In his note on this passage Dodds concludes that the sense is: “it costs but little to hold that that has (sovereign) power, whate’er it be that is more than mortal” (so far as Sandys) “and to consider what has been accepted through long ages (to be) an eternal truth and grounded in nature.” Pohlenz, Griech. Trag. Erläuterungen p 179 f. takes a similar view of the last two lines: “Es kostet doch gar nicht so viel, das, was in langer Zeit Brauch war und geglaubt wurde, für etwas zu halten, was ewig und von Natur existiert.” But the adverb ἄει is a strange bedfellow for the dative φύσει, and it is not so easy to supply mentally a second occurrence of νοµίζειν when the trenchant phrase ὅ τι ποτ’ ἄρα τὸ δαµόνων had seemed to give an effective end to a unit of sense. And although technically admissible, περικός sc. (ἐναι), hardly seems the peak of elegance, discharging as it does the rôle of περικέναι, the last word in the sentence, with no other external indication to show that it is other than a normal participle.

Sandys’ interpretation had been: “whate’er it be that is more than mortal, and in the long ages is upheld by law and grounded in nature.” This translation omits ἄει altogether, and renders τὸ τε νόµμων as if it were νόµμων τε. It is also exposed to Dodds’ criticism that the chorus could not easily equate τὸ νόµμων or τὸ φύσει περικός with τὸ δαµόνων. However Dodds’ other objection, that τὸ νόµμων could not be casually linked, as opposed to expressly identified, with τὸ φύσει περικός, fails by overlooking the fact that Euripides has not written τὸ φύσει περικός with its own article, as a separate concept from τὸ νόµμων. We should not go out of our way to create an additional example of the rare “article supplied” category discussed in connection with τέ in Denniston, Greek Particles² p. 518. The concepts are not so much linked, or identified, as merged. “That
which has been customary over a long time and is rooted in our nature.”

Is the sense then simply: “It costs little enough to believe in the validity of whatever the divine may actually turn out to be, and in what has always been practised over a long period of time and is inherent in nature”? It may be so, but the sentence straggles badly: τόδε’ is good and crisp when defined by ὅτι τὸν αὐτὸν δαμόσων; it loses both crispness and excellence when τὸδε’ is found to introduce two or three ideas strung together by “and”. ἀεὶ is also far from brilliant following ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ, even though the sense “continuously over a long period” is logically defensible. To construe ἀεὶ only with φύσει πεφυσικός, taking τε as third word, and so circumventing Pohlenz’s objection “ware νόμμων und πεφυσικός koordiniert, müßte doch auch hinter ἀεὶ ein τε stehen”, would give a sense as pedestrian in Greek as it is in a modern language – “always rooted in nature” – and that is perhaps why Pohlenz did not even consider the idea. This however is the version favoured by Verdenius (Mnemosyne 1962, p. 355) and Jeanne Roux in her commentary (p. 322). “Il en coûte bien peu de croire à la puissance et du divin, quel qu’il puisse être, et de la tradition consacrée par les siècles, qui, toujours, est issue de la nature même.” (p. 176 of her translation).

The sentence would be much tauter if for the lack-lustre ἀεὶ we wrote αἰνεῖν, an infinitive parallel in sense and construction to νομίζειν. The spelling αἰνεῖν may have been an intermediate step, and it goes without saying that ἐν χρόνῳ μακρῷ could predispose a scribe’s mind to see αἰνεῖν where αἰνεῖν stood. “It costs little enough to believe in the power of whatever the divine may be, and to accept what has been the custom over a long period of time and is naturally born in us.” The two τε’s are not parallel with each other, but the first joins the second infinitival clause on to the first. For αἰνεῖν in the sense “accept”, “consent to”, “acquiesce in”, see L. S. J. s. v. II 2. The more ordinary sense of “praise” is doubtless not absent from our passage, but the sequence κοβὰ θαμάναι... αἰνεῖν may lead us to suppose that “accept” is the idea more in the forefront of the poet’s mind.

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