The aim of this article is to pose the multiple choice question: Did Electra choose
(a) a wretched life,
(b) a life of lamentation,
(c) death, or
(d) none of these?
My arguments lead to the answer (d), and I aim also to show that, if this answer is correct, there is one, and only one emendation that will fit the requirements of sense and context.

What does πάγκλαντον αἰώνα κοινόν mean? Some scholars (e.g. Hermann, Dindorf) say ‘death’; but such a translation gives little point to πάγκλαντον and takes αἰώνα in a sense extended somewhat from its normal meaning of ‘life’, ‘period of life’, or possibly ‘life style’, ‘lot in life’ (compare, however, Euripides Phoenissae 1484 σκοτιάν αἰώνα). In the context of Electra’s continual lamentation, compared to that of a nightingale only a few lines previously, πάγκλαντον αἰώνα refers almost certainly to Electra’s life of lamentation and misery. The meaning of

1) I give here Pearson’s Oxford Text (1923).
A brief apparatus criticus is as follows:
1082 τῶν ἁγαθῶν ζῶν
κακῶς εὐχλειαν αἰσχύναi θέλει
νόνυμος, ὃς παί παί,
1085 ὡς καὶ σὺ πάγκλαντον αἰ-
ῶνα κοινόν εἶλον,
τὸ μὴ καλὸν καθολίσα-
σα δύο φέρειν ἐν ἐν λόγῳ,
σοφά τ’ ἄριστα τε παῖς κεκλήσθαι).
Nathaniel B. Booth

The word ξονόν is not clear. It has been thought to refer to Electra’s taking common cause with her father in his death; that is, she mourns with a grief that shares in the grief of his death. This would be more plausible if the implication of ξονόν were then made clearer in the text: ‘in common’ with whom, or what? In other examples of ξονόν used in a similar sense, the “with whom” or the “with what” are specified. Not here, however; accordingly, the word ξονόν must be held suspect.

If εἶλον has πάγκλαντον αἰώνα as its object (“you have chosen a life of lamentation”, or possibly “a wretched life”) there are grievous difficulties of sense. The Chorus in the immediately preceding sentence say that noble people do not like to bring shame upon themselves by living miserable lives, ingloriously accepting the situation. They continue: “Just as you too (Electra) have chosen a wretched life …” This is clearly impossible, if πάγκλαντον αἰώνα means “a wretched life”, when the point to be illustrated is that noble people do not accept a continuation of miserable living. If πάγκλαντον αἰώνα ξονόν means “death”, this too is impossible; Electra has chosen a course of action involving the risk of death, but she has not chosen death. If πάγκλαντον αἰώνα ξονόν means a life of lamentation for Agamemnon, it is clear from line 354 that Electra did not think that merely going out and lamenting for Agamemnon brought any ending to αὐαὐῳ.

In any case, in all the famous uses of the exact word εἶλον in Sophocles (in Antigone 555, 565 and in Philoctetes 1100), it is followed by the infinitive, and therefore here it should go forward to ρήξεω in line 1088, not back to αἰώνα.

Lines 1082–4 hark back to Electra’s appeal to Chrysothemis in lines 986–9:

ἀλλ’, ὦ γήλη, πείσθητι, συμπόνει πατρί,
σόγκαμν ἀδελφῷ, παῦσον ἐκ κανῶν ξεῖ, ἐπὶ
παῦσον δὲ σαυτῆν, τοῦτο γεγυγγόκουν, ὅτι
ζῆν αἰσχρὸν αἰσχροῖς τοῖς καλῶς περιφοίν.

Electra’s suggestion here is that Chrysothemis and she should together rise up and attack Aegisthus, rather than continue to live shamefully (ζῆν αἰσχροῖς). Her preceding remarks in lines 958 ff. suggest that ζῆν αἰσχροῖς implies not dishonourable

3) See, for example, Soph. Aj. 265 ff., quoted by Kells l.c.
living in the moral sense, but rather living an abject life of shame, misery and deprivation, that is, much the same as κακώς ζῆν. Electra’s response to this life of shame is not simply to carry on with lamentation and misery, but to rise up and take action against it – on her own, if Chrysothemis will not support her. How then can the Chorus say, in lines 1085–6, that she has chosen πάγκλαυτον αἰώνα κοινόν, in whatever precise sense these words may be interpreted? Electra’s choice, in the immediate context, was action to put an end to misery (if possible), or else to die in the attempt; and the introduction in lines 1082–3 takes us quite clearly back to this concept. To this choice of Electra’s, and to this choice only, can the Chorus be referring in lines 1085 ff.

It is worth noting, before proceeding further with the argument, that L. Purgold (in Observationes criticae in Sophoclem, Euripidem, Anthologiam Graecam et Ciceronem, Jena and Leipzig, 1802) says: “Ineptiunt illi omnes, qui verba κοινόν εἶλον cum πάγκλαυτον αἰώνα coniungunt, cum ea tamen ad sententiam insequentem referenda essent ...” He, too, objected to taking αἰώνα as object of εἶλον, but not for the same reasons as I do; he thought κοινόν went with the double idea σοφὰ τ’ ἄριστα τε παῖς κεκλήσατι that comes afterwards (“you made a double choice, to be called both wise and a very good daughter”). He wished to change to πάγκλαυτος αἰώνα (= κλαυοῦσα διὰ πάντα τὸν αἰώνα σου), and to take the intervening words (lines 1087–8) as parenthetic. This is impossible (πάγκλαυτος αἰὲν ὀλλύτου in S. Trach. 652 is acceptable, but not πάγκλαυτος standing on its own in a sense detached from and possibly adversative to the sense of the main verb; κοινόν is not really suitable in this sense, and in any case would naturally be taken with αἰώνα. Also, 1087–8 cannot plausibly be taken as parenthetic), but it is interesting that at least one scholar has felt a difficulty in taking αἰώνα as object of εἶλον. Hermann, by interpreting αἰώνα to mean “death”, showed that he was aware of the difficulty. More recently, all the leading scholars have shown a surprising unawareness that this problem ever existed.

If πάγκλαυτον αἰώνα is not the object of εἶλον, then εἶλον governs the infinitive φέρειν in line 1088 (as I have already suggested). Another verbal word must be found to govern πάγκλαυτον αἰώνα (assuming, of course, that these two words are not themselves corrupt). The sense should be that of trying to stop the present miserable way of life, rather than that of

9 Rhein. Mus. f. Philol. N. F. CXIX, 2
choosing it. There are one or two corrupt (or possibly corrupt) words in the text to play with: ηοινόν is at least suspicious, and I think that no scholar has fully accepted τὸ μὴ καλὸν καθοπλι-σασα ⁴ as genuine.

There is one, and only one possible way of restoring sense to the passage ⁵; a neuter noun must replace τὸ μὴ in line 1087, and a neuter participle (agreeing with it, and taking π. aἱ. as its object) must replace ηοινόν. Further, the neuter participle must mean “that will stop” or “that will cure”, or something similar. Hence I suggest that for ηοινόν in line 1086 we write παῦσον (neuter of future participle), and for τὸ μὴ in line 1087 we write ἄκος. ἄκος was previously suggested by H. Lloyd-Jones ⁶).

The corruption of the words can be explained as follows ⁷). Lloyd-Jones suggested that τομὴ might be a gloss on ἄκος. (A possible objection to this is that τομὴ ought then to be in the accusative, but this is not conclusive, since a correction from τομὴ to τὸ μὴ might well have been made by some scribe trying to make sense of the passage). For the connection between τομὴ and ἄκος, Lloyd-Jones has already quoted Aeschylus Cho. 539 (ἄκος τομαιόν πημάτων). To this reference should be added Sophocles Ajax 361–3 (ἄκος), 581–2 (τομῶντι πῆματι), 473–4 and 479–80 (death before dishonour). It is to be noted that, in the Ajax, the hero finds himself, like Electra, in a situation of desperate dishonour, in which he feels that only a “cutting remedy” will suffice. He actually decides upon suicide, which is one stage worse than Electra’s choice, but the parallel is very close, and it makes the emendation to ἄκος in the Electra highly plausible.

So far as παῦσον is concerned: We note, first, that the word is in ἄπο ηοινόν construction. This gives immediate rise to a suspicion that the word ηοινόν might have occurred in a marginal

---

⁴ The basic meaning of καθοπλιζεῖν appears to be “deck out”, “array”, “equip” – hence, perhaps, “prepare”. The scholiast’s interpretation καταπολεμήσασα has won no support from scholars. (The scholion reads: καταπολεμήσασα τὸ αἰσχρὸν καὶ πονῆσασα οἶνον τοὺς ἐξῆρησε καταγωνισμένη).  
⁵ One other possibility might have been to take αἰώνα as object of καθοπλίσασα, after emending some of the intervening words; but neither καθοπλίσασα, nor any other word to which it might be emended, bears a suitable sense. One might also have changed ηοινόν into a nom. fem. participle, e.g. αἰών’ ἄγοντι ἀμ’ εἶλον, but this does not seem at all plausible.  
⁷ Obviously it is not always possible to explain with certainty how a corruption has occurred, but this is a probable account.
comment on the grammar in some early text of Sophocles. Did such comments in fact occur in early texts?

Yes, they did. In P. Oxy. V no. 841 (Vol. V. p. 41) Paean VI line 11, in the right hand margin is written ηατά ηων[ο]ν ἕμαις τιμ(αίς). (The reference was kindly supplied to me by Professor E.G. Turner). This is an example of a critical note written in the margin of a text of lyric poetry in the second century after Christ. If κοινών (implying “word common to both clauses”) had been written here in a comment on παῦσον, it might well have crept into the text. More: if κοινών is indeed corrupt, it is plausible to suppose that it replaced a word in an ἀπό κοινων construction.

καθοπλίσασα now has a suitable word as its object8); we recall τοιούτων θράσος ὀπλίζη in 995–6 (where the θράσος is the very same venture of Electra’s). εἶλον governs the infinitive φέονειν, which previously followed the rest of the sentence as a precarious addendum (possibly a vague final clause, not at all well explained by past editors). εἶλον commonly did take the infinitive in expressions of this kind in Sophocles (Antigone 555, 565, Philoctetes 1100). However, the word παῦο is the most interesting. It occurs in an appropriate sense in Homer (Il. 4. 191): φάρμαξ' ἀ κεν παῦσηα μελανάον ὀδυνάον. It seems to be used frequently of stopping pain, grief or disease. It occurs in Sophocles in the future participle form (Antigone 575, Philoctetes 1379). For its use with the accusative, see Sophocles Electra 1295 γελώντας ἕχθρονς παῦσομεν. This use of noun with participle after the verb, in the sense “stop the laughter of our enemies”, seems a close parallel for πάγκλαντον αὐῶνα παῦσον, where presumably the aim is to stop, not the life, but the misery of the life. But παῦο is a recurring idea in the Electra:

Electra 303–4 ἐγώ δ' Ὀρέστην τόνδε προσμένων' ἀεὶ παυστήρ' ἐφήξειν ἡ τάλαιν ἀπόλλυμαι.

Then Electra 987, 988, and Electra 1295: all already quoted.

An interesting point about this choral ode is made by J.H. Kells in his edition of the play9). He notes that, on the usual

8) See note 4. The only possible object for καθοπλίσασα is some word implying the drastic action planned by Electra. Compare Aesch. Suppl. 682, 702 (ἐξοτιλίζειν "Anq"); and in the present context, to what else could Electra be applying the process of καθοπλίζειν?
interpretations of this choral ode, the Chorus here seem to be attributing all the virtues to Electra and not to her sister; wisdom, as well as filial piety. However, in the preceding iambics (lines 947–1057), it looks as if the Chorus believe that Chrysothemis shows wisdom and prudent caution in trying to dissuade Electra from her bold venture, and they seem themselves to support Chrysothemis in her plea to Electra to show prudent forethought (990–1, 1015–6). Kells believes that there is an inconsistency here, and he reorganizes the interpretation of the choral ode accordingly. His reorganization is far-fetched and not at all plausible 10), but the problem which he raises is interesting and deserves comment. What do the Chorus think about Electra? Is the inconsistency real or imagined?

It is true that the Chorus urge Electra to be prudent; but they do this because they wish to save her from destroying herself in a vain attack on Aegisthus 11). This is not inconsistent with a belief that, in following the μέγιστα νόημα (1095–6), Electra shows wisdom in a much higher, moral sense. Wisdom of this kind appears to be stressed in lines 1058–62. Further, in lines 1085–9, the Chorus do not actually say that Electra is wise, but only that she aimed to be thought so 12). This is consistent with lines 1023 and 1054, where Electra appears to claim that her behaviour shows νοης, while that of Chrysothemis does not. Electra appears to claim, not just moral wisdom, but practical wisdom as well. She thinks that there is practical wisdom in staking all on a desperate venture, rather than in continuing to live a miserable and shameful existence, propped by vain hopes. In line 1027, further, she suggests that Chryso-

10) e.g. he emends line 1087 to τῇ μη ναί’ οὐ καθοπλίσασα and says that the meaning is that “Electra has chosen her lot of mourning 'not having armed (or equipped) ignobility (so as) to win two prizes at once, so as to be called once for all a daughter both wise and very good', i.e. Electra has not tried to get the best of two possible worlds, by appearing both good and wise.” I find this hopelessly obscure and contorted.

11) Compare lines 233–5, and Electra’s reply.

12) The words in line 1089, σοφά τ’ ἄφιλα τε παίς indicate that the wisdom was something over and above the filial behaviour. For the wisdom to add something to the filial behaviour, it must be not the moral wisdom of behaving in a good filial way, but practical wisdom. (It should be noted that the word σοφά, used in this sense, would be entirely irrelevant, if in lines 1085–8 Electra simply chose lamentation and misery. Therefore σοφά strengthens still further the case for taking εἶλον with ἔφειν rather than with αἰώνα).
themis's type of wisdom was not true wisdom, but cowardice. The general tenor of the ode in lines 1058–97 suggests that, by line 1058, the Chorus at least saw Electra's point of view.

Department of Mathematics,
The Polytechnic of North London

Nathaniel B. Booth

13) The possibility that the Chorus allowed themselves to be overpersuaded by Electra's arguments between lines 1015 and 1058 cannot be overlooked. See Electra 251–3.

We may note that in lines 1078–9 (οὔτε τι τοῦ βατείν προμηθής) the Chorus still attribute lack of foresight to Electra, but here it is a matter for praise.