

A RE-INTERPRETATION OF PROMETHEUS BOUND 514

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	βραχεί δὲ μύθῳ πάντα συλλήβδην μάθε·	505
	πάσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως.	
Χο.	μή νυν βροτοὺς μὲν ὠφέλει καιροῦ πέρα, σαντοῦ δ' ἀκήδει δυστυχούντος· ὥς ἐγὼ εὐελπίς εἰμι τῶνδ' ἐκ δεσμών ἔτι	
	λυθέντα μηδὲν μείον ἰσχύσειν Διός.	510
Πρ.	οὐ ταῦτα ταύτῃ Μοῖρά πῶ τελεσφόρος κρᾶναι πέπρωται, μυρίαὶς δὲ πημοναῖς δύαις τε κναφθεῖς ὧδε δεσμὰ φυγγάνω. τέχνη δ' ἀνάγκης ἀσθενέστερα μακρῶ.	←
Χο.	τίς οὖν ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν οἰακοστρόφος;	515
Πρ.	Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἑρινύες.	
Χο.	τούτων ἄρα Ζεὺς ἐστὶν ἀσθενέστερος;	
Πρ.	οὐκ οὐν ἂν ἐκφύγοι γε τὴν πεπρωμένην.	
Χο.	τί γὰρ πέπρωται Ζηνὶ πλήν ἅει κρατεῖν;	
Πρ.	τοῦτ' οὐκέτ' ἂν πύθοιο, μηδὲ λιπάρει.	520

The traditional interpretation of *Pr.* 514 (printed above in its context from the OCT) is that given by E. Fraenkel (*Agamemnon* 3.729) in his paraphrase: “all my ingenuity and inventiveness are powerless in face of the compulsion to which I am subject. . . .” In this interpretation *τέχνη* (ingenuity, inventiveness) refers to Prometheus, *ἀνάγκη* (compulsion) refers to Zeus. In view of the specific context of the word *ἀνάγκη* in this line, and given the normal Greek usage of the word *τέχνη* from Homer to Euripides, I find this traditional interpretation most doubtful. I hope through the following discussion to offer a likelier interpretation, namely that in this line, *τέχνη* refers to the craftsmanship of Hephaistos, while *ἀνάγκη* refers to a universal Necessity that is beyond the power of Zeus.¹

¹ Although the *communis opinio* concerning 514 is that of Fraenkel, several editors of the play, without giving detailed explanations, have identified *τέχνη* with Hephaistos and *ἀνάγκη* with Necessity. These include A. Prickard (Oxford 1880), E. Sykes and St. Wynne Willson (London 1898), and G. Thomson (Cambridge 1932). I owe these references to the kindness of an anonymous *TAPA* reader. G. O. Hutchinson in *CR* 34 (1984) 2 also shares this view concerning *τέχνη* 514.

The traditional interpretation of ἀνάγκη 514 as compulsion or punishment by Zeus would be more applicable to the use of the word ἀνάγκη in the plural than it would be in the singular. The normal distinction between the meanings of the singular and plural can clearly be seen in two lines of this play: 105 τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἔστ' ἀδήριτον σθένος (the power of Necessity is invincible) and 108 ἀνάγκαις ταῖσδ' ἐνέζευγμαι (I have been yoked to this punishment).² When ἀνάγκη is used in the singular in the sense of "compulsion," it tends to be modified by an adjective (πολλή μ' ἀνάγκη) or to be introduced by a preposition (ἐξ ἀνάγκης, πρὸς ἀνάγκην), or to be part of the expression ἀνάγκη ἐστι (= χρῆ). Occasionally the dative singular ἀνάγκη is used adverbially in Homer.

In the thought sequence of our passage, however, ἀνάγκη 514 must have the larger sense of "universal Necessity." In 513, Prometheus declares that after much suffering he will be freed of his bonds (φυγγάνω is an "oracular" present). The sense of the next line, 514, should be that Prometheus considers this freeing to be inevitable, for it will happen through ἀνάγκη.³ The chorus then can quite plausibly ask, who is in control of ἀνάγκη? When Prometheus answers that it is the Moirai and the Erinyes, the chorus asks whether Zeus himself is weaker than these powers (ἀσθενέστερος, the same adjective used in 514 to describe τέχνη). The answer, although expressed negatively, is in the affirmative.

The listener to this dialogue must assume that the sense of ἀνάγκη 515 as used by the chorus is the same as that of ἀνάγκη 514 as used by Prometheus. A basic change of meaning within the space of two lines would be intolerable. Besides, the question in 515 concerning ἀνάγκη arises directly from its use in 514, so we must assume that the chorus understood Prometheus' meaning of ἀνάγκη and framed its question in accordance with that meaning. (Surely we cannot assume that the cho-

² Furthermore, the general sense of ἀνάγκης 105 seems quite close to that of ἀνάγκης 514, the difference being that the thought in 105 is expressed absolutely, while in 514 it is expressed comparatively. The absence of the definite article with ἀνάγκης in 514 and 515, in contrast to its presence in 105, is not significant. Ἀνάγκη is "personified" without the article in 514 and 515 just as are Μοῖρα 511 and Μοῖραι . . . Ἐρινύες 516. A further similarity of thought and language of the two passages may be observed: 103–4 τὴν πεπρωμένην δὲ χρῆ / αἴσαν φέρειν and 511–12 μοῖρα . . . / κρᾶναι πέπρωται. Both passages convey the sense of overriding inevitability. With the sense of ἀνάγκη in 105 and 514, cf. Soph. fr. 234P πρὸς τὴν ἀνάγκην οὐδ' Ἄρης ἀνθίσταται, and Simon. 5.21 Ἀνάγκη δ' οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται. Particularly appropriate to this passage is Eur. *Alk.* 980 καὶ τὸν ἐν Χαλύβοις δαμάξεις σὺν (Ἀνάγκῃ) βία σίδαρον. (I owe this reference to the kindness of Professor R. Meridor.) For the distinction between ἀνάγκη singular and plural, and for the various usages of ἀνάγκη singular, see LSJ s.v.

³ δ' 514 probably has the connective sense of γάρ. According to J. D. Denniston *The Greek Particles* (Oxford 1954²) 169, such usage of δέ is quite frequent.

rus misunderstood Prometheus' meaning.)⁴ Working backwards then, it is clear that the chorus in 515 is referring to ἀνάγκη in the sense of a universal force, Necessity. (Hence the answer of Prometheus in 516 to their question.) Ἀνάγκη in 514 must therefore have the same universal sense of Necessity as in 515. This ἀνάγκη in 514 cannot therefore emanate from Zeus, since we learn in 518 that Zeus also is weaker than the prime movers of Necessity. Looking further back, we can see that ἀνάγκη 514 is an extension of Μοῖρα 511. Our conclusion then is that ἀνάγκη 514 does not refer to the compulsion of Zeus, as is traditionally held, but signifies the universal force of Necessity, a force outside of and more powerful than Zeus.

The traditional interpretation of τέχνη 514, as we have seen, would have Prometheus here refer to his own inventiveness or ingenuity, and declare that his own τέχνη was far weaker than ἀνάγκη.⁵ A great obstacle to this interpretation is that it goes counter common Greek usage of the word τέχνη. According to LSJ, τέχνη is generally used, both in the singular and plural, in the *concrete* sense of a specific craft, skill, or trade (like the French *métier*) such as metal-working, prophecy, or agriculture. When τέχνη is used abstractly, both in the singular and plural, it usually has the pejorative sense of "trickery, deception," e.g. δολίη τέχνη. This sense of dishonest trickery is of course applicable to the Hesiodic Prometheus, but it is hardly a sense that the Aiskhylean Prometheus would apply to himself—he is a disobeyer, not a deceiver.⁶ A more neutral abstract sense of τέχνη is also found, but only with a modifier, e.g. πάσῃ τέχνῃ (by every means). And so the favorable or at least neutral *abstract* sense of "ingenuity, inventiveness" required by the traditional interpretation of τέχνη is apparently not a commonly attested usage of classical Greek.

⁴ For a similar exchange between a dramatic character and the chorus, where the chorus picks up the exact meaning and word uttered by the previous speaker, cf. *Eum.* 621–22 Apollo: Ζηνὸς . . . / Chorus: Ζεύς.

⁵ Under this interpretation of τέχνη, the sense of ἀνάγκη could conceivably be either that of "the compulsion of Zeus" or that of "universal Necessity." As we have seen above, the context of the entire passage clearly favors the latter sense of ἀνάγκη.

⁶ It is of course a completely different matter when in this play Kratos calls Prometheus a thief (8, 83) or when Kratos (62) and Hermes (944) call him a "wise guy" (σοφιστής). Their viewpoint would hardly be one that Prometheus would endorse for himself. It is likewise a different matter when Kratos says of Prometheus (59): δεινὸς γὰρ εὐρεῖν καὶ ἀμυγχανῶν πόρον (for he's clever at finding a way out even of the inextricable). Although Prometheus may well be δεινός in the sense Kratos suggests, the only way such δεινότης could be equated with τέχνη in its usual sense is if Prometheus had, in Houdini-like fashion, adopted as a career the *métier* of extricating himself from the inextricable. Also different in context is the unabashed self-proclamation of Odysseus in *Od.* 9.19–20 εἴμ' Ὀδυσσεὺς Λαερτιάδης ὃς πᾶσι δόλοισιν / ἀνθρώποισι μέλω (I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, formidable in the minds of all men through my tricks). The chief characteristics of the Homeric Odysseus are his wiles and tricks (πολυμήτις, πολύτροπος). As stated above, these are *not* the characteristics of the Aiskhylean Prometheus.

A complete survey of *all* occurrences of the various forms of τέχνη in Homer, Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, Herodotos, Thucydides, Aiskhylos, Sophokles, Euripides, and Aristophanes (154 occurrences altogether) fails to reveal a single instance where the noun τέχνη, in the singular and without a direct modifier (as is the case with τέχνη 514),⁷ carries the abstract sense of “ingenuity, inventiveness.”⁸ This sense may occasionally occur in the plural, but it is rare, for even in the plural the sense is usually that of “tricks, deception.” When a more neutral sense is found, both in the singular and plural, it usually is in a stock phrase accompanied by an adjective, e.g. πάσῃ τέχνῃ, πάσαις τέχναις, μηδεμιά τέχνη.⁹

The survey also shows that the only use of τέχνη in reference to gods in this period is found in the concrete sense of a craft or skill: Hephaistos (metal-working),¹⁰ Apollo (prophecy), Hermes (music and fire-craft). In the extant plays of Aiskhylos, with the exception of *Prometheus Bound*, all occurrences of τέχνη refer to the skill or art of prophecy. In *Prometheus Bound* there are eight occurrences of τέχνη. Apart from 514, the instance in question, all seven other occurrences of τέχνη (47, 87, 110, 254, 477, 497, 506) have the sense of a specific craft or skill (including that of prophecy). Now the last five of the above occurrences refer to the specific crafts and skills that Prometheus taught to humans. Most illuminating, however, is the discovery that the first two of these occurrences (47, 87) refer unequivocally to the τέχνη of Hephaistos.

⁷ The adjective ἀσθενεστέρα 514 is of course in the predicate.

⁸ The survey was made possible through the kind cooperation of Project Wordsearch and its computer resources at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁹ E. Fraenkel (*Agamemnon* 3.729, note 2) cites “Mousaios” B4 DK (date uncertain) ὡς αἰὲν τέχνη μέγ’ ἀμείνων ἰσχύος ἐστί (τέχνη is always far superior to strength) in the belief that τέχνη here also has the abstract meaning of “ingenuity, inventiveness” that he attributes to τέχνη 514, and that our line 514 is a polemic against this thought of “Mousaios.” Aside from the uncertain date of the line of “Mousaios,” making the question of polemic equally uncertain, we have no context by which to judge whether the sense of τέχνη here is that of abstract “ingenuity, inventiveness,” as Fraenkel assumes, or that of a specific skill. The well-known passage of Soph. *OT* 380–81 τέχνη τέχνης / ὑπερφέρουσα could well provide a similar uncertainty of interpretation if the context did not inform us that τέχνη here has the sense of the “art of ruling” (see Jebb ad loc.). The sense of τέχνη in the “Mousaios” line might well be similar to that of μήτι in *Il.* 23.325 μήτι τοι δρυτόμος μεγ’ ἀμείνων ἢ ἐ βίηφι (a tree cutter is much better off with skill [in cutting] than with mere strength). M. Griffith, in his recent edition of *Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1983), shares Fraenkel’s traditional interpretation of τέχνη in 514, citing ad loc. the above-mentioned passages of “Mousaios” and of the *Iliad*. Although I disagree with Griffith’s interpretation of the sense of 514, his view that 514 is a *gnome* is plausible, and is a view that Professor A. E. Raubitschek independently expressed in a conversation with the author.

¹⁰ In the case of Hephaistos, the concrete sense is made doubly clear by τέχνη 47 functioning as a synonym for χειρωναξία 45 (handicraft).

It is of course true that shortly before 514 is spoken, the audience has listened to a long speech of Prometheus (476–506) in which the Titan enumerates the various τέχναι he has revealed to humans. This passage culminates in the proud claim in 506: *πάσαι τέχναι βροτοῖσιν ἐκ Προμηθέως* (all human skills come from Prometheus).¹¹ Yet it seems to me that this consideration is offset by the dialogue in the following eight lines, which shifts the focus of thought away from events of the past to events of the future. The sequence of thought from 509 to 513 is revealing.

The chorus declares its hope that one day Prometheus will be released from his bonds and will be no less powerful than Zeus. Prometheus replies that this is not the way Moira has decreed the future, but that only after much suffering will he escape his bonds. When the chorus says in 509–10 *σ' . . . λυθέντα*, in using the passive voice, they presumably do *not* mean that Prometheus will contrive his own release, but that he will be released by someone else. (*λυθέντα* here parallels the passive *λυόμενος* in the title of the following play where Prometheus was presumably released by Herakles.) Since the chorus therefore does not suggest to Prometheus that he contrive his own release, there would be no reason for Prometheus, in rejecting the hope of the chorus, to say that his own τέχνη cannot accomplish this release. Prometheus objects to the chorus's view of the future because he knows that he is destined to undergo long and painful suffering, and that only then will he be released, and by someone *other* than himself. But he also knows that when that time does arrive, when the Moirai set into motion the power of Necessity, not even the supreme craftsmanship (τέχνη) of Hephaistos will be able to withstand its overriding force.¹²

If the above argument has lexical and dramatic validity, in *Pr.* 514 τέχνη must refer to the craftsmanship of Hephaistos, ἀνάγκης to the force of universal Necessity.¹³

¹¹ Professor C. J. Herington pointed this out in correspondence as a difficulty in my interpretation of τέχνη 514.

¹² It is presumably not by accident that τέχνη 514 is the word that immediately follows the oracular *φυγάνω* 513 (I will escape). The emphasis at the end of 513 is clearly on Prometheus' escaping his bonds. It would therefore be completely counter the current of the thought progression for Prometheus, immediately after proclaiming his eventual escape, then to state that he has not the means to escape.

¹³ I should like to think that at the original performance of *Prometheus Bound* the actor playing Prometheus (Aiskhylos?), as he spoke the word τέχνη, raised his chained hands somewhat, so that the audience actually *saw* the meaning of τέχνη. Alas, no video cassette of the performance exists. Otherwise this article need never have been written.