

The concept of Ananke in Greek Literature before 400 BCE

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the concept of ἀνάγκη (and the related terms ἀναγκαῖος and ἀναγκαίως) in Greek literature written before 400 BCE. All passages containing these words from the time period were located, translated and analysed according to specific criteria concerning the usage and interpretation of the term. The resulting exploration was then split into five main sections: physical compulsion, moral compulsion, cosmology, circumstantial compulsion and the personification of compulsion. These sections were then examined according to both context and subtle differences in the meaning of ἀνάγκη terms within these contexts. The vast majority concerned some form of violence, physical force or fear of violent repercussions. Although the focus was on the interpretation of texts dating to before 400 BCE, owing to their fragmentary nature but considerable importance, the cosmological texts had to be examined in conjunction with later texts in order to shed more light on the meaning of ἀνάγκη in this context. Statistical analysis was performed on the 466 texts located and they were further analysed to track variations across time and genre-specific usages. Several types of usage were seen to develop only towards the end of the fifth century after 450 BCE including the notion of relative compulsions; the necessity for revenge and compelled alliances were seen to develop at this time. Recommendations were made with regards to the best and most appropriate translations; the majority of passages would require either the translation of coercion, constraint or compulsion for ἀνάγκη with the exception of the adjectival ἀναγκαῖος which can mean blood relatives or similarly obligated individuals. The translation of necessity, although generally the given interpretation of ἀνάγκη was seldom appropriate since it did not grasp the entire meaning of the term in context.

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
1. Introduction	7
(i) Acknowledgements	7
(ii) Literature review	8
(iii) Why is ἀνάγκη important?	9
(iv) What is the etymology for ἀνάγκη?	9
(v) What are the primary questions to be asked about the concept of ἀνάγκη?	9
(vi) Methodology and rationale	10
(vii) Schema for the subdivisions in the database	11
(a) Primary categories	11
(b) Secondary categories	15
(c) Tertiary categories	17
(d) The author database	17
(e) The works database	18
(f) Other related databases	18
(viii) Practical implementation of the database in the thesis	18
(ix) Possible translations for ἀνάγκη	19
2. Textual Commentary	
(i) Interpersonal physical ἀνάγκη	21
(a) Simple interpersonal coercion	21
(b) Violent conquest	27
(c) ἀνάγκη as the threat or promise of violence	29
<i>i)</i> Use of ἀνάγκη to force alliances, treaties and oaths	29
<i>ii)</i> Threat of violence	32
(d) Use of ἀνάγκη as torture of slave witnesses in legal cases	33
(e) The use of ἀνάγκη as a supernatural coercive force	35
(f) Slavery	39
(ii) Phusis and physical necessity	49
(a) Physiological necessity	49
<i>i)</i> Necessity within the process of giving birth	49

<i>ii)</i> Erotic necessity	50
<i>iii)</i> Necessity that children are nursed correctly	56
<i>iv)</i> Eating and Drinking	56
<i>v)</i> Other biological necessities	58
<i>vi)</i> Poverty and other deficiencies	61
<i>vii)</i> The inevitability of Death	65
(b) Necessity and phusis of the natural world	66
(c) Prophecy	70
(iii) Interpersonal moral ἀνάγκη	71
(a) Kinship	71
<i>i)</i> Kinship and duty of care to the living	71
<i>ii)</i> Duty of Obedience	72
<i>iii)</i> Blood relations who have duties and obligations	74
<i>iv)</i> Constraints and coercion concerning marriage	76
(b) Gender	80
(c) Despotism or Tyrannical dictation of rulership – necessity of obedience	81
<i>i)</i> Rulership	87
(d) Cultural taboos and Religious Customs	91
<i>i)</i> Burial Rituals and the duty of care	94
<i>ii)</i> Supplication	97
(e) Necessity of the law	99
(f) Oaths and Treaties as Binding Necessities	104
(g) Prophecy and divine dictation	108
<i>i)</i> Necessity that prophecies are fulfilled	108
<i>ii)</i> Necessity of fate and divine dictation	111
(iv) Circumstance, expediency and personal necessity	120
(a) Inevitability of certain events and behaviour	120
(b) The desire to preserve life and ward off death	122
<i>i)</i> The necessity to survive in certain circumstances	122
(c) Necessities of circumstance in the lawcourt	127
(d) Rhetorical and Historical Necessity	129
(e) The necessity of poetic composition	136
(f) The necessity of personal intention and revenge	137
(v) Cosmology	142

(a)	Interpersonal physical necessity	213
(b)	Biological necessity	213
(c)	Moral necessity	213
(d)	Circumstantial necessity	214
(e)	Fate, destiny and divine dictates	214
(f)	Cosmological, eschatological and logical necessity	215
(g)	Treaties and military expediency	215
(h)	Personification	216
(ii)	Does the use of ἀνάγκη change across time?	216
(a)	Coercion	216
<i>i)</i>	Compulsion	217
<i>ii)</i>	Constraint	220
(iii)	Necessity as a relative concept	224
(iv)	Does a sense of personal or individual necessity develop over the time period?	226
(v)	Overall observations	229
4.	Index of passages	230
5.	Bibliography	241