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İçindekiler

Sophocles' Antigone and the Paradoxes of Language

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Among humankind's civilising achievements, as the chorus of Sophocles' Antigone lists them in the first stasimon, is the acquisition of language, conjoined in the choral catalogue with *astunomous orgas* – the 'disposition that regulates cities', in Jebb's translation of the phrase[1]. Following directly upon the chorus's account of man's mastery over the animals, this conjunction emphasises that humankind has similarly found a way to master – and organize – itself. In the perspective of the choral ode, learning language and acquiring 'the disposition that regulates cities' are not successive stages in a process of becoming civilised, but are complementary aspects of a single dynamic[2].

In a powerful 1986 essay, N. Loraux elucidated Thucydides' scrutiny of the volcanic force of language in the *polis*, that riven city – the city in *stasis* – in which words inverted their meanings[3]. In a perhaps less well-known, but equally far-reaching article on Antigone[4], she drew attention to the play's understanding that the *polis* is everywhere implicated in language.

No less than does Thucydides' passage on the *stasis* in Corcyra[5], the play shows how integral and inextricable the writers understand the link to be between language itself and the constructed order of the city[6]. The evidence for their interdependence is more pervasive than

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[1] For a discussion of the management of tensions in the democratic city and the political meanings of *orgê*, see Allen 2000.

[2] In their analysis of this stasimon, Oudemans – Lardinois (1987) 355, write, 'In the second strophe it has already been implied that the social relation of living together in the polis is impossible without the institution of laws: *astunomos* means "giving law to the city". The importance of this distinction shines through in the double meaning of the words *hypsipolis* and *apolis*. These words mean "who is citiless" and "who is high in the city" as well as "whose city is no city" and "whose city is high"... This is understandable: in an interconnected cosmology, whoever fails to separate justice from injustice will be an outcast, but his city itself is then endangered as well, especially if the evil-doer should be high in the city, i.e., one of its leaders'; see Oudemans – Lardinois (1987) 124.

[3] Loraux 1986a, 95-134. A number of the ideas adumbrated in this article are developed further in Loraux's influential collection published in 1997.

[4] Loraux 1986b, 165-196.

[5] Thuc. Hist. 3.69-85.

[6] See the assessment of tragic language in Segal 1981, 52: 'Language is not just the medium of tragedy; it is in itself an element of the tragic situation. The metaphors of Greek tragic poetry bend the cosmological, social and linguistic order together in a common suffering'. By raising 'the problem of all human communication which is, in turn, the basis of all society', tragic language in its elevation 'affirms the order-imposing power of the human *logos*. On the other hand, the density, syntactical and lexical ambiguity, and irony of language in tragedy threaten the *logos* even as they enrich and exploit its resources to the fullest'. Among the more recent explorations of questions of language in Antigone in particular, especially valuable are those by Foley 2001, 172-200 and Goldhill 2012, 231-248.

is sometimes recognized in the discussions of the play's dominant ethical antinomies that have tended, understandably, to preoccupy criticism of the Antigone[7]. Yet it is the very articulation of such antitheses that points to the ways in which the play implicates language in the condition of civic discord it dramatises.

In the course of Antigone's central and decisive exchange with Creon at 441-525, she prods him to bring their confrontation to its conclusion with the challenge[8]:

> τί δῆτα μέλλεις; ὡς ἐμοὶ τῶν σῶν λόγων
> ἀρεστὸν οὐδὲν μηδ᾽ ἀρεσθείη ποτέ·
> οὕτω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τἄμ᾽ ἀφανδάνοντ᾽ ἔφυ.

Their language cannot be acceptable to each other – or, in the root meaning of *aresko*, their words do not fit each other. This seems paradoxical, in that from the first words they say to each other, they express themselves in a common vocabulary – one that in fact lays stress on the notion of verbal accord and affirmation:

> φὴς ἢ καταρνεῖ μὴ δεδρακέναι τάδε· /καὶ φημὶ δρᾶσαι κοὐκ ἀπαρνοῦμαι τὸ μή.

('Do you say or do you deny that you have done this?' 'I say that I did it and I do not deny it[9]'; 442-443)

But from the outset the verbal patterning in the play gives us reason to understand that Antigone here is drawing attention to more than the obvious fact that she and Creon are at odds or do not like what the other is saying[10]. The two agree on what has taken place; they even agree on what words to use to describe it. What they disagree on is what those words mean.

It is important to note that the issue here is not treachery, manipulation, evasion or obscurity – at all of which language is notoriously adept. Nor is it the difficulty of reconciling integrity with words (cf. Philoctetes), finding terms for the unspeakable (cf. Oresteia), or uttering the unutterable (Oedipus Tyrannos). Closest perhaps are the redefinitions of the Oedipus at Colonus, where the accursed (and cursing) becomes revalued, blessed and blessing.

That optimism, divinely resolved, is not an option in the Antigone; yet no less would be required to bridge the gap between Creon and Antigone. Their dialogue is not really an exchange at all, in the sense that stichomythia ordinarily implies a verbal sparring, in which each party parries assertion with cross-assertion, generalisation with counter-generalisation, formulation with revision[11]. Creon and Antigone come to no verbal blows; they do not argue, cajole, seduce or persuade. The words of each scarcely touch the other. No mutual clarity or reciprocal knowledge can evolve from their dialogue, much less agreement or compromise, since their verbal contact is merely tangential.

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[7] Winnington-Ingram 1980, 128, writes, 'That Sophocles has worked out his play in terms of contrasted pairs, that the roles of Creon and Antigone are antithetically disposed for irreconcilable conflict, would be generally accepted by most interpreters'. But he cautions that among these antitheses 'a simple contrast between villainy on the one hand, sweetness and light on the other, finds no place'.

[8] As Williams 1993, 86, notes, 'Creon's obstinacy does not simply elicit a noble response from Antigone. It triggers a ready and massive self-assertion'. Goldhill 1986, 105, by contrast, writes that Creon embodies 'the tyrannical egoism of continual self-assertion', while Antigone's self-effacing 'devotion to the house gives rise to death and destruction rather than to the continuity of birth and generation'.

[9] The edition is Easterling 2004.

[10] See Easterling 1973, 14-34, on the rhetorical subtlety of Sophocles' uses of repetition.

[11] See, among many examples, Soph. El. 1023 ff. or the explicit redefinitions at El. 1212 ff.

ὡς ἐμοὶ τῶν σῶν λόγων
ἀρεστὸν οὐδέν, μηδ᾽ ἀρεσθείη ποτέ·

In the usual stichomythia, statements generate rejoinders. Here a series of ricochets results from what amounts to a volley of echoing homonyms[12].

From its opening scene, the play has structured our perception and comprehension of events through collocations that bring to the fore the diction of opposition and identity, even before (and beyond) focusing on the capacity of Creo's pronouncement to preserve or destroy. Thus Ismene responds to Antigone's initial series of questions (which ends 'do you know that the evils of our *echthroi* are advancing on our *philoi*?') by saying that 'no *muthos* either *hêdus* or *algeinos* has come' to her, so that she cannot tell whether she is *eutuchousa* or *atomenê*. Antigone gives her the news, saying that Kreon has honoured (*protisas*) one brother and shamed (*atimasas*) the other. Will Ismene, now that she knows, prove to be *eugenês* or *kakê*? Ismene claims that being women they should not fight with men; and to Antigone's injunction to speak out and not keep silent, Ismene replies that Antigone has a hot heart (*thermên kardian*) over chilling matters (*psukhroisi*). In the lengthy account of his policy Kreon addresses to the chorus (162-210) the antithesis of speaking out and keeping silent recurs, while the contrast between the man who is friendly to the city and the man who is hostile to it is fully elaborated.

But threaded among numerous phrases positing alternative extremes are those which, through verbal echoes propose relationships of convergence or identity[13]. So, for example, Ismene says that Antigone is τοῖς φίλοις δ᾽ ὀρθῶς φίλη (99), Antigone herself having promised φίλη μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα (73).

The chorus describe the seven attackers against the seven defenders as ἴσοι πρὸς ἴσους (379-380); later they call Antigone δύστηνος καὶ δυστήνου πατρὸς (379-380), and subsequently add that she is τὸ γέννημ᾽ ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς (471). Antigone, moreover, proposes that she is charged with μωρία by a μῶρος (470). In the context of these alternatives for expression we read Antigone's oxymoron ὅσια πανουργήσασ᾽ ('committing the crime of piety') as an acknowledgement – indeed an embodiment – of what her statement to Creon cited earlier puts directly: that their words do not belong together[14]. As with her later oxymoron, which uses a verbal echo *as though* to evoke relations of identity, this formulation What should be mutually reinforcing synonyms here stand as opposite extremes; her word for holy is Creon's word for criminal.

Their dialogue reveals that she and Creon have profoundly divergent referents for the whole set of terms in which their dialogue is couched. Antigone and Creon disagree not merely on which individual is a friend; rather, as scholars of the play have observed, they disagree

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12 Compare, for example, Hopkins 1918. On the evolution of stichomythia, see the discussion in Jens 1955. Reinhardt 1979, 77-78 sees this exchange in similar terms, but focuses on the character of the interlocutors: 'Thus the cut-and-thrust dispute (*stichomythia*) which follows is not a conflict of rights and principles either. Although the two characters use the same words when they speak and develop their pros and cons, the content of the speeches does not result in an antithetical relationship. Rather the opposition is between two *realms*: word for word and meaning for meaning, they *separate* from each other' (author's emphases). He concludes that 'the inner form of this conversation is a parting of the ways'.

13 On the *auto-* compounds in this play, see Loraux 1986b, 165-196.

14 Segal 1964, 52-53, places this image in a general context: 'The logos, like every other element in the tragic structure, becomes divided against itself. It enters into the tragic division between illusion and reality. The conflicts which themselves constitute the tragic situation wrench language into paradoxes and oxymora like Antigone's "holy impiety", Oedipus' "wedless wedlock", Ajax's "darkness my light, dimness most brilliant".

on what the word 'friend' means[15]. Not only do 'law', 'piety', 'honor', and 'friend' have one meaning in the lexicon of Antigone and a radically contrasting one in that of Creon[16], but so do words like 'living' and 'dying'. The remainder of the lines that pass between them confirm that, although they use a shared vocabulary, they give key words utterly different denotations. Incompatible values are expressed in irreconcilable definitions.

In saying that their words are not acceptable to each other then, Antigone is not only drawing attention to a fundamental disjunction in their dialogue but to a problem inherent in all language: namely, that a word does not mean anything until or unless the interlocutors agree on what it means. In this sense it is not so much that Creon and Antigone are 'talking at cross-purposes', as some students of the play have put it, or 'talking past each other', but rather that they are engaged in an effort to establish competing definitions. Thus Antigone asserts that Creon cannot define death for her:

εἰ δὲ τοῦ χρόνου πρόσθεν θανοῦμαι, κέρδος αὔτ᾽ ἐγὼ λέγω (461-2)

He may call it punishment, but she calls it profit[17]. Her doom is not *algos* ('pain') for her; only allowing her brother to lie unburied could be called *algos* (465-468).

What Antigone already knows about the possibility of dialogue with Creon by vv. 499-501, Haemon subsequently discovers – through his protracted attempt to make himself understood by his father (630-765). Because Antigone and Creon are at odds from the outset of the play, Antigone's assessment might have seemed merely to describe their impasse. But Haemon initiates the effort at an exchange with Creon in a spirit of filial conciliation and cooperation that a dialogue should serve to reaffirm and specify. Yet the very procedure of articulating the issues at stake reveals that the meanings each assigns to the shared vocabulary do not coincide[18].

Thus, it is striking to note, in successive couplets in the stichomythia (726-765) each speaker responds by recapitulating a word or phrase from the previous line in order to call its usage into question or to redefine it (e.g. *têlikoude...neos* [727-728]; *t'arga...ergon* [729-730]; *sebein...*

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[15] For Segal 1981, 161, 'the *Antigone*, concerned especially with [the] communal and civilizing function of language, also shows language divided between its private and public, familial and civic functions. The conflict between state and family rights polarizes language as well'. 'Friends and enemies: it is the standing antithesis upon which so much of Greek morals and politics is based', writes Winnington-Ingram 1980, 128. And his discussion, like those of Segal, Goldhill, and others, gives considerable attention to the meanings of *philoi* and *echthroi*, which these authors agree in seeing as dependent on one's attitude toward the *polis*. Winnington-Ingram 1980, 128, continues: 'Antigone takes her stand upon *philia* in the sense of kinship and the duty to bury which it imposes. But the city too has friends and enemies? The *polis* means nothing to her'. Goldhill's plague is for both houses, 1986, 105: 'Within these distorted and distorting idealisms, neither the city nor the household can be maintained as the locus of order, value, or principle. As Creon's and Antigone's views of *philia* seem divided against each other, each seems divided against itself in the very strength of its formulation. Such divisions in the language of personal relationships and obligations constitute this play's tragic view of the terms *philos* and *ekhthros* and the positioning of the individual that they develop'. See also Knox 1964, especially chapters 1-2.

[16] See the far-reaching discussion of the role of 'double meaning [in the] economy of the play' in Vernant 1978, 475-501. Vernant cites Segal (1964, 46-66) on the characters' use of the same terms with different semantic values.

[17] Of the angry exchange between Teiresias and Creon, Reinhardt 1979, 87, points out: 'like "friend" and "foe" in the argument between Antigone and Creon, "profit" (*kerdos*) here has two meanings, in the one case sordid advantage and monetary gain, in the other the sense of true salvation'.

[18] Although in my view this exchange is a far more genuine and interactive dialogue than the stichomythia, Reinhardt 1979, 441-525, here, as with Antigone and Creon (n. 16 above), sees Haemon and his father as each 'separated from the other's world...[they] escape each other, to hurtle to their extremes'. He observes: 'Scenes of this kind had not been possible in the *Ajax* or *Trachiniae*, if only because of their language. It was not until this play that the conflict ends not simply because the contestants have had enough, but also because the end of the scene has become a literal separation, and this separation, instead of being merely the ending of the speeches, becomes their aim and consequence'.

eusebein [730-731]; *homoptolis...polis* [733-734]; *polis...polis* [737-738]; *tei gunaiki summachei.. eiper gunê su* [740-741]; *dikês...dikaia* [742-743]; *examartanonth'...hamartanô* [743-44]; *sebôn... sebeis* [744-745]; *apapeilôn ...ti d'esti apeilê* [752-753]; *kenas...kenos* [753-754]; *phrenôseis ...phro- nein* [754-755]; even *plêsia...plêsia* [761-763]). They challenge each other, in effect, on a range of terms from abstract to concrete, from metaphorical to literal, from religious to secular; and indeed in a number of instances the sense of a word as determined in one of these categories contests its sense in the other. *Sebein*, *dike*, *phronein* – even *gunê* – are reinterpreted, and at the centre of the conflict is the struggle over the meaning of *polis*. Each of the speakers reit- erates the other's diction so as to wrest it away from him and to claim it for another sphere of values. In a densely interlocking pattern, a disputed term is defined by a subsequent term whose meaning is itself then subverted: as though one were to pull a single thread and unravel an entire fabric.

This struggle over language amounts to a kind of verbal anarchy, which Creon predictably wishes to suppress. He orders Haemon how *not* to speak to him, much as he earlier objects to the guard's speech and to the chorus' suggestion that the gods may have had a hand in the burial of Polyneices ('Stop, before your speaking fills me with anger', 280). Most stunning in this connection is Creon's reply to Ismene at 567: ἀλλ' ἥδε μέντοι μὴ λέγ'· οὐ γὰρ ἔστ' ἔτι. Creon's annihilation of Antigone must first obliterate her in speech: 'Do not say "she" – she no longer exists'.

Of course, it is Creon himself who has insisted (in his opening policy statement) on fearless speaking as indispensable to the proper functioning and governance of the city. The risk, how- ever, is not so much that citizens will be afraid to speak but that dialogue will turn out to be an illusion, that it will alienate citizens and fragment their common project[19].

A fundamental problem in Antigone is how to rebuild the shattered city, divided against it- self in the most profound way. One element of Sophocles' tragedy is that language itself is part of the dilemma; to channel the *astunomous orgas* requires assenting together to what *nomos* means and what *astu* means. The unbridgeable disparity in language, between Haemon and Creon as between Antigone and Creon, prefigures the description of Thucydides (Hist. 3.82-83) description of the struggle over words as a concomitant of civic disintegration[20].

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[19] Reinhardt 1979, 1080 ff., commenting on the 'emptiness of Creon's fate as a useless survivor', observes elsewhere that 'the other consequence of his blindness, the revolt in the city, is hinted at without being developed into drama'. Segal 1981, 161, writes: 'In defining the polis in terms of its man-made, rational structures, Creon in fact exposes their fragility' since 'the city's laws have no clearly revealed divine authority'. Des Bouvrie 1990, 191, argues that 'the message of the drama is that human rational thought may err, while divinely inspired or mantic knowledge guides human actions unerringly' and that fragility is too strong a term. In this view, the first stasimon extols a man of straw, whose *techne* is celebrated against the same final perspective as the *tuche*. Oudemans – Lardinois 1987, 121, write: 'It is clear that the ode is indeed concerned with man's ability to impose order and separation on the confusing powers which surround him. This civilizing ability is shown to be effective in all cosmological categories'. But they 1987, 124, continue that 'though man has all the technical skills, there is always the danger that he will confuse justice with injustice', and the tragic ambiguity of that distinction provides the title for their study of the play. They argue that 'the first lines of the *stasimon* [confront] us with the key word of the tragedy' and that *deinos* should be translated as 'awesome', simultaneously awful and awe-inspiring, transcending and transgressing. The impossibility of pinning down the translation of the Antigone's key term, however, is significant beyond its force as a sample of ambiguity. As an example of the imprecision of language – multiplied many times in the Antigone – it is unequivocal. Language is an imprecise tool, whether for cognition or communication; and *techne* is powerful only in its precision, predicting the course of achievement against the thousand outcomes that lack of skill conflates as failure.

[20] Goldhill 1986, 1-32, in his opening chapter 'The Drama of Logos', begins by stressing the crucial role of language in 'a society dominated by the assembly and the law courts' (to which one could add the dramatic festivals). Citing the present passage, Goldhill 1986, 2, rightly comments that for Thucydides 'language is an object of study among

καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν
τῇ δικαιώσει. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος
ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθὴς δειλία εὐπρεπήςώ

To fit in with events, words too had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying that one was a coward....

As in Thucydides' account of the *stasis* in Corcyra and elsewhere, it is not that language becomes more ambiguous. Instead, the same words are used to signify opposite ends of a continuum of meaning. The paradoxical capacity of language to do this – as well as to construct a world and to undermine it – is best described as *deinos*. And it is no coincidence that Creon, having heard Antigone verbalise her position (and thinking she speaks for Ismene as well) refers to the two of them as *epanastaseis* ('revolutions'; 533)[21].

Thucydides tells us that new political crises and exigencies require new evaluations, new analysis ('to fit in with events, words had to change their meanings') – and 'Human nature being ever the same' (a view Sophocles seems in accord with), there will always be crises and new political configurations; and yet all we have at our disposal to deal with them are the same old words. So that language becomes a kind of subterranean battlefield, where meanings clash beneath an apparently continuous, harmonious, lexical surface. Inevitably, then, shared words that ought to be able to repair the city will – precisely, paradoxically, because they *are* shared (because they *are* a common vocabulary – contribute to rending it apart. What we see in the Antigone is the collision enacted, and with it the awareness – one might even call it *anagnôrisis* – of a specious linguistic identity, which being revealed, produces a reversal, as Aristotle says it should[22], in which*, in language,* 'friendship' becomes 'enmity'.

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the symptoms of the city in turmoil' before passing to extensive discussion of the Oresteia, a drama for a long time without a *polis*.

[21] Thoreau 1869, 231, writes: 'When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now'.

[22] Aristot. Poet. 1452a30.

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Özet

Sophokles'in Antigone'si ve Dil Paradoksları

Antigone'deki temel bir sorun, yerle bir edilmiş kenti yeniden nasıl inşa etmektir ki, en derin biçimde kendisine karşı bölünmüş bir husustur. Sophokles'in tragedyasındaki bir unsur, lisanın kendisinin ikilemin parçası olmasıdır. Bu makalede, adı geçen oyunun hem konuşmada ortaya çıkartılan bir çatışmayı hem de lisan üzerine bir ikilemi dramatize ettiği öne sürülmektedir.

Thukydides'in iç savaş sırasında 'anlam değiştiren sözcükler' analizi ile bu oyundaki linguistik açmazlar arasındaki bir karşılaştırma yapılarak, Sophokles'in tragedyasındaki lisan politikasını irdelemek için hem Kreon ile Haimon arasındaki hem de Kreon ile Antigone arasındaki stikhomythia üzerine odaklanılmaktadır.