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## ANTIGONE 925–28 AND ANTIGONE'S FAITH

*Abstract:* The conclusion of Antigone's speech (925–8) comprises two pairs of formally balanced verses which convey two possibilities: that Antigone at the very end of her life either believes the gods to be on her side or not. Rather than expressions of her genuine uncertainty, the verses are usually interpreted as a rhetorical (or even ironic) affirmation of her belief in divine support. Yet a consideration of the dynamics of her inner life, i. e. her psychological reversal, and of the plight she is facing at this very moment of the play suggests that her confidence may now be truly shaken: she has grown uncertain of what she wants and sees as connected with her own well-being. Nevertheless, she clings to the belief that the burial of her brother was in accordance with the divine law. This belief, however, is now no more based on a firm conviction (as it seemed to be in the first part of the play) but on hope. Therefore, her state of mind as depicted in her final speech (891–928) comes close to what is dubbed by J. Bishop as the 'hope model of faith'.

### I

While Antigone's final speech (821–928) "is one of the most discussed passages in one of the world's most famous works of literature",<sup>1</sup> discussions have largely focused on lines 904–20 and their authenticity,<sup>2</sup> while the speech as a whole has received less attention. There is hardly a line in the play *Antigone* that has not been subject to diverging interpretations: this applies as well to the concluding lines of the speech (925–28), illuminated from various aspects both in many annotated editions and in monographs

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<sup>1</sup> M. Cropp, 'Antigone's Final Speech (Sophocles, "Antigone" 891–928)', *Greece and Rome* 44.2 (1997), 138. In contrast to many important interpreters, Cropp's chief purpose is to demonstrate that the passage can only be properly understood by "recognizing that the whole speech is shaped rhetorically as a public address [...] that Antigone is stating a position, not merely pondering her fate", 139.

<sup>2</sup> Literature on this topic is extensive. For an overview of the discussion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see S. Reiter, *ZöG* 49 (1898), 961 ff.; up to 1980 see T. A. Szlezák, 'Bemerkungen zur Diskussion um Sophokles, *Antigone* 904–920', *RM* 124 (1981), 108–42; for a briefer treatment of later studies, see Cropp, 156 n. 11.

treating the play or its author, Sophocles. Still, the content and position of these lines (Antigone's last words spoken in the iambic trimeter) suggest an even greater significance than is generally acknowledged. They are important for a holistic insight into Antigone's dynamic inner life and her – final – view on Polynices' burial. It is of course the reflection on Antigone's character or personality and on her reasons for burying Polynices that leads to the key issues of this play – issues traditionally addressed by conflicting, often even incompatible answers, as the play has been discussed within different hermeneutic compasses and by vastly different methods. The purpose of the present study is much narrower: to shed light on the question whether Antigone at the very end believes the gods to be on her side or not, or, more precisely, whether she equates the will of the gods with her own.

## II

The conclusion of Antigone's speech (925–8) comprises two pairs of formally balanced<sup>3</sup> verses which convey two possibilities: that her fate (capital punishment) either is or is not agreeable to the gods. In either case, the apodosis depends on the judgment of the gods:

ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν οὖν τάδ' ἐστὶν ἐν θεοῖς καλὰ,  
παθόντες ἂν ξυγγοῖμεν ἡμαρτηκότες·  
εἰ δ' οἶδ' ἄμαρτάνουσι, μὴ πλείω κακὰ  
πάθοιεν ἢ καὶ δρῶσιν ἐκδίκως ἐμέ.

The passage provoking disagreement is line 926. The verb ξυγγοῖμεν is usually translated either as 'recognize / become aware/be conscious that' or as 'acknowledge/agree/confess that'. The translation of the verb is determined by our interpretation of the syntax of the participles. In the former translation, ἡμαρτηκότες is construed as the object and παθόντες as a temporal / modal adverbial adjunct: "after / through suffering I shall recognize that I have transgressed."<sup>4</sup> In the latter case, on the other hand, παθόντες is construed as the object and ἡμαρτηκότες as an adjunct of cause: "I shall acknowledge that I have suffered for having transgressed."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The symmetry of Antigone's last speech is minutely analyzed by a number of scholars, cf. S. Benardete, 'A Reading of Sophocles' Antigone, III', *Interpretation* 5 (1975), 148–84, 149; 154; P. Riemer, *Sophokles, Antigone – Götterwille und menschliche Freiheit*, Stuttgart, 1991, 43; Cropp, 148–50.

<sup>4</sup> The oldest and most widespread interpretation, already suggested in the *scholia vetera*, *ad loc.*: εἰ ταῦτα τοῖς θεοῖς ἀρέσκει παθόντες τὴν τιμωρίαν <ἂν> γνοίμεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν.

<sup>5</sup> First suggested in G. Hermann's commentary on the third edition of *Sophoclis 'Antigona'.* *Instruxit G. A. Erfurdt*, Leipzig, 1830. Both translations quoted above are adopted from Cropp, 140.

For grammatical reasons,<sup>6</sup> V. Rosivach<sup>7</sup> favours yet a third possibility, rendering the verb *ξυγγνωίμεν* as ‘forgive’: “having suffered these things I would be forgiving, since I will have been wrong in what I did.”<sup>8</sup> This suggestion, while not unproblematic in terms of grammar,<sup>9</sup> raises some additional objections in terms of content. Certainly, the two pairs of lines form a balance of content if the first pair conveys Antigone’s willingness to forgive Creon if she has been in the wrong, while the second wishes him ill if he has acted unjustly. However, if it should transpire that Antigone has acted counter to divine will – unreal as this hypothesis may seem to her in Rosivach’s account – she would be the guilty one and Creon an instrument of divine punishment. In this case, it would hardly behove her to talk about forgiveness. Another objection concerns Rosivach’s claim that the first pair of verses is ironic: that Antigone’s display of humility and willingness to forgive Creon serves rhetorical effect only. But a simulated and unreal possibility could hardly form a proper balance to the single real alternative – with the effect that the much-lauded symmetry of the passage would be weakened.<sup>10</sup> The crucial problem, however, lies elsewhere: how is the participle *παθόντες* to be understood? If taken *stricto sensu* to mean ‘suffering punishment’, Antigone’s guilt is as good as proven: the punishment is already taking place and she is already suffering it, being led to her stone prison / grave.<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking, the moment when she should forgive Creon should have

<sup>6</sup> Both cases display “an apparently unparalleled use of the verb *συγγινώσκω*. It is regularly used by other authors in the sense ‘be conscious [that...]’ with a supplementary participle in indirect discourse; but when the verb is so used it seems always to be found with a reflexive pronoun in the dative. On the other hand, *συγγινώσκω* can be used without a reflexive dative in the sense ‘confess [that...]’; but when it is so used the indirect statement is apparently never expressed by a participle.”

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Interpretation of Sophocles *Antigone* 926’, *CP* 84 (1989), 116–19.

<sup>8</sup> This interpretation is in fact an ancient one. As the oldest example, Rosivach quotes Camerarius’ paraphrase from the *Antigone* commentary in *Σοφοκλέους τραγωδία ἐπτὰ / Sophoclis tragoediae septem ... auctore Ioachimo Camerario*, Grossehain, 1534, 85: “si mea poena et Dis probatur et ego merito sustineo, veniam datam volo iis qui me perdunt, sin plector iniuste, videant ne plus sibi accersant meo supplicio quam ego accipiam.”

<sup>9</sup> “First, *ξυγγνωίμεν* ‘forgive’ needs an object, which Rosivach supplies with difficulty by understanding *τοῖσδε*, ‘these people’, in anticipation of *οἶδε* in 927”, Cropp, 140.

<sup>10</sup> Another argument in favour of a symmetrical structure is “the precise counterpointing of words between two couplets of 925–8: ‘good ... evils (*καλά:κακά*)’, ‘the gods ... these men (*θεοῖς : οἶδε*)’, ‘suffered ... suffer (*παθόντες : πάθειεν*)’, ‘done wrong ... doing wrong (*ἡμαρτηκότες : ἁμαρτάνουσι*)’”, *ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the entire *komos* (801–75).

come already – which, of course, makes no sense.<sup>12</sup> But if the aorist participle is interpreted in a more common way, as *antecedens* (‘after having suffered’), the expression could – given the nature of the punishment – hardly mean anything other than ‘after death’. However, Antigone’s only interest in the life ‘beyond’,<sup>13</sup> is her φίλοι as she stresses throughout the play and in her final speech in particular,<sup>14</sup> and these definitely exclude Creon. Moreover, while she does use irony, even sarcasm, on several occasions and perhaps even in the immediate context, in line 928,<sup>15</sup> she never levels it at life after death, in stark contrast to Creon.<sup>16</sup>

Cropp quotes a grammatical and contextual<sup>17</sup> parallel to this passage from Hesiod (*Works* 218), where the participle παθών is used without an object and associated with the verb ἔγνω which likewise lacks an explicit object.<sup>18</sup> On this basis he suggests a para-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. W. Humphreys, *The Antigone of Sophocles*, New York, 1891, 151. Humphreys rejects the translation of ξυγγνωίμεν ἡμαρτηκότες as ‘become conscious of my error’, “since παθόντες cannot be the means; for in that case her suffering at all (which is now certainty) would be proof of her guilt”. Moreover, he argues against taking ξυγγνωίμεν to mean ‘acknowledge’, “since this would force us to seek some other meaning in παθόντες than the punishment she is about to suffer”.

<sup>13</sup> The life or world beyond the grave is designated in *Antigone* by a number of more or less synonymous terms: 75: τοῖς κάτω; 76: ἐκεῖ; 519: Ἄιδης; 524: □ κάτω. The expression κατασκαφῆς οἴκησις ἀείφρουρος refers both to the grave and to the life beyond it: Antigone is said to enter it to join her kin (891–3).

<sup>14</sup> 73–6; 511–23; 891–903.

<sup>15</sup> This interpretation of her utterance μὴ πλείω κακά πάθοιεν (sc. Creon) is found in Cropp, 140. But there are others: R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles. The Plays and Fragments III: The Antigone*, Cambridge<sup>3</sup>, 1900, 167, *ad loc.*: “She can imagine no worse fate”; similarly M. Griffith, *Sophocles, Antigone*, Cambridge, 1999, 281, *ad loc.*: “‘equal’ (because none greater evil could be imagined).” On the other hand, G. Müller, *Sophokles Antigone*, Heidelberg, 1976, 198, vigorously argues in favour of Vauvilliers’ conjecture: “Das übelieferte πλείω ist nur mit Künstelei zu verteidigen [...] dafür ist μὴ μείω κακά [...] der geforderte, einfache und kräftige Ausdruck.”

<sup>16</sup> 525–6; 777–80; 1039–44. Some critics perceive no sarcasm or blasphemy in Creon’s words of vv. 777–80, cf. Calder, ‘Sophokles’ Political Tragedy, *Antigone*’, *GRBS* 9 (1968), 389–407, 400 n. 48; C. W. Oudemans and A. Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity. Anthropology, Philology and Sophocles’ Antigone*, Leiden, 1987, 185; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘Assumptions and the creation of meaning: reading Sophocles’ Antigone’, *JHS* 109 (1989), 134–48, 146.

<sup>17</sup> Griffith, 281, *ad loc.* quotes another: πάθει μάθος, Aeschylus, *Ag.* 177, while adding a parallel to 928: δράσαντα παθεῖν (“The doer must suffer”), Aeschylus, *Cho.* 313.

<sup>18</sup> The meaning of both uncommonly used verbal forms is clear from the context (213–18):

Ω Πέρση, σὺ δ' ἄκουε δίκης μηδ' ὕβριν θφελλε·

phrase synthesizing the two predominant translations of ξυγγνοῖμεν: “If the gods are allowing my punishment because they think Creon has justice on his side, then I am prepared to *infer* from my suffering, *in agreement* with the gods and Creon, that I have transgressed.” Moreover, he notes Sophocles’ frequent use of coinages with σύν<sup>19</sup> and correctly points out that the use of such a coinage is particularly appropriate in this context: “She will abandon the ‘self-determining (αὐτόγνωτος) temper’ to which the Chorus have attributed her ruin (875) and join with the gods and Creon in recognizing her transgression.”

Παθόντες is thus translated in two ways: as ‘to suffer (sc. capital punishment)’<sup>20</sup> or as ‘to die’.<sup>21</sup> The difficulties accompanying the former translation have been outlined already. Still, the particular circumstances of the dramatic situation should be considered. The last scene reveals an Antigone profoundly altered: shocked over her fate, she (vainly) looks to the gods for help.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps she still believes that she will be saved, and even expects a divine intervention to arrest the execution at the last moment. When she ends up in prison, she takes it as a sign that she has been in the wrong, and kills herself. With this interpretation, there is no significant difference if παθόντες is translated as ‘die’: in this case Antigone is saying that she will acknowledge her error by dying (or suicide).

There is still another possible explanation which reads παθόντες strictly temporally, as the *antecedens*: after death. In that case ξυγγνοῖμεν is appropriately translated as ‘become aware’. However death may come, Antigone will perceive her guilt only afterwards.<sup>23</sup> From the very beginning she has dwelt on life after de-

ὔβρις γάρ τε κακῆ δειλῶ βροτῶ, οὐδὲ μὲν ἐσθλὸς  
 ῥηδίως φερέμεν δύναται, βαρῦθει δὲ θ’ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς  
 ἐγκύρσας ἄτησιν· ὁδὸς δ’ ἐτέρηφι παρελθεῖν  
 κρείσσων ἐς τὰ δίκαια· δίκη δ’ ὑπὲρ ὕβριος ἴσχει  
 ἐς τέλος ἐξελοῦσα, παθῶν δὲ τε νήπιος ἔγνω.

That is: “the foolish man [whose foolishness has led him into hybris] has come to know it”, Cropp, 141.

<sup>19</sup> In *Antigone*, these lines are 41, 66, 266, 279, 523, 537, 541, 846.

<sup>20</sup> This translation is adopted by the majority of recent commentaries. For I. Linforth, *Antigone and Creon*, Univ. of Calif. Publ. in Cl. Philol. 15.5 (1961), 230 n. 1, it is a “strange notion that after her death Antigone will become conscious of her guilt”. By contrast, Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Commentaries III: Antigone*, 162, *ad loc.*, finds it perfectly reasonable.

<sup>21</sup> And thus to enter: “in the other world”, Jebb, 167. Similarly Griffith, 281, *ad loc.*: “by suffering (i.e. after I die).”

<sup>22</sup> This is evident not only from her words but also from the Chorus’ lines 929–32.

<sup>23</sup> W. M. Calder III, ‘Was Antigone murdered?’, *GRBS* 3 (1960), 31–35, weighs the possibility that Antigone may have been killed in prison by Haemon, but admits the ambiguity of the text concerning the heroine’s death.

ath, projecting into it all her hopes and desires, and she continues to do so at her final appearance, after her great psychological reversal (in the *komos* and fourth *epeisodion*, vv. 883–943). Against this background, the notion that her error (transgression) will only be revealed to her after death, precisely in the place where she finally expects to rejoin her φίλοι is particularly striking, for it conveys a veiled hint that her hope may be thwarted.

### III

In lines 925–8 Antigone is clearly considering two possibilities: that the gods approve of her punishment (εἰ μὲν οὖν τάδ' ἔστιν ἐν θεοῖς καλὰ) or that they find blameworthy the one who has passed the sentence (εἰ δ' οἷδ' ἀμαρτάνουσι). If she takes both possibilities seriously, she is *at least at this moment* not *absolutely* convinced that the gods are on her side.<sup>24</sup> A number of interpreters, however, dissents: even though she uses a *realis* conditional sentence both times, they claim that the former possibility is inconceivable to her,<sup>25</sup> that she possesses the same inner firmness as before<sup>26</sup> or even a miraculous static quality,<sup>27</sup> while others point to the use of particles suggesting that the second alternative is more likely.<sup>28</sup> Still, there is no doubt that Antigone is greatly altered in her final scene and her state of mind has become very complex,<sup>29</sup> as is evident from the content and manner of her speech. If she used to see premature death as a profit, as the rescue from a life beset by evils (74; 96–7; 460–6), she is now mourning her unfulfilled life

<sup>24</sup> The contrary is maintained by A. Schmitt, ‘Bemerkungen zu Charakter und Schicksal der tragischen Hauptpersonen in der “Antigone”’, *Antike und Abendland* 34.1 (1988), 1–16, 7 n. 30. Schmitt claims that her attitude in this respect is analogous to Creon’s, who equates his purely private wishes and notions of a good ruler with the will of the gods. This is, in Schmitt’s opinion, the ὄβρις □ shared by both protagonists, a character trait which influences their actions and consequently their fates. Similarly, a number of recent interpreters ascribe Antigone’s tragedy to her stubbornness and unwillingness to compromise, without suggesting what kind of compromise she might settle for in her current situation at all, cf. C. Meier, *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie*, München, 1988, 219; M. Coray, *Wissen und Erkennen bei Sophokles*, Schweizerische Beitr. zur Altertumswissenschaft 24, Basel/Berlin, 1993, 59; J. Latacz, *Einführung in die griechische Tragödie*, Göttingen, 1993, 212.

<sup>25</sup> Kamerbeek, 161, *ad loc.*

<sup>26</sup> Müller, 197–8.

<sup>27</sup> W. Schadewaldt, *Die griechische Tragödie*, Frankfurt am Main, 1992<sup>2</sup>, 246.

<sup>28</sup> Griffith, 281, *ad loc.*: “a grimly symmetrical pair of alternatives [...] The introductory particles make clear that the alternatives are not of equal plausibility [...] but then μὲν οὖν emphasizes (as often) the prospect of a more probable sequel (here εἰ δ’... cf. *OT* 496–501).”

<sup>29</sup> For an exceptionally subtle description of her state of mind in the fourth *epeisodion*, see Jebb, xxxi–ii.

and her utter solitude (813–6; 850–2; 876–82). If she used to describe her life after death with firm conviction,<sup>30</sup> she is now reduced to passionately hoping for it (897–9):<sup>31</sup> her only support remains ἄ πολὺπλαγκτος ἐλπίς, ‘much-erring hope’.<sup>32</sup> If she previously justified her rebellion against Creon’s decree by invoking ἄγραπτα κάσφαλιῆ θεῶν νόμιμα (454–5),<sup>33</sup> she is now wondering why she should at all continue looking to the gods for help in her misfortune (922–3). This change is so obvious that it cannot be overlooked or explained away as not consciously motivated.<sup>34</sup> But what could the poet’s motivation be?

According to P. Riemer, who gives a minute description of her change, this is how Sophocles provides Antigone with a new, fresh defence for burying her brother at the cost of her own life: now her motive is fully human, explicated in the much-discussed lines 904–20.<sup>35</sup> But however that may be, Antigone will turn to the gods again at the end of her valedictory monologue (921–8), subjecting to their judgment all that has happened, her motives inclu-

<sup>30</sup> Cf. 73: φίλη μετ’ αὐτοῦ κείσομαι; 76: ἐκεῖ γὰρ αἶε κείσομαι. She displays the same certainty in alluding to Ismene’s future beyond the grave (93–4), emphasizing that the dead (τοῖς κάτω) are more important to her than the living (τῶν ἐνθάδε), cf. 74–6, 559–60.

<sup>31</sup> ἔλθοῦσα μέντοι καρτ’ ἐν ἐλπίσιν τρέφω / φίλη μὲν ἤξειν πατρί, προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί, / μήτηρ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα. This “emphatic ἐλπίζω” (Kamerbeek, 158, *ad loc.*) is additionally emphasized with an adverb of measure. Cf. the Chorus’ lines 615–25 on the ambiguity of hope, which benefits many people (ὄνησις) but deceives many as well (ἀπάτα). This passage is immediately followed by the observation that a mortal whose mind is being led by a god to destruction often perceives evil as good. All this is echoed in Antigone’s anxiety in the last scene.

<sup>32</sup> Griffith, 229, *ad loc.*

<sup>33</sup> Schmitt, 15, reads in this reference an evident sign “einer Tendenz zur Hybris”. The thought is a tempting one, particularly as it is supported by the haughty and often sarcastic tone adopted by Antigone not only in her dialogue with Creon but also with Ismene, esp. in lines 549–51, although her feelings for her sister in the dialogue are complex, cf. Jebb, 106, *ad loc.* Still, it appears somewhat exaggerated: what Antigone declares is not her willingness to obey solely the laws communicated to her personally by Zeus and Dike, but her unwillingness to transgress any of those laws for the sake of a human decree – which, of course, implies an opposition between them and Creon’s decree (458–60). In her opinion, the divine laws rank above the decree, as the latter is (merely) human: οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον φόβῳ τὰ σὰ / κηρύγμαθ’ ὥστ’ ἄγραπτα κάσφαλιῆ θεῶν / νόμιμα δύνασθαι θηγά γ’ ὄνθ’ ὑπερδραμεῖν. She also stresses that the laws are eternal (ἀλλ’ αἶε ποτε / ζῆ ταῦτα) and that they originate with *no* man (κούδεις οἶδεν ἐξ ὄτου ἴφρανη, 457): this in turn implies that they can be appropriated by *nobody* (including herself) while they bind *all* humans (including Creon).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Schmitt, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Riemer, 44–48, sees this new, human justification of Antigone’s act as an additional proof that the lines are authentic.

ded. Her supreme measure of everything – her own actions as well – continues to be the divine law.<sup>36</sup>

In this respect Antigone has not changed after all – not renounced the belief that her action is εὐσέβεια. True, her words have a different ring: at the beginning she described her piety proudly, with an oxymoron ironically targeted at Creon (74: ὄσια πανουργήσασ'); now, by contrast, her words exude anxiety aroused by the unfathomability of the gods (921: ποίαν παρεξελθοῦσα δαιμόνων δίκην;), and her oxymoron is tinged with bitterness (924: τὴν δυσσέβειαν εὐσεβοῦσ' ἔκτησάμην). But even assailed by doubts and anxiety, she still believes that she has acted right (943: τὴν εὐσεβίαν σεβίσασσα) and that it is Creon who is unjust, as suggested by her last – scornful – words about him: πρὸς οἴων ἀνδρῶν πάσχω.<sup>37</sup> Above all, she is now hoping – hoping for a reunion with her φίλοι beyond the grave. This hope, of course, is contingent on the will of the gods, of which she is less certain now.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Even if it should turn out that her convictions (which she never renounces) and actions have run counter to these laws. This possibility is detailed in W. Jens, 'Antigone-Interpretationen' (1952), in: H. Diller (ed.), *Sophokles*, Darmstadt, 1967, 295–310, 308, and still further elaborated in R. Bultmann, 'Polis und Hades in der Antigone des Sophokles', in: H. Diller (ed.), *op. cit.*, 311–24, 312–3; cf. also G. F. Else, *The Madness of Antigone*, Heidelberg 1976, 66.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Kamerbeek, 164, *ad loc.*: "In her last words her condemnation of Creon's conduct is as absolute as in her first."

<sup>38</sup> According to E. Lefèvre, Antigone arrives here at the threshold of self-knowledge – that is, the knowledge of her own (human) limitations – but never actually passes it, at least not explicitly. And even if she did pass it, Lefèvre would consider the event "eine Erkenntnis nicht aus Einsicht, sondern aus Zwang", as in the case of Creon or Philoctetes. This comparison, however, is wobbly in several respects. Firstly, Creon and Philoctetes (unwittingly) act counter to the will of the gods, to the harm of their polis or countrymen, until they are forced to change by an exceptional outside intervention (the advent of Teiresias or Hercules as a *deus ex machina*). Antigone, by contrast, acts in accordance with (what she believes to be) the gods' will with no external authority to rely on. Seen in this light, her own interest (her brother's burial) coincides with the divine law, and her 'autonomy' (the term used by the Chorus: 821: αὐτόνομος; 875: αὐτόγνωτος ὄργα) is not the same as Creon's αὐθαδία (1028). Both speeches by Teiresias (998–1046; 1064–86) suggest that the latter is harmful to the Theban polis, something Antigone's 'autonomy' is not, although this is not explicitly stated: if she could carry it out and bury Polynices, Thebes would not be afflicted by divine wrath. The implication is that Creon's αὐθαδία is harmful because it has suppressed Antigone's alleged 'autonomy' – which is essentially not autonomy in any existentialist sense but rather reverence for the divine law which. To this law Creon yields explicitly against his will (1094; 1102; 1105–6; 1113–4), while Antigone clings to it to the end despite her doubts and the lack of all evidence. She might be described as aware of her limitations from the very beginning because she is ever conscious of her mortality, but her awareness in the last scene grows much more radical as her certainty about afterlife is weakened by her utter abandonment by both humans and gods.



## IV

Application of such philosophical and theological categories as have evolved from analyzing modern Western models of monotheistic faith to descriptions of Ancient Greek faith is dubious in many respects. Nevertheless it is safe to say that the depiction of Antigone's state of mind startlingly accords with what is dubbed by J. Bishop as the 'hope model of faith'<sup>39</sup> and defined with Muyskens' formulation: "one who hopes, 'keep[s] his life open or fluid with respect to [a-faith proposition]  $p$  – where (a) neither  $p$  or not- $p$  is certain for him, (b) he wants  $p$  and (c) he sees  $p$  as connected with his own well-being'."<sup>40</sup> Antigone longs for a *post mortem* reunion with her φίλοι, staking on it all her well-being, but has grown uncertain as to its realization. Even her last step is taken in view of this faith, which is hope rather than belief. In this respect she has no parallel among Sophocles' suicidal protagonists. The suicide to which she is driven by exceptional circumstances is not (or at least not exclusively) portrayed as an irrational flight from intolerable life situation, as it seems to be in the case of Eurydice or Deianeira or Jocasta, or as an honourable retreat to Hades, as in the case of Ajax: rather, it is the ultimate test whether her convictions and actions had been 'objectively' justified (in her words: ἐν θεοῖς καλᾶ). There is no reliable external authority to assure her about the correct interpretation of divine laws, as this assurance is granted to Oedipus in both Oedipus plays as well as to Philoctetes, as Heracles is furnished in advance with prophetic instructions which guide him to his death on the pyre – the transition to another world, or as Creon finally yields to Teiresias and the Chorus, although he is persuaded to do so by the former benefits of the seer's advice for the city rather than by the authority of the seer's vocation. What, then, has Antigone to lean on?

It has been suggested recently that Antigone arrives at a "true insight into the divine world, but is unable to bear the reality of the divided cosmos; tragic insight is the insight that the cosmos is divine order, yet unbearable to human beings and therefore unacceptable".<sup>41</sup> In other words, for a human being the ultimate reality is knowable but intolerable. The crux is, however, that Antigone at the end has *no* reliable insight into the ultimate reality: her only 'in-

<sup>39</sup> J. Bishop, 'Faith', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),

URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/faith/>>.

<sup>40</sup> J. Muyskens, *The Sufficiency of Hope: The Conceptual Foundations of Religion*, Philadelphia, 1979, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Oudemans, Lardinois, 189. For a more extensive criticism of their interpretation see M. F. Fresco, 'Antigone und Anthropologie', *Mnemosyne* 47 (1994), 289–318.

sight' is that she cannot glimpse this reality before her death without divine intervention. Why is that? While the text does not make it clear where Antigone and the others have learnt about the unwritten laws, it is reasonable to suppose that these have been traditionally established in the Theban society. Antigone's interpretation of ἄγραπτα νόμια as the supreme command is corroborated by Teiresias' appearance at the end of the play; there are earlier hints that her interpretation is shared by the Thebans<sup>42</sup> (504–5; 509; 690–700; 733),<sup>43</sup> and, finally, unwritten laws are known to have had great historical significance, which is certainly important for any attempt to reconstruct the horizons of the original audience.<sup>44</sup> But just when Antigone's fate is being decided, these laws are *politically* annulled; the political pressure is strong enough to isolate the heroine<sup>45</sup> and shake even *her* certainty.<sup>46</sup> The audience of Sophocles' plays would have sympathized with her uncertainty because they did not distinguish between politics and religion,<sup>47</sup> and their perspective was presumably shared by the characters of *Antigone*.<sup>48</sup> Here lies the heroine's unique tragic quality, and her faith in such circumstances can only be maintained through hope.

<sup>42</sup> Lines 504–505 and 509 refer to the Chorus, and Haemon's words in lines 690–700 and 733 to all Theban people (733: ὀμόπολις λεώς). Lines 164–5 suggest that the Chorus cannot be simply equated with the demos.

<sup>43</sup> Certain critics see in these hints a "persistent element of indeterminacy among the 'internal audiences' of the play", Griffith, 209, *ad loc.* While we readers admittedly cannot accurately gauge the belief of the people (Griffith, 242, *ad* 692–3), it hardly seems likely that the entire population could share in Creon's error. Ismene, who begins by respecting Creon's decree despite her disapproval (65–7), later sides with Antigone, thus risking her own life (536 ff.).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. E. M. Harris, 'Sophocles and Athenian Law', in: K. Ormond (ed.), *A Companion to Sophocles*, Malden, MA Oxford, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 287–300, 288–91. Harris provides a list of the most recent literature on the topic.

<sup>45</sup> This utter solitude, however, is somewhat qualified by Ismene after her change of heart, by Haemon, and even by Antigone's own words (504–505 and 509).

<sup>46</sup> Such questions as why Teiresias fails to appear earlier or why he has no word of praise for Antigone cannot be definitely answered on the basis of the text: any attempt at an answer is necessarily a matter of speculation and aesthetic perspective, presupposing that the events depicted are real but selectively presented in the play. This problematic method of interpretation is cogently presented and illustrated by examples from Sophocles' plays by A. J. A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.

<sup>47</sup> Harris, 288.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed account of the connection between Sophocles' tragedy and the political situation in which it was staged, as well as for a list of the most recent literature on this topic, cf. R. Osborne, 'Sophocles and Contemporary Politics', in: K. Ormond (ed.), *A Companion to Sophocles*, Malden, MA Oxford, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 270–86.