32]

> εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεών.
>
> One ought to know that war is common, and *dikē* strife, and all things happen [or 'come into being'] according to strife and necessity.

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mistaken understanding of *miasma* (776, 1042–43) may further lead us to speculate whether the *nosos* he causes is a physical disease.

[29] On this term, see Griffith (1999) *ad loc.* Knox (1964) 97 argues that *nomima* means 'customary rites' rather than 'laws', but whilst the distinction between *nomima* and *nomoi* seems significant here, the former evidently conveyed legal implications to Aristotle (*Rh.* 137b4–11).

[30] For example, the *locus classicus*, *Il.* 16.384–93; Hes. *Op.* 225–47. Note that at *Op.* 276–79 there is no justice among animals.

[31] See, for example, Vlastos (1947) 168–72; Kahn (1960) 119–66; Kirk et al. (1983) 119–20, 128–30; Graham (2006) 39–44.

[32] Kahn (1979) 207; Kirk et al. (1983) 194; Scapin (2020) 134. On this development in the use of the term, see Vlastos (1947) and Havelock (1978) 263–71.

Dikē is identified with 'strife', something according to which 'all things happen' or 'come to be'. The other surviving fragments shed some light on this claim. Warfare and conflict serve as symbols for the notorious doctrine of the 'unity of opposites',[33] that is, ostensibly opposite items are in fact somehow unified or even identical. Thus, the 'road up and the road down is one and the same' (ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή, D51 = B60) and 'the sea is the purest and the most polluted water, drinkable and life-preserving for fish, but for humans undrinkable and destructive' (D78 = B61). The unity of opposites is, on any account, a pervasive and central feature of Heraclitus' cosmology. For this reason, all things 'happen' or 'come to be' in accordance with conflict *qua* unity of opposites, and conflict is the *dikē* of the cosmos. In fact, the identification of *dikē* with *eris* is itself a unity of opposites, since civic strife can be a manifestation of *adikia* (Solon 4.7, 32–3 W).[34] Heraclitus is able to make the paradoxical claim that 'justice' is 'strife' because of the breadth of meaning of *dikē*. From Homer onwards, the term can either have normative value, in the sense of 'right' or 'what is fitting' (for example, *Il.* 16.388, 19.180), or more neutrally refer simply to 'custom' or 'usage' (*Od.* 11.218, 24.225). *Dikē qua* justice is, by popular accord, opposed to strife, but *dikē qua* custom, in the broadest sense of the custom of the universe, consists of strife.

By the time of *Antigone*, then, the definition of *dikē* had become a topic of theoretical debate, one which would continue among the sophists.[35] The chorus' conclusive remark, during the closing *kommos*, that Creon 'seems to have recognized justice (τὴν δίκην) too late' (1270), suggests that the play has provided an insight into the workings of *dikē*, so that it, too, can be read as a contribution to this discussion. The basic details of the narrative conform to the Homeric and Hesiodic usages of the term: natural phenomena, the pestilence in the city and the miraculous preservation of Polyneices, are the instruments of divine justice rather than agents. At no point is *dikē* used in the sense of an overriding system of cosmic justice that imposes obligations on inanimate objects.[36] But in two respects the treatment of justice in the play resembles that of the Presocratics rather than the earlier poets. First, both Heraclitus and Antigone regard the universe as regulated by divine law, a higher authority than mortal laws. Thus, according to Heraclitus (D105 = B114):

> Those who speak with their mind must rely on what is in common for all, just as a city does on its law (νόμωι), and much more strongly [i.e. than a city]. For all human laws (πάντες οἱ ἀνθρώπειοι νόμοι) are nourished by one law, the divine one (ὑπὸ ἑνὸς τοῦ θείου): for it dominates as much as it wants to, and it suffices for all, and there is some left over.[37]

To be sure, Heraclitus did not invent the idea of divine law. Already in Hesiod, Zeus 'distributed laws to the immortals' (*Theog.* 74). But Antigone's stark statement of the distinction between mortal laws and divine, unwritten *nomima* (454–55) recalls Heraclitus' fragment more closely than anything in Homer or Hesiod. This parallel is corroborated by the fact that both Heraclitus and *Antigone* present divine law as maintained by the Erinyes (D89 = B94; Soph. *Ant.* 603, 1075). The second respect in which *Antigone*'s justice resembles that of the Presocratics is in the role of opposites, which merits a more extensive discussion.

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[33] Thus, Kahn (1979) 206; Graham (2006) 144 (who sees it as an 'exchange' rather than a unity of opposites); Scapin (2020) 133.

[34] This particular unity of opposites also emerges from D55 = B23, 'they would not know the name of justice (ικης ὄνομα) if these things were not'. As Kahn (1979) 185 argues, 'these things' are probably 'unjust things', so that knowledge of the name of justice depends upon the existence of injustice.

[35] Note, for example, Antiphon D38 = B44 and the debates with Thrasymachus and Callicles reimagined by Plato in *Republic* book 1 and the *Gorgias*.

[36] The word occurs ten times in the play: three times in the δίκην διδόναι idiom (228, 303, 459); twice in reference to the '*dikē* of the gods' from which one may depart (368, 921); twice in the dative in the sense of 'with *dikē*' or 'rightly' (23, assuming Schütz's emendation for the sense, and 94); once with the connotation of 'legal dispute' (742 with Griffith (1999) *ad loc.*; *cf.* T.6.60); once, personified (854, the 'pedestal' or 'throne of Dike'); and finally the *dikē* that Creon recognizes (1270).

[37] Tr. Laks and Most (2016).

ii. Opposites and their unity

Part of the *dikē* that Creon must recognize requires, among other things, the appropriate arrangement of opposites. This much is suggested by Teiresias' accusation at 1068–71:

> ἔχεις μὲν τῶν ἄνω βαλὼν κάτω,
> ψυχήν τ᾽ ἀτίμως ἐν τάφῳ κατῴκισας,
> ἔχεις δὲ τῶν κάτωθεν ἐνθάδ᾽ αὖ θεῶν
> ἄμοιρον, ἀκτέριστον, ἀνόσιον νέκυν.
>
> You have cast below one of those above,
> And housed a soul dishonourably in a tomb,
> And you have here, in turn, a corpse that belongs to the gods below
> Without its due share, without funeral rites, unholy.

Creon's mistake involves confusing opposite categories, in particular that which belongs above and below, a geometrical opposition that corresponds to the living and the dead. The centrality of this particular opposition is evinced both by its occurrence at this revelatory point in the drama and by the fact that it has been foreshadowed earlier on, in Haimon's image of the unyielding steersman whose ship ends up 'with its benches' (the part which should be on top) 'upside-down, underneath' (ὑπτίοις κάτω … σέλμασιν, 716–17). In Teiresias' speech, the opposition is emphatically illustrated by verbal antithesis (ἄνω … κάτω, τάφῳ κατῴκισας, κάτωθεν ἐνθάδ᾽), and by the symmetrical sentence structure, with its contrasting anaphora (ἔχεις μὲν τῶν ἄνω … ἔχεις δὲ τῶν κάτωθεν). The confusion of opposites will rebound back on Creon, when he becomes, in the words of the messenger, a 'living corpse' (1167). The image has already been used of Antigone herself who, according to the chorus, 'living, alone of mortals, will go down to Hades' (821–22), and is spoken of by Creon as 'living entombed' (888). The fusion of life and death is also implicit in the repeated notion that Antigone's death is a marriage, her tomb a bridal chamber (810–16, 891): she will not be going to this place for the inauguration of new life,[38] but to end her own. Of course, the application of this image to the situations of both Antigone and Creon implies that the latter is the result of the former.[39]

This central opposition, between above and below, or the living and the dead, is one among many thematic oppositions that critics tend to identify within the play, such as male and female, age and youth or *philoi* and *echthroi*.[40] We are primed to identify these thematic oppositions in part by the abundant use of polar expressions, which occur in the language of all speaking characters apart from the briefly appearing Eurydice.[41] For instance, in addition to the Teiresias example quoted above, Antigone states that Ismene may be a 'bad woman from good ancestors' (ἐσθλῶν κακή, 38); Ismene describes Antigone as having 'a hot heart at cold matters' (θερμὴν ἐπὶ ψυχροῖσι, 88); the guard considers it 'most pleasant' to have escaped from ills but at the same time, 'painful to lead friends to ill' (ἥδιστον … ἀλγεινόν, contrastingly placed at the start of successive lines, 438–39); Creon sees money as teaching 'fine men to attend to shameful deeds' (χρηστὰς πρὸς αἰσχρὰ, 299); and the chorus describes man as 'all-inventive, uninventive at nothing that might occur' (παντοπόρος· ἄπορος, 360) before contrasting (in the same metrical position in the subsequent antistrophe) the man who is 'high-in-his-city' with the one who is 'city-less' (ὑψίπολις· ἄπολις, 370). Expressions of this type are a familiar stylistic feature throughout Greek literature, but in this play they assume a more than rhetorical force, reflecting on a formal level the notion of polar opposition that is central to the plot. The cumulative effect of these linguistic antitheses is, I suggest, to create the impression of a world divided not only into the major thematic oppositions of *philoi* and *echthroi* or *oikos* and polis, but also into more mundane and physical oppositions, such as hot and cold, pleasure and pain, or up and down.

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[38] The recognized function of marriage, as is clear from the betrothal formula, is that the bride is given 'for the bearing [literally, "ploughing"] of lawful children' (Men. *Sam.* 727, *Pk.* 1010, *Dys.* 842, *fr.* 682).

[39] Thus, Knox (1964) 116; Oudemans and Lardinois (1987) 197–98.

[40] In addition to the quotation at the start of this essay, see the representative overview of Griffith (1999) 43–54. On *philoi* and *echthroi*, see Goldhill (1986) 79–106; Blundell (1989), 106–15; and Nussbaum (2001) 54–55.

[41] The section above documents examples spoken by Antigone, Ismene, Creon, Teiresias and the Chorus, but note also, for example, 232, 276, 438–39 spoken by the Guard; 695, 731, perhaps 757 spoken by Haimon; 1157, 1158, 1159 spoken by the Messenger.

Opposition itself, then, is a major theme of the play, and if I am right in arguing that Creon's recognition of *dikē* must involve a recognition of the correct arrangement of opposites, then in this respect, too, the play's justice resembles that of the Presocratics. As we have noted, Anaximander presents opposite qualities paying penalties for acts of injustice, while the most conspicuous feature of Heraclitus' *nomoi*-governed universe is the abundance of polar oppositions that are in fact somehow united in a manner that normally goes unnoticed by humanity at large. Indeed, it seems likely that Heraclitus' 'road' fragment (D51 = B60, quoted above) refers not only to an actual road on a gradient, but also to the road into life on birth and the katabatic road on death: these roads are 'the same' since the soul enters the body on birth and departs it on death as part of the same never-ending, cyclical journey.[42] Thus, the central opposition that Creon fails to understand also crops up in Heraclitus, where 'up' and 'down', as in *Antigone*, correspond symbolically to the domains of the living and the dead, and, as in *Antigone*, there is a fusion of these two opposites. But whereas for Heraclitus the unity of opposites is an ineluctable feature of the universe (albeit one that most mortals fail to recognize), in Sophocles' tragedy it is an indication of a perverted state of affairs and cosmic disruption. Creon's ignorance manifests in his confusion of opposites which, in contrast to Heraclitus' cosmos, brings extraordinary disaster.

Moreover, in both cases, the system of opposites is presented in financial terms. Heraclitus sees the change in perceptible circumstances as an exchange of money or gold (D87 = B90): 'All things are in exchange (ἀνταμοιβή) for fire, and fire for all things, just like goods for gold and gold for goods'. Teiresias prophesies that Creon will redress the imbalance caused by his fusion of opposites by making an exchange, when declaring that 'you will have given in exchange (ἀμοιβὸν ἀντιδοὺς ἔσῃ) one corpse for corpses' (1066–67). This is the climax of the financial imagery that recurs throughout the play, above all in Creon's ungrounded assumptions that his opponents act through desire for *kerdos*, 'gain' or 'profit' (222, 310–12, 326, 1047, 1061): Creon may be obsessed with gain, but he does not understand the real 'balance sheet' that underlies his actions.[43]

iii. The language of the cosmos

Both *Antigone* and Heraclitus present sensory phenomena as a language, or at least a system of signs. In what may be Heraclitus' most famous statement (D41 = B93), 'the lord whose oracle is the one in Delphi neither speaks nor hides but gives signs (σημαίνει)'. The fragment is programmatic of Heraclitus' notoriously 'oracular' style, but that style itself reflects the obscurity of the laws of his cosmology, a quality encapsulated by his use of the term *logos*, which seems to refer both to Heraclitus' text and to the objective 'account' or rules of the cosmos.[44] Thus, people are forever uncomprehending of his account (D1 = B1) even though it is 'common to all' (D2 = B2). The rules of the Heraclitean cosmos, then, are figured as a kind of language which the masses do not understand. This seems to be the significance of D33 = B107: 'Bad witnesses for humans are the eyes and ears of those who possess barbarian souls (βαρβάρους ψυχάς)', that is, souls that do not understand Greek, or rather the 'common tongue' of the *logos*.[45] The laws of Heraclitus' cosmos, as manifest in our sensory experience, are, for most people, like a foreign language, or like oracular utterances, in being hard to interpret. In *Antigone*, the prophet Teiresias is, like Heraclitus, able to understand the 'signs' of the cosmos: the birds have ceased to make 'comprehensible noises' (εὐσήμους … βοάς, 1021), and the rites are now 'non-signifying' (ἀσήμων, 1013). As Kamerbeek comments, 'the failing of the sign is itself a sign',[46] and Teiresias correctly infers the reasons behind this 'failure' of his usual means of prophecy. Both Heraclitus and Teiresias, then, are able to decode the *sēmata* that the cosmos presents to them.

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[42] Thus Kahn (1979) 240. This interpretation of the fragment goes back at least as far as Plotinus (4.8.1.11–18 = R88). *Cf.* Pl. *Grg.* 493a for ἄνω κάτω in reference to the journey of the soul.

[43] *Cf.* Antigone's appropriation of the word at 462–64, and the Chorus' ironic comment at 1326. On the significance of *kerdos* in the play, see Goheen (1951) 14–19; Segal (1964) 48.

iv. Dionysus

One final parallel is less distinctive but, I shall argue, is instructive as to how these points of similarity can affect an interpretation of the play. Both texts feature a prominent engagement with Dionysus. The god appears in three of *Antigone*'s choral odes.[47] First, the parodos describes Kapaneus as βακχεύων ('raging', 136).[48] Its main, hymnic section closes with a call for choral celebration (152–54) and a prayer that 'the Bacchic earth-shaker rule over Thebes' (153–54). Second, after Antigone's final appearance, the fourth stasimon recounts three mythological narratives in which someone is imprisoned, including the story of Lycurgus who, like Pentheus, tried to prevent the worship of Dionysus at Thrace. According to other sources, he was consequently driven mad, murdered his son (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.1) and wife (*LIMC s.v.* 'Lykourgos'), and was eventually blinded (*Il.* 6.130–43) or torn apart by horses (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.1). Here, he is imprisoned in a cave (955–58; perhaps a Sophoclean invention to create a parallel with Antigone)[49] where the madness 'drips out' of him (959–60) before he 'came to recognize the god, as in his madness he was violating him with his taunting tongue'.[50] Although the immediate parallel is with the imprisoned Antigone, the tradition of the filicide,[51] as well as the detail that Lycurgus 'recognized' the god (too late?), associate him with Creon, who achieves recognition late in the play after suffering (*cf.* 1095). Third, just after the exchange with Teiresias, when Creon has decided to release Antigone, in the fifth stasimon the chorus sing a kletic hymn to Dionysus in which they address him as the patron deity of Thebes (1121–25), but also as the one 'who watches over Italy and rules in the all-receiving vales of Eleusinian Deo' (1118–21), an address that hints at his associations both with Italian Dionysiac mystery cults and with the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis.[52] They then relate his peculiar birth from the union of Zeus and Semele (1126–39), and request that he come with a 'purifying foot' to the city afflicted with a 'violent disease' (1140–41). In all three instances, Dionysus is associated with madness, whether of Kapaneus (135), Lycurgus (959) or of his dancing choruses (1151): madness is a quality of both his victims and his celebrants.

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[44] On this, see Kahn (1979) 96–100.

[45] For this interpretation, see Hussey (1982) and Kahn (1979) *ad loc. Cf.* also D4 = B34, D22 = B56.

[46] Kamerbeek (1978) *ad loc.*

[47] On Dionysus in these odes, see Winnington-Ingram (1980) 91–116; Bierl (1989); and Henrichs (1994) 75–79. On the fifth stasimon, a kletic hymn to the god, see Henrichs (1990) 265–70; Scullion (1998); Cullyer (2005); Macedo (2011).

[48] Griffiths (1999) *ad loc.* glosses as '"raging", here, as often, with no specifically Dionysiac reference', but this seems reductive given that Dionysus crops up at the end of the ode, as the 'Bacchic earth-shaker'.

[49] Thus, Gantz (1993) 113.

[50] Translation here adapted from the interpretation of Griffiths (1999) *ad loc.*

[51] Winnington-Ingram (1980) 102–03.

One surviving fragment of Heraclitus makes explicit reference to the god (D16 = B15):

> D16 = B15 εἰ μὴ γὰρ Διονύσωι πομπὴν ἐποιοῦντο καὶ ὕμνεον ᾆισμα αἰδοίοισιν, ἀναιδέστατα εἴργαστ' ἄν· ὡυτὸς δὲ Ἀίδης καὶ Διόνυσος, ὅτεωι μαίνονται καὶ ληναΐζουσιν.
>
> For if they were not making a procession to Dionysus and singing a hymn to genitals [i.e., phallic images], they would be acting most shamelessly. But Hades and Dionysus are the same, him for whom they rave and celebrate the Leneia.

The fragment features a neat wordplay: people would act ἀναιδέστατα ('most shamelessly') by singing to αἰδοῖα, genitals, or more literally, 'things-to-be-ashamed-at'. The *aid*- syllable also occurs in Hades, implicitly associating the god of death with the reproductive organs. As Kahn succinctly puts it, '[t]he most obviously correct interpretation takes Hades here as representative of death and the phallic Dionysus as representative of sexual vitality'.[53] The fragment, then, pronounces on the unity of life and death that we observed in other fragments (D45 = B32; D53 = B48; D68 = B88; D70 = B62). Most probably, it is critical of the traditional religious practices. Heraclitus elsewhere denounces the excessive consumption of alcohol (i.e. Dionysus' wine, D104 = B117), which he may equate to a death of the soul.[54] This would be one reason why Dionysus/wine and Hades/death are 'the same' and celebrants of Dionysus are 'mad'. Elsewhere, traditional forms of initiation and purification are faulted.[55] In D18 = B14, 'night-wanderers, Magi, Bacchants, Maenads, and initiates … are initiated impiously into the mysteries that are recognised among men'.[56] D15 = B5 likens purification through blood to a muddy person attempting to clean himself with mud, another case of madness (μαίνεσθαι).

Dionysus in Heraclitus, as in *Antigone*, is associated with madness, initiation and possibly purification. The fact that both texts feature a union of life and death may be a further Dionysiac parallel, given the god's eschatological associations. There are some hints (but no more than that) that Dionysus may be at work in Creon's fate:[57] his situation is comparable to that of the Dionysus-denying Lycurgus and, like Dionysus' victims and celebrants, he is 'mad' (765). It is consonant with these Dionysian intimations that he comes to unite life and death as a 'living corpse' (1167).

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[52] As Griffith (1999) 318–19 notes. On the relationship between this passage and Eleusinian ritual, see Seaford (1994a) 381–82. On 'salvationist' mystery cults in Magna Graecia, see Henrichs (1990) 267–69; Parker (1995); and Casadio and Johnston (2009). Though there appears to have been no specific cult of Dionysus at Eleusis, aspects of divinity associated with him (Zagreus, Iakchos, Orpheus) are prominent. See Burkert (1985) 287, 296–300; Graf (1974) 46–69.

[53] Kahn (1979) 264.

[54] This equation is made explicit if we accept either Diels' or Kranz's proposed emendations for D101 = B77. In any case it seems implicit in D100 = B36, whilst D103 = B118 states that 'a dry soul [i.e. not drunk], wisest and best'. In favour of this interpretation, see Kahn (1979) 264; Granger (2013) 190.

[55] Most (2013) discusses Heraclitus on religion and provides a critical overview of earlier interpretations.

[56] Text and tr. here from Laks and Most (2016). For discussion of the fragment, see Most (2013) 160–61.

[57] *Pace* Scullion (1998) 119, the claim that 'nothing in the text suggests that Dionysos is in any way interested or involved in what is happening' seems to me to place too-stringent conditions on what would have to 'suggest' a god's involvement in a Sophoclean tragedy. On Dionysus in the odes, see further Winnington-Ingram (1980) 91–116.

IV. Cosmology, language, rationality and initiation

How, then, could these parallels affect our reading of *Antigone*? It might immediately be objected that they are too generic to be significant. *Dikē* is a prominent theme throughout Archaic and Classical Greek literature. The 'justice of opposites' reflects a wider tendency in Greek cosmological thought, evident also in medical and other non-philosophical sources, and so would not have called to mind Heraclitus or the Presocratics in particular. Thus, the fifth-century physician and astronomer Alcmaeon of Croton saw disease as caused by an imbalance of the opposite qualities within the body, the moist and dry, the cold and hot, the bitter and sweet, and so on (D30 = B4 = Aëtius 5.30.1). Similar theories abound in the Hippocratic corpus (for example, *VM* 14; *De natura hominis* 4).[58] These may have developed from more traditional views, such as the polar opposition between Olympian and Chthonic deities which was symbolized by the practice of sacrificing white animals to the former and black ones to the latter.[59] Moreover, the two engagements with Dionysus share features that are more widely attested in portrayals of the god: he typically brings madness (for example, Eur. *Bacch.* 326; Pl. *Phdr.* 265), and his connection with the cycle of life and death is attested in one of the mysterious bone tablets from Olbia (*Orphicorum fragmenta* 564–66 Bernabé), one of which is inscribed with the words 'Death life death', 'Truth', 'Dio[nysos?]', 'Orphic[s?]', and has been dated to the fifth century.[60] The fact that Heraclitus and Sophocles both refer to the god in the context of the relationship between life and death need hardly result from a direct connection, since the god more generally has eschatological associations. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that the type of cosmological speculation that Heraclitus represents can shed light on the meaning and effects of Sophocles' drama. The basic fact that there is this particular confluence of various points of similarity is noteworthy; not all Archaic or Classical Greek texts display these different features (contrast genres such as iambic, comedy or rhetoric). The comparison exposes the way in which the play touches on cosmological questions that had been explicitly addressed by thinkers such as Heraclitus, concerning the wider unseen forces that frame both human behaviour and the natural world.

More specifically, the parallels with Heraclitus, when bolstered by other contextual evidence, have some implications for our interpretation of Sophocles' language and of the model of rationality *Antigone* propounds. I have argued that both Heraclitus and Sophocles present sensory phenomena as a kind of language or semiotic system. For Heraclitus, this 'cosmic' language is also evident in normal human speech. Names express only one side to the coin, one opposite that is in fact somehow unified with its converse. The bow's name, *bios*, hints at life, but its function is death (D53 = B48). One wise thing 'is both willing and unwilling to be spoken of by the name of Zeus' (οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα, D45 = B32), probably because Zeus signifies life, an entity that, for Heraclitus, is indissolubly connected to its opposite, death (*cf.* D68 = B88; D70 = B62).[61]

Language, for Heraclitus, is thus a natural phenomenon that warrants the same sort of analysis as other sensory experience (*cf.* also D55 = B23). In *Antigone*, there are grounds for suspecting that the 'language' or 'signs' of the cosmos are also manifest in the actual language of the characters. Teiresias 'reads' the behaviour of birds, but the imagery of bird cries has occurred elsewhere: the chorus compare Polyneices to an eagle (112) and, in the famous first stasimon, celebrate humanity's ability to hunt birds (342); the guard likens Antigone's cry on discovering the uncovered Polyneices (424–28) to that of a bird. It is a truism of Sophoclean criticism that his characters are often unaware of the full significance of their speech.[62] Thus, the chorus and the guard do not realize that their language, along with that of Teiresias, forms part of a pattern of imagery which hints at a web of causation linking Polyneices' invasion, Antigone's burial and the pollution of Teiresias' altar. A further respect in which *Antigone*'s characters conform to this principle is in their use of oppositions and antitheses that hint at a world structured by polar opposites. Language, in this play, reveals the workings of the cosmos, even unbeknownst to its speakers. In both Heraclitus' cosmos and the world of Sophocles' play, mortal language, if interpreted correctly, reveals something about the underlying structure of the universe, even though its speakers may be unaware of the fact. In this respect, the parallel of Heraclitus provides an insight into the use of dramatic irony in the play, one of the most widely celebrated features of Sophoclean dramatic technique: it is not simply an artificial dramatic device, but a function of a particular cosmological outlook.

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[58] See further Lloyd (1966), 20–24.

[59] See Burkert (1985) 199–200, and also, on Greek religious polar oppositions more generally, Lloyd (1966) 41–48.

[60] On the bone tablets, first published in 1978, see M. West (1983) 17–18, 19 fig. 1, pl. 1.

[61] Note the etymological play with the old poetic form Ζηνός recalling its folk etymology with the verb ζῆν, 'to live' (*cf.* Aesch. *Supp.* 584–85; Pl. *Cra.* 396a7). See Kahn (1979) 270–71 and Tor (2017) 103–04.

If this analysis is along the right lines, then *Antigone*, like Heraclitus, presents a world in which rationality consists of an understanding of the underlying cosmic framework, one which is generally unknown to mortals but can be manifest in their language. Teiresias, who values *euboulia* above all other possessions (1050), is the one character who conspicuously displays this quality. Unlike Aeschylus' Cassandra, his powers of divination do not consist in divine rapture, but are a result of his 'skill', *technē* (998), which enables him, like Heraclitus, to decode the signs of the cosmos and live in accordance with its rules. His 'good judgement' does not consist in logical deduction or, unlike some Classical Greek texts, in command of his emotions (note his anger at 1064–90). His model of wisdom contrasts pointedly with that presented in the first stasimon (332–75), which extols the practical skills of hunting animals and governing cities. Such skills seem insufficient in light of the play's course of events, which implies that our actions have a deeper significance. Polyneices' exposure is not only wrong because it brings personal dishonour to Antigone and her family; it has physical consequences (the crying of the birds at 1001–04; the failure of the altars to ignite at 1005–13; the sickness of the city at 1015) that are governed by the rules of the cosmos into which Teiresias has some insight.

The references to Dionysus are also suggestive of this model of rationality. This is above all evident from his appearance in the fifth stasimon, where we noted that his address as the one 'who watches over Italy and rules in the all-receiving vales of Eleusinian Deo' (1118–21) calls to mind his associations with Italian and Eleusinian mysteries. Mystic initiates are often characterized as those who 'know',[63] and appear as privy to cosmological knowledge that remains hidden to the uninitiated. Among other examples, this tendency is most conspicuous from the Derveni papyrus, whose author wrote an explanation of the hidden meanings of an Orphic theogony, probably as a means to provide a 'true' initiation in competition against the other initiators he rails against (col. XX).[64] The association between mystic initiation and wider theogonical/cosmological explanation is one reason why Heraclitus singles out mystic initiates for criticism when promoting his own cosmology, and also why Parmenides and Empedocles use initiation as a metaphor for the process of getting to understand their explanations of the world.[65]

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[62] *Cf.* Winnington-Ingram (1980) 97: 'it is characteristic of the odes of this play that they tend, ironically, to carry a secondary reference to Creon which cannot be in the minds of the singers'.

[63] Initiates as those 'who know' or 'understand': Pind. *fr.* 137; Eur. *Bacch.* 73; Thuc. 3.53.4; *Orphicorum fragmenta* 1a Bernabé.

[64] For this *communis opinio*, see Betegh (2004) 349–72; Graf (2014); and, now, Piano (2016) 107–11. For alternative (and to my mind less persuasive) views, see Janko (1997) and Kouremenos et al. (2006) 52–59. For other instances where initiation seems to involve the acquisition of cosmological/theogonical knowledge, see, on the 'Orphic' gold tablets, Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008) 41–42 and Graf and Johnston (2013) 113–14; and the explanations of Eleusinian initiation espoused, for instance, by Richardson (1974) 24–28 and Bremmer (2014) 11–16.

In *Antigone*, the cosmological associations of Dionysiac initiation are activated by the description of the god 'leading a chorus of fire-breathing stars' (1146–47), as if he governs the movement of the constellations and the cycle of the seasons.[66] There are even indications that the acquisition of cosmological knowledge is a form of initiation, in particular concerning Creon's education. The chorus express reluctance to state openly that Creon himself has made a mistake with the conditional, 'if it is right to speak' (εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, 1259), a locution that recalls the formulaic preface for speech that was reserved for the initiated: 'I will speak to those for whom it is right' (φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί).[67] The quality of Creon's actions thus takes on the status of a truth preserved for initiates. Creon himself, in the process of discovering the misguided nature of his actions, undergoes a kind of initiation: like initiates of various kinds, including those at Eleusis, he has to enter a cavernous space to acquire a life-changing revelation.[68] Only, instead of encountering the goddess Persephone/Kore,[69] he finds the mortal Antigone who, in being 'married' to an underworld deity (816), has taken on Persephone's role in perverse fashion.[70] Like an initiate, Creon acquires knowledge, but it is the terrible realization that he is responsible for his son's death. Appropriately for this initiatory framework, Dionysus may indeed bring a 'purification', just as the Chorus request (1144), but this is a purification in blood.[71] Creon, like the initiates, and like the students of Parmenides and Empedocles, gains cosmological insight concerning the distinction between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead, but unlike them he does so at immense personal expense.

How, then, does Antigone herself stack up against this model? She is proven right in her judgement of the situation, but her judgement is an intuitive one, and she expresses uncertainty as to whether it is correct (521, 925–28). In a speech that has seemed most problematic to scholars, she claims at 905–15 that she would not have disobeyed Creon's edict for a child or a husband, since she could find another husband or conceive another child, but that, with her parents deceased, she could have no other brother (909–10).[72] Some have argued that this speech conflicts with her previous assertions that she buried Polyneices in order to obey divine laws (especially 450–60, 519; *cf.* 24, 74, 77), thereby betraying her true motivation: her emotional attachment to her brother. On this interpretation, it is an irrational, *post hoc* attempt to justify her burial of Polyneices.[73] However, as Foley has pointed out, obedience to divine laws does not conflict with, and may consist in, the personal commitment to bury Polyneices, and Antigone may stress different (though equally valid) reasons to different addressees for rhetorical purposes.[74] Of course, part of the point of the passage may be to raise precisely these questions, to prompt discussion of Antigone's motivations and whether they constitute good judgement. I want to propose that one of the ways in which it does this is by situating her scenario within a wider cosmological framework. Like Intaphrenes' wife in Herodotus' account (3.119), which this speech closely resembles and to which it may allude,[75] Antigone provides an impressive argument, appealing to principles that had not been taken into consideration by her male addressees. Her speech reveals that she values the maintenance of a certain cosmic balance: her children or her husband would be replaceable (909–10), but her brother cannot be replaced and therefore must be buried in the appropriate manner. The tacit premise is that the irreplaceable dead must be placed where they belong. What matters is not the individual, whether, say, Antigone was particularly fond of Polyneices or her putative son, but his place in the family structure. To this extent, she shows an awareness that her actions are enmeshed within a wider cosmic framework.

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[65] On the initiatory language in Parmenides' proem (D4 = B1), see Burkert (1969) especially 3–5; on Empedocles D257 = B110, see Willi (2008) 236–37. For Empedocles' connections to Orphic-Bacchic mystery cult more generally, see Riedweg (1995) and Rodríguez (2005).

[66] According to a scholiast *ad loc.*, he is called chorus-leader of the stars 'according to a mystic formula (μυστικὸν λόγον)'.

[67] *Orphicorum fragmenta* 1b Bernabé, with similar expressions at Empedocles D44 = B3.4; Eur. *Bacch.* 474. For further allusions to Eleusinian ritual at this point in the play, see Seaford (1990) 87–89 and (1994a) 381–82. On Sophocles and mystery cult more generally, see Seaford (1994b).

[68] See Ustinova (2009) especially 232–55. At Eleusis the appearance of Persephone seems to have been staged in the cave.

[69] For the process of initiation at Eleusis, involving a blindfolded search for Persephone and her ultimate appearance, see Clinton (2003) and Bremmer (2014) 1–20.

[70] Goldhill (1986) 102.

[71] As Oudemans and Lardinois (1987) 159 and Bierl (1989) argue, *pace* Henrichs (1990) 264–69 and (1994) 77; Scullion (1998) persuasively argues that Dionysus' 'purificatory foot' refers to ritual dancing, a homeopathic cure for madness, but we need not deny further connotations to this highly charged term, and its proximity to an Eleusinian reference is suggestive of the purificatory rituals in initiation ceremonies, for which see Bremmer (2014) 5 and note, for example, Pl. *Resp.* 2.364b2–365a3, and the 'pure from the pure' expression in some of the gold tablets, *OF* 488–49.

[72] I follow the recent consensus that these lines are genuine, and not a later interpolation, as has sometimes been thought (for example, Winnington-Ingram (1980) 145). In their favour, see Griffith (1999) *ad loc.*

However, the play does not supply an obvious answer to the major questions her speech raises, of whether, if this were a husband or child, she would lack equivalent obligations, or, more generally, whether a woman's loyalty rests with her natal or her marital family.[76] She provides a glimpse of an overarching cosmology, but without elaborating or elucidating it. In fact, the details of the play's cosmology are, like that of Heraclitus, hard to grasp: aside from the basic point that even the corpses of traitors deserve burial, a point which is not immediately obvious and only emerges through the course of the drama, its details are kept obscure to the audience. Antigone's speech is one component, along with the patterns of imagery and linguistic antitheses, that conveys the suggestion of a coherent cosmological framework underlying the events of the play, a framework which would allow the characters to evaluate their actions successfully, if only they had access to it. The long-standing view that Creon and Antigone represent, respectively, the polis and *oikos*, may fail to do justice to the complexity of two fully fleshed-out individuals who are entangled in a complex web of relationships and competing responsibilities; this is not *simply* 'the story of the clash of opposites: male *versus* female, age *versus* youth, religion *versus* secularism'.[77] Yet the characters inhabit a world that appears to be governed by such opposing forces as had been shaped neatly into coherent cosmologies by Heraclitus and other near-contemporary thinkers. The play does not offer an explicit and readily comprehensible cosmological system to compete with those of the Presocratics, but it tantalizes us with the possibility of one, an understanding of the workings of the universe and the repercussions of our actions that is always just beyond our grasp.

V. Conclusion

Adopting an anthropological conception of cosmology, I have tried to demonstrate some of the benefits of reading Attic tragedy against the context of the Presocratics. I have refrained from the traditional intertextual approach of hunting for allusions to, or direct influences of, particular theories, since such points of contact are usually very hard to verify.[78] Instead, my contention is that the Presocratics are a valuable context because they provide explicitly articulated theories of cosmology and epistemology that emerge from roughly the same cultural context as fifth-century Athens. They can therefore throw into relief some of the ways in which this particular Sophoclean tragedy hints at an overarching cosmology, and can flesh out our understanding of the predicaments in which the characters find themselves. According to both Heraclitus and the *Antigone*, there is a systematic, overarching cosmological framework that is manifest in sensory phenomena, and against which mortal actions should be evaluated. In both cases, this is a framework that is hard for the masses to comprehend, and consequently mortals fall into folly. But there is an important, general contrast in the way this folly is treated. Heraclitus shows utter contempt for mortals' inability to grasp the overarching framework (for example, D1 = B1, D2 < B2, D3 = B17, D4 = B34, D5 = B19): they are 'uncomprehending when they have heard, like deaf people' (D4 = B34) and their opinions are 'children's toys' (D6 < B70). Sophocles, however, in giving voice to one who, disastrously, only comes to a late and partial cosmological understanding, provokes sympathy. Though Creon is in an extraordinary situation, as the head of a household with responsibilities for his dependants, he is more of an 'everyman' than the hermitic Teiresias. Part of the force of the play, then, is in revealing how our cosmological convictions may fail, with disastrous consequences, to accord with the wider principles of the cosmos. If tragedy does indeed elicit sympathy for characters in such situations as we might find ourselves, then in Creon's case, this is not because we might actually make an authoritarian edict that turns out to have disastrous consequences, nor because we may unwittingly irritate the gods and suffer their punishment; it is rather that we recognize what it is like to have our once firmly held assumptions retrospectively proven false or inadequate by the course of events. *Antigone* is not only 'philosophical' in the ethical problems it poses; it shares with the Presocratics an epistemological and metaphysical concern for the gap between being and seeming.

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[73] Thus, Blundell (1989) 134; Garvie (2017) 20–21. See also n.13 above.

[74] Foley (2001) 172–83.

[75] On this issue, see the full discussion of West (1999).

[76] For Foley (2001) 179, Antigone's argument 'relies on the point that there is no other family member left to perform obligations for her blood kin', but if that is so, it is not a point she makes explicitly. For further criticism of Foley's interpretation, see Trapp (1996).

[77] Stuttard (2017) 1.

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[78] Contrast the intertextual approach of Arp (2006), and the focus of Allan (2007) on 'the influence of early Greek philosophical thought on tragedy' (p. 71). Whilst such an influence can hardly be doubted, it is hard to pinpoint with much precision. For the possibility that Heraclitus influenced *Philoctetes*, see Goldhill (2012) 34 n.45.

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