

AUCA Freshman Summer Reading Assignment includes:

- 1) Plato. Book VII, *The Republic*. Plato's *Complete Works*. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, pp. 1132-1137.
- 2) Descartes, Rene. Meditations I, II. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Tr. by Michael Moriarty, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 13-25.
- 3) Sophocles, *The Antigone*, trans. by Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia, November, May, 2005.

They're like us. Do you suppose, first of all, that these prisoners see anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall in front of them?

How could they, if they have to keep their heads motionless throughout life?

What about the things being carried along the wall? Isn't the same true of them?

Of course.

And if they could talk to one another, don't you think they'd suppose that the names they used applied to the things they see passing before them?¹

They'd have to.

And what if their prison also had an echo from the wall facing them? Don't you think they'd believe that the shadows passing in front of them were talking whenever one of the carriers passing along the wall was doing so?

I certainly do.

Then the prisoners would in every way believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of those artifacts.

They must surely believe that.

Consider, then, what being released from their bonds and cured of their ignorance would naturally be like, if something like this came to pass.² When one of them was freed and suddenly compelled to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look up toward the light, he'd be pained and dazzled and unable to see the things whose shadows he'd seen before. What do you think he'd say, if we told him that what he'd seen before was inconsequential, but that now—because he is a bit closer to the things that are and is turned towards things that are more—he sees more correctly? Or, to put it another way, if we pointed to each of the things passing by, asked him what each of them is, and compelled him to answer, don't you think he'd be at a loss and that he'd believe that the things he saw earlier were truer than the ones he was now being shown?

Much truer.

And if someone compelled him to look at the light itself, wouldn't his eyes hurt, and wouldn't he turn around and flee towards the things he's able to see, believing that they're really clearer than the ones he's being shown?

He would.

And if someone dragged him away from there by force, up the rough, steep path, and didn't let him go until he had dragged him into the sunlight, wouldn't he be pained and irritated at being treated that way? And when he came into the light, with the sun filling his eyes, wouldn't he be unable to see a single one of the things now said to be true?

Book VII

514 Next, I said, compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this: Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself. They've been there since childhood, fixed in the same place, with their necks and legs fettered, able to see only in front of them, because their bonds prevent them from turning their heads around. Light is provided by a fire burning far above and behind them. Also behind them, but on higher ground, there is a path stretching between them and the fire. Imagine that along this path a low wall has been built, like the screen in front of puppeteers above which they show their puppets.

I'm imagining it.

Then also imagine that there are people along the wall, carrying all kinds of artifacts that project above it—statues of people and other animals, made out of stone, wood, and every material. And, as you'd expect, some of the carriers are talking, and some are silent.

It's a strange image you're describing, and strange prisoners.

1. Reading *parionta autous nomizein onomazein* in b5.

2. Reading *hoia tis an ephusei, ei* in c5.

He would be unable to see them, at least at first.

I suppose, then, that he'd need time to get adjusted before he could see things in the world above. At first, he'd see shadows most easily, then images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves. Of these, he'd be able to study the things in the sky and the sky itself more easily at night, looking at the light of the stars and the moon, than during the day, looking at the sun and the light of the sun.

Of course.

Finally, I suppose, he'd be able to see the sun, not images of it in water or some alien place, but the sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it.

Necessarily so.

And at this point he would infer and conclude that the sun provides the seasons and the years, governs everything in the visible world, and is in some way the cause of all the things that he used to see.

It's clear that would be his next step.

What about when he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, his fellow prisoners, and what passed for wisdom there? Don't you think that he'd count himself happy for the change and pity the others?

Certainly.

And if there had been any honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who was sharpest at identifying the shadows as they passed by and who best remembered which usually came earlier, which later, and which simultaneously, and who could thus best divine the future, do you think that our man would desire these rewards or envy those among the prisoners who were honored and held power? Instead, wouldn't he feel, with Homer, that he'd much prefer to "work the earth as a serf to another, one without possessions,"³ and go through any sufferings, rather than share their opinions and live as they do?

I suppose he would rather suffer anything than live like that.

Consider this too. If this man went down into the cave again and sat down in his same seat, wouldn't his eyes—coming suddenly out of the sun like that—be filled with darkness?

They certainly would.

And before his eyes had recovered—and the adjustment would not be quick—while his vision was still dim, if he had to compete again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, wouldn't he invite ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?

They certainly would.

This whole image, Glaucon, must be fitted together with what we said before. The visible realm should be likened to the prison dwelling, and the light of the fire inside it to the power of the sun. And if you interpret the upward journey and the study of things above as the upward journey of the soul to the intelligible realm, you'll grasp what I hope to convey, since that is what you wanted to hear about. Whether it's true or not, only the god knows. But this is how I see it: In the knowable realm, the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it.

I have the same thought, at least as far as I'm able.

Come, then, share with me this thought also: It isn't surprising that the ones who get to this point are unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs and that their souls are always pressing upwards, eager to spend their time above, for, after all, this is surely what we'd expect, if indeed things fit the image I described before.

It is.

What about what happens when someone turns from divine study to the evils of human life? Do you think it's surprising, since his sight is still dim, and he hasn't yet become accustomed to the darkness around him, that he behaves awkwardly and appears completely ridiculous if he's compelled, either in the courts or elsewhere, to contend about the shadows of justice or the statues of which they are the shadows and to dispute about the way these things are understood by people who have never seen justice itself?

That's not surprising at all.

No, it isn't. But anyone with any understanding would remember that the eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes, namely, when they've come from the light into the darkness *and* when they've come from the darkness into the light. Realizing that the same applies to the soul, when someone sees a soul disturbed and unable to see something, he won't laugh mindlessly, but he'll take into consideration whether it has come from a brighter life and is dimmed through not having yet become accustomed to the dark or whether it has come from greater ignorance into greater light and is dazzled by the increased brilliance. Then he'll declare the first soul happy in its experience and life, and he'll pity the latter—but even if he chose to make fun of it, at least he'd be less ridiculous than if he laughed at a soul that has come from the light above.

What you say is very reasonable.

If that's true, then here's what we must think about these matters:

Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes.

They do say that.

3. *Odyssey* xi.489–90.

But our present discussion, on the other hand, shows that the power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good. Isn't that right?

Yes.

Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately.

So it seems.

Now, it looks as though the other so-called virtues of the soul are akin to those of the body, for they really aren't there beforehand but are added later by habit and practice. However, the virtue of reason seems to belong above all to something more divine, which never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned. Or have you never noticed this about people who are said to be vicious but clever, how keen the vision of their little souls is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned towards? This shows that its sight isn't inferior but rather is forced to serve evil ends, so that the sharper it sees, the more evil it accomplishes.

Absolutely.

However, if a nature of this sort had been hammered at from childhood and freed from the bonds of kinship with becoming, which have been fastened to it by feasting, greed, and other such pleasures and which, like leaden weights, pull its vision downwards—if, being rid of these, it turned to look at true things, then I say that the same soul of the same person would see these most sharply, just as it now does the things it is presently turned towards.

Probably so.

And what about the uneducated who have no experience of truth? Isn't it likely—indeed, doesn't it follow necessarily from what was said before—that they will never adequately govern a city? But neither would those who've been allowed to spend their whole lives being educated. The former would fail because they don't have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim; the latter would fail because they'd refuse to act, thinking that they had settled while still alive in the faraway Isles of the Blessed.

That's true.

It is our task as founders, then, to compel the best natures to reach the study we said before is the most important, namely, to make the ascent and see the good. But when they've made it and looked sufficiently, we mustn't allow them to do what they're allowed to do today.

What's that?

To stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave and share their labors and honors, whether they are of less worth or of greater.

Then are we to do them an injustice by making them live a worse life when they could live a better one?

You are forgetting again that it isn't the law's concern to make any one class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community.⁴ The law produces such people in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together.

That's true, I had forgotten.

Observe, then, Glaucon, that we won't be doing an injustice to those who've become philosophers in our city and that what we'll say to them, when we compel them to guard and care for the others, will be just. We'll say: "When people like you come to be in other cities, they're justified in not sharing in their city's labors, for they've grown there spontaneously, against the will of the constitution. And what grows of its own accord and owes no debt for its upbringing has justice on its side when it isn't keen to pay anyone for that upbringing. But we've made you kings in our city and leaders of the swarm, as it were, both for yourselves and for the rest of the city. You're better and more completely educated than the others and are better able to share in both types of life. Therefore each of you in turn must go down to live in the common dwelling place of the others and grow accustomed to seeing in the dark. When you are used to it, you'll see vastly better than the people there. And because you've seen the truth about fine, just, and good things, you'll know each image for what it is and also that of which it is the image. Thus, for you and for us, the city will be governed, not like the majority of cities nowadays, by people who fight over shadows and struggle against one another in order to rule—as if that were a great good—but by people who are awake rather than dreaming, for the truth is surely this: A city whose prospective rulers are least eager to rule must of necessity be most free from civil war, whereas a city with the opposite kind of rulers is governed in the opposite way."

Absolutely.

Then do you think that those we've nurtured will disobey us and refuse to share the labors of the city, each in turn, while living the greater part of their time with one another in the pure realm?

It isn't possible, for we'll be giving just orders to just people. Each of them will certainly go to rule as to something compulsory, however, which is exactly the opposite of what's done by those who now rule in each city.

4. See 420b–421c, 462a–466c.

521 This is how it is. If you can find a way of life that's better than ruling for the prospective rulers, your well-governed city will become a possibility, for only in it will the truly rich rule—not those who are rich in gold but those who are rich in the wealth that the happy must have, namely, a good and rational life. But if beggars hungry for private goods go into public life, thinking that the good is there for the seizing, then the well-governed city is impossible, for then ruling is something fought over, and this civil and domestic war destroys these people and the rest of the city as well.

That's very true.

b Can you name any life that despises political rule besides that of the true philosopher?

No, by god, I can't.

But surely it is those who are not lovers of ruling who must rule, for if they don't, the lovers of it, who are rivals, will fight over it.

Of course.

Then who will you compel to become guardians of the city, if not those who have the best understanding of what matters for good government and who have other honors than political ones, and a better life as well?

No one.

c Do you want us to consider now how such people will come to be in our city and how—just as some are said to have gone up from Hades to the gods—we'll lead them up to the light?

Of course I do.

This isn't, it seems, a matter of tossing a coin, but of turning a soul from a day that is a kind of night to the true day—the ascent to what is, which we say is true philosophy.

Indeed.

d Then mustn't we try to discover the subjects that have the power to bring this about?

Of course.

So what subject is it, Glaucon, that draws the soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of what is? And it occurs to me as I'm speaking that that we said, didn't we, that it is necessary for the prospective rulers to be athletes in war when they're young?

Yes, we did.

Then the subject we're looking for must also have this characteristic in addition to the former one.

Which one?

It mustn't be useless to warlike men.

If it's at all possible, it mustn't.

e Now, prior to this, we educated them in music and poetry and physical training.

We did.

And physical training is concerned with what comes into being and dies, for it oversees the growth and decay of the body.

Apparently.

So it couldn't be the subject we're looking for.

No, it couldn't.

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Then, could it be the music and poetry we described before?

But that, if you remember, is just the counterpart of physical training. It educated the guardians through habits. Its harmonies gave them a certain harmoniousness, not knowledge; its rhythms gave them a certain rhythmical quality; and its stories, whether fictional or nearer the truth, cultivated other habits akin to these. But as for the subject you're looking for now, there's nothing like that in music and poetry.

b

Your reminder is exactly to the point; there's really nothing like that in music and poetry. But, Glaucon, what is there that does have this? The crafts all seem to be base or mechanical.

How could they be otherwise? But apart from music and poetry, physical training, and the crafts, what subject is left?

Well, if we can't find anything apart from these, let's consider one of the subjects that touches all of them.

What sort of thing?

For example, that common thing that every craft, every type of thought, and every science uses and that is among the first compulsory subjects for everyone.

c

What's that?

That inconsequential matter of distinguishing the one, the two, and the three. In short, I mean number and calculation, for isn't it true that every craft and science must have a share in that?

They certainly must.

Then so must warfare.

Absolutely.

In the tragedies, at any rate, Palamedes is always showing up Agamemnon as a totally ridiculous general. Haven't you noticed? He says that, by inventing numbers, he established how many troops there were in the Trojan army and counted their ships and everything else—implying that they were uncounted before and that Agamemnon (if indeed he didn't know how to count) didn't even know how many feet he had? What kind of general do you think that made him?

d

A very strange one, if that's true.

Then won't we set down this subject as compulsory for a warrior, so that he is able to count and calculate?

e

More compulsory than anything. If, that is, he's to understand anything about setting his troops in order or if he's even to be properly human.

Then do you notice the same thing about this subject that I do?

What's that?

That this turns out to be one of the subjects we were looking for that naturally lead to understanding. But no one uses it correctly, namely, as something that is really fitted in every way to draw one towards being.

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What do you mean?

I'll try to make my view clear as follows: I'll distinguish for myself the things that do or don't lead in the direction we mentioned, and you must study them along with me and either agree or disagree, and that way we may come to know more clearly whether things are indeed as I divine.

Point them out.

I'll point out, then, if you can grasp it, that some sense perceptions *don't* summon the understanding to look into them, because the judgment of sense perception is itself adequate, while others encourage it in every way to look into them, because sense perception seems to produce no sound result.

You're obviously referring to things appearing in the distance and to *trompe l'oeil* paintings.

You're not quite getting my meaning.

Then what do you mean?

The ones that don't summon the understanding are all those that don't go off into opposite perceptions at the same time. But the ones that do go off in that way I call *summoners*—whenever sense perception doesn't declare one thing any more than its opposite, no matter whether the object striking the senses is near at hand or far away. You'll understand my meaning better if I put it this way: These, we s y, are three fingers—the smallest, the second, and the middle finger.

That's right.

Assume that I'm talking about them as being seen from close by. Now, this is my question about them.

What?

It's apparent that each of them is equally a finger, and it makes no difference in this regard whether the finger is seen to be in the middle or at either end, whether it is dark or pale, thick or thin, or anything else of that sort, for in all these cases, an ordinary soul isn't compelled to ask the understanding what a finger is, since sight doesn't suggest to it that a finger is at the same time the opposite of a finger.

No, it doesn't.

Therefore, it isn't likely that anything of that sort would summon or awaken the understanding.

No, it isn't.

But what about the bigness and smallness of fingers? Does sight perceive them adequately? Does it make no difference to it whether the finger is in the middle or at the end? And is it the same with the sense of touch, as regards the thick and the thin, the hard and the soft? And do the other senses reveal such things clearly and adequately? Doesn't each of them rather do the following: The sense set over the hard is, in the first place, of necessity also set over the soft, and it reports to the soul that the same thing is perceived by it to be both hard and soft?

That's right.

And isn't it necessary that in such cases the soul is puzzled as to what this sense means by the hard, if it indicates that the same thing is also

soft, or what it means by the light and the heavy, if it indicates that the heavy is light, or the light, heavy?

Yes, indeed, these are strange reports for the soul to receive, and they do demand to be looked into.

Then it's likely that in such cases the soul, summoning calculation and understanding, first tries to determine whether each of the things announced to it is one or two.

Of course.

If it's evidently two, won't each be evidently distinct and one?

Yes.

Then, if each is one, and both two, the soul will understand that the two are separate, for it wouldn't understand the inseparable to be two, but rather one.

That's right.

Sight, however, saw the big and small, not as separate, but as mixed up together. Isn't that so?

Yes.

And in order to get clear about all this, understanding was compelled to see the big and the small, not as mixed up together, but as separate—the opposite way from sight.

True.

And isn't it from these cases that it first occurs to us to ask what the big is and what the small is?

Absolutely.

And, because of this, we called the one the intelligible and the other the visible.

That's right.

This, then, is what I was trying to express before, when I said that some things summon thought, while others don't. Those that strike the relevant sense at the same time as their opposites I call *summoners*, those that don't do this do not awaken understanding.

Now I understand, and I think you're right.

Well, then, to which of them do number and the one belong?

I don't know.

Reason it out from what was said before. If the one is adequately seen itself by itself or is so perceived by any of the other senses, then, as we were saying in the case of fingers, it wouldn't draw the soul towards being. But if something opposite to it is always seen at the same time, so that nothing is apparently any more one than the opposite of one, then something would be needed to judge the matter. The soul would then be puzzled, would look for an answer, would stir up its understanding, and would ask what the one itself is. And so this would be among the subjects that lead the soul and turn it around towards the study of that which is.

But surely the sight of the one does possess this characteristic to a remarkable degree, for we see the same thing to be both one and an unlimited number at the same time.

Then, if this is true of the one, won't it also be true of all numbers?

Of course.

Now, calculation and arithmetic are wholly concerned with numbers.

That's right.

b Then evidently they lead us towards truth.

Supernaturally so.

Then they belong, it seems, to the subjects we're seeking. They are compulsory for warriors because of their orderly ranks and for philosophers because they have to learn to rise up out of becoming and grasp being, if they are ever to become rational.

That's right.

And our guardian must be both a warrior and a philosopher.

Certainly.

Then it would be appropriate, Glaucon, to legislate this subject for those who are going to share in the highest offices in the city and to persuade them to turn to calculation and take it up, not as laymen do, but staying with it until they reach the study of the natures of the numbers by means of understanding itself, nor like tradesmen and retailers, for the sake of buying and selling, but for the sake of war and for ease in turning the soul around, away from becoming and towards truth and being.

Well put.

Moreover, it strikes me, now that it has been mentioned, how sophisticated the subject of calculation is and in how many ways it is useful for our purposes, provided that one practices it for the sake of knowing rather than trading.

How is it useful?

In the very way we were talking about. It leads the soul forcibly upward and compels it to discuss the numbers themselves, never permitting anyone to propose for discussion numbers attached to visible or tangible bodies. You know what those who are clever in these matters are like: If, in the course of the argument, someone tries to divide the one itself, they laugh and won't permit it. If you divide it, they multiply it, taking care that one thing never be found to be many parts rather than one.

That's very true.

526 Then what do you think would happen, Glaucon, if someone were to ask them: "What kind of numbers are you talking about, in which the one is as you assume it to be, each one equal to every other, without the least difference and containing no internal parts?"

I think they'd answer that they are talking about those numbers that can be grasped only in thought and can't be dealt with in any other way.

b Then do you see that it's likely that this subject really is compulsory for us, since it apparently compels the soul to use understanding itself on the truth itself?

Indeed, it most certainly does do that.

And what about those who are naturally good at calculation or reasoning? Have you already noticed that they're naturally sharp, so to speak,

in all subjects, and that those who are slow at it, if they're educated and exercised in it, even if they're benefited in no other way, nonetheless improve and become generally sharper than they were?

That's true.

Moreover, I don't think you'll easily find subjects that are harder to learn or practice than this.

No, indeed.

Then, for all these reasons, this subject isn't to be neglected, and the best natures must be educated in it.

I agree.

Let that, then, be one of our subjects. Second, let's consider whether the subject that comes next is also appropriate for our purposes.

What subject is that? Do you mean geometry?

That's the very one I had in mind.

Insofar as it pertains to war, it's obviously appropriate, for when it comes to setting up camp, occupying a region, concentrating troops, deploying them, or with regard to any of the other formations an army adopts in battle or on the march, it makes all the difference whether someone is a geometer or not.

But, for things like that, even a little geometry—or calculation for that matter—would suffice. What we need to consider is whether the greater and more advanced part of it tends to make it easier to see the form of the good. And we say that anything has that tendency if it compels the soul to turn itself around towards the region in which lies the happiest of the things that are, the one the soul must see at any cost.

You're right.

Therefore, if geometry compels the soul to study being, it's appropriate, but if it compels it to study becoming, it's inappropriate.

So we've said, at any rate.

Now, no one with even a little experience of geometry will dispute that this science is entirely the opposite of what is said about it in the accounts of its practitioners.

How do you mean?

They give ridiculous accounts of it, though they can't help it, for they speak like practical men, and all their accounts refer to doing things. They talk of "squaring," "applying," "adding," and the like, whereas the entire subject is pursued for the sake of knowledge.

Absolutely.

And mustn't we also agree on a further point?

What is that?

That their accounts are for the sake of knowing what always is, not what comes into being and passes away.

That's easy to agree to, for geometry *is* knowledge of what always is.

Then it draws the soul towards truth and produces philosophic thought by directing upwards what we now wrongly direct downwards.

As far as anything possibly can.

c Then as far as *we* possibly can, we must require those in your fine city not to neglect geometry in any way, for even its by-products are not insignificant.

What are they?

The ones concerned with war that you mentioned. But we also surely know that, when it comes to better understanding any subject, there is a world of difference between someone who has grasped geometry and someone who hasn't.

Yes, by god, a world of difference.

Then shall we set this down as a second subject for the young?

Let's do so, he said.

d And what about astronomy? Shall we make it the third? Or do you disagree?

That's fine with me, for a better awareness of the seasons, months, and years is no less appropriate for a general than for a farmer or navigator.

e You amuse me: You're like someone who's afraid that the majority will think he is prescribing useless subjects. It's no easy task—indeed it's very difficult—to realize that in every soul there is an instrument that is purified and rekindled by such subjects when it has been blinded and destroyed by other ways of life, an instrument that it is more important to preserve than ten thousand eyes, since only with it can the truth be seen. Those who share your belief that this is so will think you're speaking incredibly well, while those who've never been aware of it will probably think you're talking nonsense, since they see no benefit worth mentioning in these subjects. So decide right now which group you're addressing. Or are your arguments for neither of them but mostly for your own sake—though you won't begrudge anyone else whatever benefit he's able to get from them?

The latter: I want to speak, question, and answer mostly for my own sake.

Then let's fall back to our earlier position, for we were wrong just now about the subject that comes after geometry.

What was our error?

b After plane surfaces, we went on to revolving solids before dealing with solids by themselves. But the right thing to do is to take up the third dimension right after the second. And this, I suppose, consists of cubes and of whatever shares in depth.

You're right, Socrates, but this subject hasn't been developed yet.

c There are two reasons for that: First, because no city values it, this difficult subject is little researched. Second, the researchers need a director, for, without one, they won't discover anything. To begin with, such a director is hard to find, and, then, even if he could be found, those who currently do research in this field would be too arrogant to follow him. If an entire city helped him to supervise it, however, and took the lead in valuing it, then he would be followed. And, if the subject was consistently and vigorously pursued, it would soon be developed. Even now, when it isn't valued and is held in contempt by the majority and is pursued by

researchers who are unable to give an account of its usefulness, nevertheless, in spite of all these handicaps, the force of its charm has caused it to develop somewhat, so that it wouldn't be surprising if it were further developed even as things stand.

d The subject *has* outstanding charm. But explain more clearly what you were saying just now. The subject that deals with plane surfaces you took to be geometry.

Yes.

And at first you put astronomy after it, but later you went back on that. In my haste to go through them all, I've only progressed more slowly. The subject dealing with the dimension of depth was next. But because it is in a ridiculous state, I passed it by and spoke of astronomy (which deals with the motion of things having depth) after geometry.

e That's right.

Let's then put astronomy as the fourth subject, on the assumption that solid geometry will be available if a city takes it up.

That seems reasonable. And since you reproached me before for praising astronomy in a vulgar manner, I'll now praise it your way, for I think it's clear to everyone that astronomy compels the soul to look upward and leads it from things here to things there.

It may be obvious to everyone except me, but that's not my view about it.

Then what *is* your view?

As it's practiced today by those who teach philosophy, it makes the soul look very much downward.

How do you mean?

b In my opinion, your conception of "higher studies" is a good deal too generous, for if someone were to study something by leaning his head back and studying ornaments on a ceiling, it looks as though you'd say he's studying not with his eyes but with his understanding. Perhaps you're right, and I'm foolish, but I can't conceive of any subject making the soul look upward except one concerned with that which is, and that which is invisible. If anyone attempts to learn something about sensible things, whether by gazing upward or squinting downward, I'd claim—since there's no knowledge of such things—that he never learns anything and that, even if he studies lying on his back on the ground or floating on it in the sea, his soul is looking not up but down.

c You're right to reproach me, and I've been justly punished, but what did you mean when you said that astronomy must be learned in a different way from the way in which it is learned at present if it is to be a useful subject for our purposes?

d It's like this: We should consider the decorations in the sky to be the most beautiful and most exact of visible things, seeing that they're embroidered on a visible surface. But we should consider their motions to fall far short of the true ones—motions that are really fast or slow as measured in true numbers, that trace out true geometrical figures, that are all in

relation to one another, and that are the true motions of the things carried along in them. And these, of course, must be grasped by reason and thought, not by sight. Or do you think otherwise?

Not at all.

Therefore, we should use the embroidery in the sky as a model in the study of these other things. If someone experienced in geometry were to come upon plans very carefully drawn and worked out by Daedalus or some other craftsman or artist, he'd consider them to be very finely executed, but he'd think it ridiculous to examine them seriously in order to find the truth in them about the equal, the double, or any other ratio.

How could it be anything other than ridiculous?

Then don't you think that a real astronomer will feel the same when he looks at the motions of the stars? He'll believe that the craftsman of the heavens arranged them and all that's in them in the finest way possible for such things. But as for the ratio of night to day, of days to a month, of a month to a year, or of the motions of the stars to any of them or to each other, don't you think he'll consider it strange to believe that they're always the same and never deviate anywhere at all or to try in any sort of way to grasp the truth about them, since they're connected to body and visible?

That's my opinion anyway, now that I hear it from you.

Then if, by really taking part in astronomy, we're to make the naturally intelligent part of the soul useful instead of useless, let's study astronomy by means of problems, as we do geometry, and leave the things in the sky alone.

The task you're prescribing is a lot harder than anything now attempted in astronomy.

And I suppose that, if we are to be of any benefit as lawgivers, our prescriptions for the other subjects will be of the same kind. But have you any other appropriate subject to suggest?

Not offhand.

Well, there isn't just one form of motion but several. Perhaps a wise person could list them all, but there are two that are evident even to us.

What are they?

Besides the one we've discussed, there is also its counterpart.

What's that?

It's likely that, as the eyes fasten on astronomical motions, so the ears fasten on harmonic ones, and that the sciences of astronomy and harmonics are closely akin. This is what the Pythagoreans say, Glaucon, and we agree, don't we?

We do.

Therefore, since the subject is so huge, shouldn't we ask them what they have to say about harmonic motions and whether there is anything else besides them, all the while keeping our own goal squarely in view?

What's that?

That those whom we are rearing should never try to learn anything incomplete, anything that doesn't reach the end that everything should reach—the end we mentioned just now in the case of astronomy. Or don't you know that people do something similar in harmonics? Measuring audible consonances and sounds against one another, they labor in vain, just like present-day astronomers.

Yes, by the gods, and pretty ridiculous they are too. They talk about something they call a "dense interval" or quartertone—putting their ears to their instruments like someone trying to overhear what the neighbors are saying. And some say that they hear a tone in between and that it is the shortest interval by which they must measure, while others argue that this tone sounds the same as a quarter tone. Both put ears before understanding.

You mean those excellent fellows who torment their strings, torturing them, and stretching them on pegs. I won't draw out the analogy by speaking of blows with the plectrum or the accusations or denials and boastings on the part of the strings; instead I'll cut it short by saying that these aren't the people I'm talking about. The ones I mean are the ones we just said we were going to question about harmonics, for they do the same as the astronomers. They seek out the numbers that are to be found in these audible consonances, but they do not make the ascent to problems. They don't investigate, for example, which numbers are consonant and which aren't or what the explanation is of each.

But that would be a superhuman task.

Yet it's useful in the search for the beautiful and the good. But pursued for any other purpose, it's useless.

Probably so.

Moreover, I take it that, if inquiry into all the subjects we've mentioned brings out their association and relationship with one another and draws conclusions about their kinship, it does contribute something to our goal and isn't labor in vain, but that otherwise it is in vain.

I, too, divine that this is true. But you're still talking about a very big task, Socrates.

Do you mean the prelude, or what? Or don't you know that all these subjects are merely preludes to the song itself that must also be learned? Surely you don't think that people who are clever in these matters are dialecticians.

No, by god, I don't. Although I have met a few exceptions.

But did it ever seem to you that those who can neither give nor follow an account know anything at all of the things we say they must know?

My answer to that is also no.

Then isn't this at last, Glaucon, the song that dialectic sings? It is intelligible, but it is imitated by the power of sight. We said that sight tries at last to look at the animals themselves, the stars themselves, and, in the end, at the sun itself. In the same way, whenever someone tries through

argument and apart from all sense perceptions to find the being itself of each thing and doesn't give up until he grasps the good itself with understanding itself, he reaches the end of the intelligible, just as the other reached the end of the visible.

Absolutely.

And what about this journey? Don't you call it dialectic?

I do.

Then the release from bonds and the turning around from shadows to statues and the light of the fire and, then, the way up out of the cave to the sunlight and, there, the continuing inability to look at the animals, the plants, and the light of the sun, but the newly acquired ability to look at divine images in water and shadows of the things that are, rather than, as before, merely at shadows of statues thrown by another source of light that is itself a shadow in relation to the sun—all this business of the crafts we've mentioned has the power to awaken the best part of the soul and lead it upward to the study of the best among the things that are, just as, before, the clearest thing in the body was led to the brightest thing in the bodily and visible realm.

I accept that this is so, even though it seems very hard to accept in one way and hard not to accept in another. All the same, since we'll have to return to these things often in the future, rather than having to hear them just once now, let's assume that what you've said is so and turn to the song itself, discussing it in the same way as we did the prelude. So tell us: what is the sort of power dialectic has, what forms is it divided into, and what paths does it follow? For these lead at last, it seems, towards that place which is a rest from the road, so to speak, and an end of journeying for the one who reaches it.

You won't be able to follow me any longer, Glaucon, even though there is no lack of eagerness on my part to lead you, for you would no longer be seeing an image of what we're describing, but the truth itself. At any rate, that's how it seems to me. That it is really so is not worth insisting on any further. But that there is some such thing to be seen, *that* is something we must insist on. Isn't that so?

Of course.

And mustn't we also insist that the power of dialectic could reveal it only to someone experienced in the subjects we've described and that it cannot reveal it in any other way?

That too is worth insisting on.

At any rate, no one will dispute it when we say that there is no other inquiry that systematically attempts to grasp with respect to each thing itself what the being of it is, for all the other crafts are concerned with human opinions and desires, with growing or construction, or with the care of growing or constructed things. And as for the rest, I mean geometry and the subjects that follow it, we described them as to some extent grasping what is, for we saw that, while they do dream about what is, they are unable to command a waking view of it as long as they make use of

hypotheses that they leave untouched and that they cannot give any account of. What mechanism could possibly turn any agreement into knowledge when it begins with something unknown and puts together the conclusion and the steps in between from what is unknown?

None.

Therefore, dialectic is the only inquiry that travels this road, doing away with hypotheses and proceeding to the first principle itself, so as to be secure. And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards, using the crafts we described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around. From force of habit, we've often called these crafts sciences or kinds of knowledge, but they need another name, clearer than opinion, darker than knowledge. We called them thought somewhere before.⁵ But I presume that we won't dispute about a name when we have so many more important matters to investigate.

Of course not.

It will therefore be enough to call the first section knowledge, the second thought, the third belief, and the fourth imaging, just as we did before.

The last two together we call opinion, the other two, intellect. Opinion is concerned with becoming, intellect with being. And as being is to becoming, so intellect is to opinion, and as intellect is to opinion, so knowledge is to belief and thought to imaging. But as for the ratios between the things these are set over and the division of either the opinable or the intelligible section into two, let's pass them by, Glaucon, lest they involve us in arguments many times longer than the ones we've already gone through.

I agree with you about the others in any case, insofar as I'm able to follow.

Then, do you call someone who is able to give an account of the being of each thing dialectical? But insofar as he's unable to give an account of something, either to himself or to another, do you deny that he has any understanding of it?

How could I do anything else?

Then the same applies to the good. Unless someone can distinguish in an account the form of the good from everything else, can survive all refutation, as if in a battle, striving to judge things not in accordance with opinion but in accordance with being, and can come through all this with his account still intact, you'll say that he doesn't know the good itself or any other good. And if he gets hold of some image of it, you'll say that it's through opinion, not knowledge, for he is dreaming and asleep throughout his present life, and, before he wakes up here, he will arrive in Hades and go to sleep forever.

Yes, by god, I'll certainly say all of that.

Then, as for those children of yours whom you're rearing and educating in theory, if you ever reared them in fact, I don't think that you'd allow

5. See 511d–e.

them to rule in your city or be responsible for the most important things while they are as irrational as incommensurable lines.

Certainly not.

Then you'll legislate that they are to give most attention to the education that will enable them to ask and answer questions most knowledgeably?

I'll legislate it along with you.

Then do you think that we've placed dialectic at the top of the other subjects like a coping stone and that no other subject can rightly be placed above it, but that our account of the subjects that a future ruler must learn has come to an end?

Probably so.

Then it remains for you to deal with the distribution of these subjects, with the question of to whom we'll assign them and in what way.

That's clearly next.

Do you remember what sort of people we chose in our earlier selection of rulers?⁶

Of course I do.

In the other respects, the same natures have to be chosen: we have to select the most stable, the most courageous, and as far as possible the most graceful. In addition, we must look not only for people who have a noble and tough character but for those who have the natural qualities conducive to this education of ours.

Which ones exactly?

They must be keen on the subjects and learn them easily, for people's souls give up much more easily in hard study than in physical training, since the pain—being peculiar to them and not shared with their body—is more their own.

That's true.

We must also look for someone who has got a good memory, is persistent, and is in every way a lover of hard work. How else do you think he'd be willing to carry out both the requisite bodily labors and also complete so much study and practice?

Nobody would, unless his nature was in every way a good one.

In any case, the present error, which as we said before explains why philosophy isn't valued, is that she's taken up by people who are unworthy of her, for illegitimate students shouldn't be allowed to take her up, but only legitimate ones.

How so?

In the first place, no student should be lame in his love of hard work, really loving one half of it, and hating the other half. This happens when someone is a lover of physical training, hunting, or any kind of bodily labor and isn't a lover of learning, listening, or inquiry, but hates the work involved in them. And someone whose love of hard work tends in the opposite direction is also lame.

That's very true.

Similarly with regard to truth, won't we say that a soul is maimed if it hates a voluntary falsehood, cannot endure to have one in itself, and is greatly angered when it exists in others, but is nonetheless content to accept an involuntary falsehood, isn't angry when it is caught being ignorant, and bears its lack of learning easily, wallowing in it like a pig?

Absolutely.

And with regard to moderation, courage, high-mindedness, and all the other parts of virtue, it is also important to distinguish the illegitimate from the legitimate, for when either a city or an individual doesn't know how to do this, it unwittingly employs the lame and illegitimate as friends or rulers for whatever services it wants done.

That's just how it is.

So we must be careful in all these matters, for if we bring people who are sound of limb and mind to so great a subject and training, and educate them in it, even justice itself won't blame us, and we'll save the city and its constitution. But if we bring people of a different sort, we'll do the opposite, and let loose an even greater flood of ridicule upon philosophy.

And it would be shameful to do that.

It certainly would. But I seem to have done something a bit ridiculous myself just now.

What's that?

I forgot that we were only playing, and so I spoke too vehemently. But I looked upon philosophy as I spoke, and seeing her undeservedly besmirched, I seem to have lost my temper and said what I had to say too earnestly, as if I were angry with those responsible for it.

That certainly wasn't my impression as I listened to you.

But it was mine as I was speaking. In any case, let's not forget that in our earlier selection we chose older people but that that isn't permitted in this one, for we mustn't believe Solon⁷ when he says that as someone grows older he's able to learn a lot. He can do that even less well than he can run races, for all great and numerous labors belong to the young.

Necessarily.

Therefore, calculation, geometry, and all the preliminary education required for dialectic must be offered to the future rulers in childhood, and not in the shape of compulsory learning either.

Why's that?

Because no free person should learn anything like a slave. Forced bodily labor does no harm to the body, but nothing taught by force stays in the soul.

That's true.

Then don't use force to train the children in these subjects; use play instead. That way you'll also see better what each of them is naturally fitted for.

6. See 412b ff.

7. Athenian statesman, lawgiver, and poet (c. 640–560).

That seems reasonable.

Do you remember that we stated that the children were to be led into war on horseback as observers and that, wherever it is safe to do so, they should be brought close and taste blood, like puppies?

I remember.

In all these things—in labors, studies, and fears—the ones who always show the greatest aptitude are to be inscribed on a list.

b At what age?

When they're released from compulsory physical training, for during that period, whether it's two or three years, young people are incapable of doing anything else, since weariness and sleep are enemies of learning. At the same time, how they fare in this physical training is itself an important test.

Of course it is.

c And after that, that is to say, from the age of twenty, those who are chosen will also receive more honors than the others. Moreover, the subjects they learned in no particular order as children they must now bring together to form a unified vision of their kinship both with one another and with the nature of that which is.

At any rate, only learning of that sort holds firm in those who receive it.

It is also the greatest test of who is naturally dialectical and who isn't, for anyone who can achieve a unified vision is dialectical, and anyone who can't isn't.

I agree.

d Well, then, you'll have to look out for the ones who most of all have this ability in them and who also remain steadfast in their studies, in war, and in the other activities laid down by law. And after they have reached their thirtieth year, you'll select them in turn from among those chosen earlier and assign them yet greater honors. Then you'll have to test them by means of the power of dialectic, to discover which of them can relinquish his eyes and other senses, going on with the help of truth to that which by itself is. And this is a task that requires great care.

What's the main reason for that?

e Don't you realize what a great evil comes from dialectic as it is currently practiced?

What evil is that?

Those who practice it are filled with lawlessness.

They certainly are.

Do you think it's surprising that this happens to them? Aren't you sympathetic?

Why isn't it surprising? And why should I be sympathetic?

538 Because it's like the case of a child brought up surrounded by much wealth and many flatterers in a great and numerous family, who finds out, when he has become a man, that he isn't the child of his professed parents and that he can't discover his real ones. Can you divine what the

attitude of someone like that would be to the flatterers, on the one hand, and to his supposed parents, on the other, before he knew about his parentage, and what it would be when he found out? Or would you rather hear what I divine about it?

I'd rather hear your views.

b Well, then, I divine that during the time that he didn't know the truth, he'd honor his father, mother, and the rest of his supposed family more than he would the flatterers, that he'd pay greater attention to their needs, be less likely to treat them lawlessly in word or deed, and be more likely to obey them than the flatterers in any matters of importance.

Probably so.

c When he became aware of the truth, however, his honor and enthusiasm would lessen for his family and increase for the flatterers, he'd obey the latter far more than before, begin to live in the way that they did, and keep company with them openly, and, unless he was very decent by nature, he'd eventually care nothing for that father of his or any of the rest of his supposed family.

All this would probably happen as you say, but in what way is it an image of those who take up arguments?

As follows. We hold from childhood certain convictions about just and fine things; we're brought up with them as with our parents, we obey and honor them.

Indeed, we do.

d There are other ways of living, however, opposite to these and full of pleasures, that flatter the soul and attract it to themselves but which don't persuade sensible people, who continue to honor and obey the convictions of their fathers.

That's right.

e And then a questioner comes along and asks someone of this sort, "What is the fine?" And, when he answers what he has heard from the traditional lawgiver, the argument refutes him, and by refuting him often and in many places shakes him from his convictions, and makes him believe that the fine is no more fine than shameful, and the same with the just, the good, and the things he honored most. What do you think his attitude will be then to honoring and obeying his earlier convictions?

Of necessity he won't honor or obey them in the same way.

Then, when he no longer honors and obeys those convictions and can't discover the true ones, will he be likely to adopt any other way of life than that which flatters him?

No, he won't.

And so, I suppose, from being law-abiding he becomes lawless.

Inevitably.

Then, as I asked before, isn't it only to be expected that this is what happens to those who take up arguments in this way, and don't they therefore deserve a lot of sympathy?

Yes, and they deserve pity too.

Then, if you don't want your thirty-year-olds to be objects of such pity, you'll have to be extremely careful about how you introduce them to arguments.

That's right.

And isn't it one lasting precaution not to let them taste arguments while they're young? I don't suppose that it has escaped your notice that, when young people get their first taste of arguments, they misuse it by treating it as a kind of game of contradiction. They imitate those who've refuted them by refuting others themselves, and, like puppies, they enjoy dragging and tearing those around them with their arguments.

They're excessively fond of it.

Then, when they've refuted many and been refuted by them in turn, they forcefully and quickly fall into disbelieving what they believed before. And, as a result, they themselves and the whole of philosophy are discredited in the eyes of others.

That's very true.

But an older person won't want to take part in such madness. He'll imitate someone who is willing to engage in discussion in order to look for the truth, rather than someone who plays at contradiction for sport. He'll be more sensible himself and will bring honor rather than discredit to the philosophical way of life.

That's right.

And when we said before that those allowed to take part in arguments should be orderly and steady by nature, not as nowadays, when even the unfit are allowed to engage in them—wasn't all that also said as a precaution?

Of course.

Then if someone continuously, strenuously, and exclusively devotes himself to participation in arguments, exercising himself in them just as he did in the bodily physical training, which is their counterpart, would that be enough?

Do you mean six years or four?

It doesn't matter. Make it five. And after that, you must make them go down into the cave again, and compel them to take command in matters of war and occupy the other offices suitable for young people, so that they won't be inferior to the others in experience. But in these, too, they must be tested to see whether they'll remain steadfast when they're pulled this way and that or shift their ground.

How much time do you allow for that?

Fifteen years. Then, at the age of fifty, those who've survived the tests and been successful both in practical matters and in the sciences must be led to the goal and compelled to lift up the radiant light of their souls to what itself provides light for everything. And once they've seen the good itself, they must each in turn put the city, its citizens, and themselves in order, using it as their model. Each of them will spend most of his time

with philosophy, but, when his turn comes, he must labor in politics and rule for the city's sake, not as if he were doing something fine, but rather something that has to be done. Then, having educated others like himself to take his place as guardians of the city, he will depart for the Isles of the Blessed and dwell there. And, if the Pythia agrees, the city will publicly establish memorials and sacrifices to him as a daemon, but if not, then as a happy and divine human being.

Like a sculptor, Socrates, you've produced ruling men that are completely fine.

And ruling women, too, Glaucon, for you mustn't think that what I've said applies any more to men than it does to women who are born with the appropriate natures.

That's right, if indeed they are to share everything equally with the men, as we said they should.

Then, do you agree that the things we've said about the city and its constitution aren't altogether wishful thinking, that it's hard for them to come about, but not impossible? And do you also agree that they can come about only in the way we indicated, namely, when one or more true philosophers come to power in a city, who despise present honors, thinking them slavish and worthless, and who prize what is right and the honors that come from it above everything, and regard justice as the most important and most essential thing, serving it and increasing it as they set their city in order?

How will they do that?

They'll send everyone in the city who is over ten years old into the country. Then they'll take possession of the children, who are now free from the ethos of their parents, and bring them up in their own customs and laws, which are the ones we've described. This is the quickest and easiest way for the city and constitution we've discussed to be established, become happy, and bring most benefit to the people among whom it's established.

That's by far the quickest and easiest way. And in my opinion, Socrates, you've described well how it would come into being, if it ever did.

Then, isn't that enough about this city and the man who is like it? Surely it is clear what sort of man we'll say he has to be.

It is clear, he said. And as for your question, I think that we have reached the end of this topic.

FIRST MEDITATION

17

OF THOSE THINGS THAT MAY BE CALLED INTO DOUBT

It is some years now since I realized how many false opinions I had accepted as true from childhood onwards,* and that, whatever I had since built on such shaky foundations, could only be highly doubtful. Hence I saw that at some stage in my life the whole structure would have to be utterly demolished, and that I should have to begin again from the bottom up if I wished to construct something lasting and unshakeable in the sciences. But this seemed to be a massive task, and so I postponed it until I had reached the age when one is as fit as one will ever be to master the various disciplines. Hence I have delayed so long that now I should be at fault if I used up in deliberating the time that is left for acting. The moment has come, and so today I have discharged my mind from all its cares, and have carved out a space of 18 untroubled leisure. I have withdrawn into seclusion and shall at last be able to devote myself seriously and without encumbrance to the task of destroying all my former opinions.

To this end, however, it will not be necessary to prove them all false—a thing I should perhaps never be able to achieve. But since reason already persuades me that I should no less scrupulously withhold my assent from what is not fully certain and indubitable than from what is blatantly false, then, in order to reject them all, it will be sufficient to find some reason for doubting each one. Nor shall I therefore have to go through them each individually, which would be an endless task: but since, once the foundations are undermined, the building will collapse of its own accord, I shall straight away attack the very principles that form the basis of all my former beliefs.

Certainly, up to now whatever I have accepted as fully true I have learned either from or by means of the senses: but I have discovered that they sometimes deceive us, and prudence dictates that we should never fully trust those who have deceived us even once.

But perhaps, although they sometimes deceive us about things that are little, or rather a long way away, there are plenty of other things of which there is clearly no doubt, although it was from the senses that we learned them: for instance, that I am now here, sitting by the fire, wrapped in a warm winter gown, handling this paper,

and suchlike. Indeed, that these hands themselves, and this whole body are mine—what reason could there be for doubting this? Unless perhaps I were to compare myself to one of those madmen, whose little brains have been so befuddled by a pestilential vapour arising from the black bile,* that they swear blind that they are kings, though they are beggars, or that they are clad in purple, when they are naked, or that their head is made of clay, or that their whole body is a jug, or made entirely of glass. But they are lunatics, and I should seem no less of a madman myself if I should follow their example in any way.

This is all very well, to be sure. But am I not a human being, and therefore in the habit of sleeping at night, when in my dreams I have all the same experiences as these madmen do when they are awake—or sometimes even stranger ones? How often my sleep at night has convinced me of all these familiar things—that I was here, wrapped in my gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I was lying naked under the bedclothes.—All the same, I am now perceiving this paper with eyes that are certainly awake; the head I am nodding is not drowsy; I stretch out my hand and feel it knowingly and deliberately; a sleeper would not have these experiences so distinctly.—But have I then forgotten those other occasions on which I have been deceived by similar thoughts in my dreams? When I think this over more carefully I see so clearly that waking can never be distinguished from sleep by any conclusive indications that I am stupefied; and this very stupor comes close to persuading me that I am asleep after all.

Let us then suppose* that we are dreaming, and that these particular things (that we have our eyes open, are moving our head, stretching out our hands) are not true; and that perhaps we do not even have hands or the rest of a body like what we see. It must nonetheless be admitted that the things we see in sleep are, so to speak, painted images, which could not be formed except on the basis of a resemblance with real things; and that for this reason these general things at least (such as eyes, head, hands, and the rest of the body) are not imaginary things, but real and existing. For the fact is that when painters desire to represent sirens and little satyrs with utterly unfamiliar shapes, they cannot devise altogether new natures for them, but simply combine parts from different animals; or if perhaps they do think up something so new that nothing at all like it has ever been seen, which is thus altogether fictitious and false, it is certain that at

least the colours which they combine to form images must be real. By the same token, even though these general things—eyes, head, hands, and so forth—might be imaginary, it must necessarily be admitted that at least some other still more simple and universal realities must exist, from which (as the painter's image is produced from real colours) all these images of things—be they true or false—that occur in our thoughts are produced.

In this category it seems we should include bodily nature in general, and its extension; likewise the shape of extended things and their quantity (magnitude and number); likewise the place in which they exist, the time during which they exist, and suchlike.

From all this, perhaps, we may safely conclude that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all the other disciplines which involve the study of composite things are indeed doubtful; but that arithmetic, geometry, and other disciplines of the same kind, which deal only with the very simplest and most general things, and care little whether they exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am waking or sleeping, two plus three equals five, and a square has no more than four sides; nor does it seem possible that such obvious truths could be affected by any suspicion that they are false.

However, there is a certain opinion long fixed in my mind, that there is a God who is all-powerful, and by whom I was created such as I am now. Now how do I know that he has not brought it about that there is no earth at all, no heavens, no extended things, no shape, no magnitude, no place—and yet that all these things appear to me to exist just as they do now? Or even—just as I judge now and again that other people are mistaken about things they believe they know with the greatest certitude—that I too should be similarly deceived whenever I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or make a judgement about something even simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined? 21

But perhaps God has not willed that I should be so cheated, for he is said to be supremely good.—But if it were incompatible with his goodness to have created me such that I am perpetually deceived, it would seem equally inconsistent with that quality to permit me to be sometimes deceived. Nonetheless, I cannot doubt that he does permit it.

Perhaps, indeed, there might be some people who would prefer to deny the existence of any God so powerful, rather than believing that all other things are uncertain. But let us not quarrel with them, and

let us grant that all this we have said of God is only a fiction; and let them suppose that it is by fate or chance or a continuous sequence of things that I have come to be what I am. Since, though, to be deceived and to err appear to be some kind of imperfection, the less powerful the source they invoke to explain my being, the more probable it will be that I am so imperfect that I am perpetually deceived. To all these arguments, indeed, I have no answer, but at length I am forced to admit that there is nothing of all those things I once thought true, of which it is not legitimate to doubt—and not out of any thoughtlessness or irresponsibility, but for sound and well-weighted reasons; and therefore that, from these things as well, no less than from what is blatantly false, I must now carefully withhold
 22 my assent if I wish to discover any thing that is certain.*

But it is not enough to have realized all this, I must take care to remember it: for my accustomed opinions continually creep back into my mind, and take possession of my belief, which has, so to speak, been enslaved to them by long experience and familiarity, for the most part against my will. Nor shall I ever break the habit of assenting to them and relying on them, as long as I go on supposing them to be such as they are in truth, that is to say, doubtful indeed in some respect, as has been shown just now, and yet nonetheless highly probable, so that it is much more rational to believe than to deny them. Hence, it seems to me, I shall not be acting unwisely if, willing myself to believe the contrary, I deceive myself, and make believe, for some considerable time, that they are altogether false and imaginary, until, once the prior judgements on each side have been evenly balanced in the scales, no evil custom can any longer twist my judgement away from the correct perception of things. For I know for sure that no danger or error will ensue as a result of this, and that there is no risk that I shall be giving too free a rein to my distrustfulness, since my concern at the moment is not with action but only with the attainment of knowledge.*

I will therefore suppose that, not God, who is perfectly good and the source of truth, but some evil spirit, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me.* I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things are no different from the illusions of our dreams, and that they
 23 are traps he has laid for my credulity; I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, and no senses, but yet as falsely

believing that I have all these;* I will obstinately cling to these thoughts, and in this way, if indeed it is not in my power to discover any truth,* yet certainly to the best of my ability and determination I will take care not to give my assent to anything false, or to allow this deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, to impose upon me in any way.

But to carry out this plan requires great effort, and there is a kind of indolence that drags me back to my customary way of life. Just as a prisoner, who was perhaps enjoying an imaginary freedom in his dreams, when he then begins to suspect that he is asleep is afraid of being woken up, and lets himself sink back into his soothing illusions; so I of my own accord slip back into my former opinions, and am scared to awake, for fear that tranquil sleep will give way to laborious hours of waking, which from now on I shall have to spend not in any kind of light, but in the unrelenting darkness of the difficulties just stirred up.

SECOND MEDITATION

OF THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND; THAT IT IS
MORE EASILY KNOWN THAN THE BODY

Yesterday's meditation has plunged me into so many doubts that I still cannot put them out of my mind, nor, on the other hand, can I see any way to resolve them; but, as if I had suddenly slipped into a deep whirlpool, I am in such difficulties that I can neither touch 24
bottom with my foot nor swim back to the surface. Yet I will struggle on, and I will try the same path again as the one I set out on yesterday, that is to say, eliminating everything in which there is the smallest element of doubt, exactly as if I had found it to be false through and through; and I shall pursue my way until I discover something certain; or, failing that, discover that it is certain only that nothing is certain. Archimedes* claimed, that if only he had a point that was firm and immovable, he would move the whole earth; and great things are likewise to be hoped, if I can find just one little thing that is certain and unshakeable.

I therefore suppose that all I see is false; I believe that none of those things represented by my deceitful memory has ever existed; in fact I have no senses at all; body, shape, extension in space, motion,

and place itself are all illusions. What truth then is left? Perhaps this alone, that nothing is certain.

But how do I know that there is not something different from all those things I have just listed, about which there is not the slightest room for doubt? Is there not, after all, some God, or whatever he should be called, that puts these thoughts into my mind? But why should I think that, when perhaps I myself could be the source of these thoughts? But am I at least not something, after all? But I have already denied that I have any senses or any body. Now I am at a loss,
 25 because what follows from this? Am I so bound up with my body and senses that I cannot exist without them? But I convinced myself that there was nothing at all in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Did I therefore not also convince myself that I did not exist either? No: certainly I did exist, if I convinced myself of something.—But there is some deceiver or other, supremely powerful and cunning, who is deliberately deceiving me all the time.—Beyond doubt then, I also exist, if he is deceiving me; and he can deceive me all he likes, but he will never bring it about that I should be nothing as long as I think I am something. So that, having weighed all these considerations sufficiently and more than sufficiently, I can finally decide* that this proposition, ‘I am, I exist’, whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in the mind, is necessarily true.

But indeed I do not yet sufficiently understand what in fact this ‘I’ is that now necessarily exists;* so that from now on I must take care in case I should happen imprudently to take something else to be me that is not me, and thus go astray in the very knowledge [*cognitione*] that I claim to be the most certain and evident of all. Hence I shall now meditate afresh on what I once believed myself to be, before I fell into this train of thought. From this I shall then subtract whatever it has been possible to cast doubt on, even in the slightest degree, by the reasons put forward above, so that in the end there shall remain exactly and only that which is certain and unshakeable.

So what in fact did I think I was before all this? A human being, of course. But what is a human being? Shall I say, ‘a rational animal’? No, for then I should have to examine what exactly an animal is, and what ‘rational’ is, and hence, starting with one question, I should stumble into more and more difficult ones. Nor do I now have so much leisure that I can afford to fritter it away on subtleties of this kind. But here I shall rather direct my attention to the thoughts that

spontaneously and by nature's prompting came to my mind before-
hand, whenever I considered what I was. The first was that I have a
face, hands, arms, and this whole mechanism of limbs, such as we see
even in corpses; this I referred to as the body. Next, that I took nour-
ishment, moved, perceived with my senses, and thought: these
actions indeed I attributed to the soul.* What this soul was, however,
either I never considered, or I imagined it as something very rarefied
and subtle, like a wind, or fire, or thin air, infused into my coarser
parts. But about the body itself, on the other hand, I had no doubts,
but I thought I distinctly knew its nature, which, if I had attempted
to describe how I conceived it in my mind, I would have explained as
follows: by body I mean everything that is capable of being bounded
by some shape, of existing in a definite place, of filling a space in such
a way as to exclude the presence of any other body within it; of being
perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell, and also of being
moved in various ways, not indeed by itself, but by some other thing
by which it is touched; for to have the power of moving itself, and
also of perceiving by the senses or thinking, I judged could in no way
belong to the nature of body; rather, I was puzzled by the fact that
such capacities were found in certain bodies. 26

But what about now, when I am supposing that some deceiver,
who is supremely powerful and, if I may venture to say so, evil, has
been exerting all his efforts to delude me in every way? Can I affirm
that I possess the slightest thing of all those that I have just said
belong to the nature of body? I consider, I think, I go over it all in my
mind: nothing comes up. It would be a waste of effort to go through
the list again. But what about the attributes I used to ascribe to the
soul? What about taking nourishment or moving? But since I now
have no body, these also are nothing but illusions. What about sense-
perception? But certainly this does not take place without a body,
and I have seemed to perceive very many things when asleep that
I later realized I had not perceived. What about thinking? Here I do
find something: it is thought; this alone cannot be stripped from me. 27
I am, I exist, this is certain. But for how long? Certainly only for as
long as I am thinking; for perhaps if I were to cease from all thinking
it might also come to pass that I might immediately cease altogether
to exist. I am now admitting nothing except what is necessarily true:
I am therefore, speaking precisely, only a thinking thing, that is,
a mind, or a soul, or an intellect, or a reason— words the meaning of

which was previously unknown to me. I am therefore a true thing, and one that truly exists; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: one that thinks.

What comes next? I will imagine: I am not that framework of limbs that is called a human body; I am not some thin air infused into these limbs, or a wind, or a fire, or a vapour, or a breath, or whatever I can picture myself as: for I have supposed that these things do not exist. But even if I keep to this supposition, nonetheless I am still something.*—But all the same, it is perhaps still the case that these very things I am supposing to be nothing, are nevertheless not distinct from this ‘me’ that I know* [*novi*].—Perhaps: I don’t know. But this is not the point at issue at present. I can pass judgement only on those things that are known to me. I know [*novi*] that I exist; I am trying to find out what this ‘I’ is, whom I know [*novi*]. It is absolutely certain that this knowledge [*notitia*], in the precise sense in question
 28 here, does not depend on things of which I do not yet know [*novi*] whether they exist; and therefore it depends on none of those things I picture in my imagination. This very word ‘imagination’ shows where I am going wrong. For I should certainly be ‘imagining things’ if I *imagined* myself to be anything, since imagining is nothing other than contemplating the shape or image of a bodily thing. Now, however, I know [*scio*] for certain that I exist; and that, at the same time, it could be the case that all these images, and in general everything that pertains to the nature of body, are nothing but illusions. Now this is clear to me, it would seem as foolish of me to say: ‘I shall use my imagination, in order to recognize more clearly what I am’, as it would be to say: ‘Now I am awake, and I see something true; but because I cannot yet see it clearly enough, I shall do my best to get back to sleep again so that my dreams can show it to me more truly and more clearly.’ And so I realize [*cognosco*] that nothing that I can grasp by means of the imagination has to do with this knowledge [*notitiam*] I have of myself, and that I need to withdraw my mind from such things as thoroughly as possible, if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible.

But what therefore am I? A thinking thing. What is that? I mean a thing that doubts, that understands, that affirms, that denies, that wishes to do this and does not wish to do that, and also that imagines and perceives by the senses.

Well, indeed, there is quite a lot there, if all these things really do belong to me. But why should they not belong to me? Is it not me who currently doubts virtually everything, who nonetheless understands something, who affirms this alone to be true, and denies the rest, who wishes to know more, and wishes not to be deceived, who imagines many things, even against his will, and is aware of many things that appear to come via the senses? Is there any of these things that is not equally true as the fact that I exist—even if I am always asleep, and even if my creator is deceiving me to the best of his ability? Is there any of them that can be distinguished from my thinking? Is there any that can be said to be separate from me? For that it is I that am doubting, understanding, wishing, is so obvious that nothing further is needed in order to explain it more clearly. But indeed it is also this same I that is imagining; for although it might be the case, as I have been supposing, that none of these imagined things is true, yet the actual power of imagining certainly does exist, and is part of my thinking. And finally it is the same I that perceives by means of the senses, or who is aware of corporeal things as if by means of the senses: for example, I am seeing a light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. — But these things are false, since I am asleep!—But certainly I *seem* to be seeing, hearing, getting hot. This cannot be false. This is what is properly meant by speaking of myself as having sensations; and, understood in this precise sense, it is nothing other than thinking. 29

From all of this, I am indeed beginning to know [*nosse*] rather better what I in fact am. But it still seems (and I cannot help thinking this) that the bodily things of which the images are formed in our thought, and which the senses themselves investigate, are much more distinctly recognized than that part of myself, whatever it is, that cannot be represented by the imagination. Although, indeed, it is strange that things that I realize are doubtful, unknown, unrelated to me should be more distinctly grasped by me than what is true and what is known—more distinctly grasped even than myself. But I see what is happening. My mind enjoys wandering off the track, and will not yet allow itself to be confined within the boundaries of truth. Very well, then: let us, once again, slacken its reins as far as possible— 30 then, before too long, a tug on them at the right moment will bring it more easily back to obedience.*

Let us consider those things which are commonly thought to be more distinctly grasped than anything else: I mean the bodies we

touch and see; but not bodies in general, for these general perceptions are usually considerably more confused, but one body in particular. Let us, for example, take this wax: it has only just been removed from the honeycomb; it has not yet lost all the flavour of its honey; it retains some of the scent of the flowers among which it was gathered; its colour, shape, and size are clearly visible; it is hard, cold, easy to touch, and if you tap it with your knuckle, it makes a sound. In short, it has all the properties that seem to be required for a given body to be known as distinctly as possible. But wait—while I am speaking, it is brought close to the fire. The remains of its flavour evaporate; the smell fades; the colour is changed, the shape is taken away, it grows in size, becomes liquid, becomes warm, it can hardly be touched, and now, if you strike it, it will give off no sound. Does the same wax still remain? We must admit it does remain: no one would say or think it does not. So what was there in it that was so distinctly grasped? Certainly, none of those qualities I apprehended by the senses: for whatever came under taste, or smell, or sight, or touch, or hearing, has now changed: but the wax remains.

Perhaps the truth of the matter was what I now think it is: namely, that the wax itself was not in fact this sweetness of the honey, or the fragrance of the flowers, or the whiteness, shape, or sonority, but the body which not long ago appeared to me as perceptible in these modes,* but now appears in others. But what exactly is this that I am
 31 imagining in this way? Let us consider the matter, and, thinking away those things that do not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. Something extended, flexible, mutable: certainly, that is all. But in what do this flexibility and mutability consist? Is it in the fact that I can imagine this wax being changed in shape, from a circle to a square, and from a square into a triangle? That cannot be right: for I understand that it is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, yet I cannot keep track of all these by using my imagination. Therefore my understanding of these properties is not achieved by using the faculty of imagination. What about 'extended'? Surely I know something about the nature of its extension. For it is greater when the wax is melting, greater still when it is boiling, and greater still when the heat is further increased. And I would not be correctly judging what the wax is if I failed to see that it is capable of receiving more varieties, as regards extension, than I have ever grasped in my imagination. So I am left with no alternative, but to accept that I am

not at all *imagining* what this wax is, I am perceiving it with my mind alone: I say 'this wax' in particular, for the point is even clearer about wax in general. So then, what is this wax, which is only perceived by the mind? Certainly it is the same wax I see, touch, and imagine, and in short it is the same wax I judged it to be from the beginning. But yet—and this is important—the perception of it is not sight, touch, or imagination, and never was, although it seemed to be so at first: it is an inspection by the mind alone, which can be either imperfect and confused, as it was before in this case, or clear and distinct, as it now is, depending on the greater or lesser degree of attention I pay to what it consists of.

But in the meantime I am amazed by the proneness of my mind to error. For although I am considering all this in myself silently and without speech, yet I am still ensnared by words themselves, and all but deceived by the very ways in which we usually put things. For we say that we 'see' the wax itself, if it is present, not that we judge it to be there on the basis of its colour or shape. From this I would have immediately concluded that I therefore knew the wax by the sight of my eyes, not by the inspection of the mind alone—if I had not happened to glance out of the window at people walking along the street. Using the customary expression, I say that I 'see' them, just as I 'see' the wax. But what do I actually see other than hats and coats, which could be covering automata? But I judge that they are people. And therefore what I thought I saw with my eyes, I in fact grasp only by the faculty of judging that is in my mind. 32

But one who desires to know more than the common herd might be ashamed to have gone to the speech of the common herd to find a reason for doubting. Let us then go on where we left off by considering whether I perceived more perfectly and more evidently what the wax was, when I first encountered it, and believed that I knew [*cognoscere*] it by these external senses, or at least by what they call the 'common sense',* that is, the imaginative power; or whether I perceive it better now, after I have more carefully investigated both what it is and how it is known [*cognoscatur*]. Certainly it would be foolish to doubt that I have a much better grasp of it now. For what, if anything, was distinct in my original perception? What was there, if anything, that seemed to go beyond the perception of the lowest animals? But on the other hand, when I distinguish the wax from its external forms, and, as if I had stripped off its garments, consider it in all its

nakedness, then, indeed, although there may still be error in my judgments, I cannot perceive it in this way except by the human mind.

33 But what, then, shall I say about this mind, or about myself? For I do not yet accept that there is anything in me but a mind. What, I say, am I who seem to perceive this wax so distinctly? Do I not know [*cognosco*] myself not only much more truly, much more certainly, but also much more distinctly and evidently than the wax? For, if I judge that the wax exists, for the reason that I see it, it is certainly much more evident that I myself also exist, from the very fact that I am seeing it. For it could be the case that what I am seeing is not really wax; it could be the case that I do not even have eyes with which to see anything; but it certainly cannot be the case, when I see something, or when I think I am seeing something (the difference is irrelevant for the moment), that I myself who think should not be something. By the same token, if I judge that the wax exists, for the reason that I am touching it, the same consequence follows: namely, that I exist. If I judge it exists, for the reason I am imagining it, or for any other reason, again, the same certainly applies. But what I have realized in the case of the wax, I can apply to anything that exists outside myself. Moreover, if the perception of the wax appeared more distinct after it became known to me from many sources, and not from sight or touch alone, how much more distinctly—it must be admitted—I now know [*cognosci*] myself. For there are no reasons that can enhance the perception either of the wax or of any other body at all that do not at the same time prove better to me the nature of my own mind. But there are so many things besides in the mind itself that can serve to make the knowledge [*notitia*] of it more distinct, that there seems scarcely any point in listing all the perceptions that flow into it from the body.

34 But I see now that, without realizing it, I have ended up back where I wanted to be. For since I have now learned that bodies themselves are perceived not, strictly speaking, by the senses or by the imaginative faculty, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived because they are touched or seen, but only because they are understood, I clearly realize [*cognosco*] that nothing can be perceived by me more easily or more clearly than my own mind. But since a long-held opinion is a habit that cannot so readily be laid aside, I intend to stop here for a while, in order to fix this newly acquired knowledge more deeply in my memory by long meditation.

SOPHOCLES ANTIGONE

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ANTIGONE

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

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Note that in this translation the numbers in square brackets refer to the Greek text, and the numbers with no brackets refer to this text.

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BACKGROUND NOTE TO THE STORY

When Oedipus, king of Thebes, discovered through his own investigations that he had killed his father and married his mother, Jocasta, he put out his own eyes, and Jocasta killed herself. Once Oedipus ceased being king of Thebes, his two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, agreed to alternate as king. When Eteocles refused to give up power to Polyneices, the latter collected a foreign army of Argives and attacked the city. In the ensuing battle, the Thebans triumphed over the invading forces, and the two brothers killed each other, with Eteocles defending the city and Polyneices attacking it. The action of the play begins immediately after the battle.

Note that Creon is a brother of Jocasta and thus an uncle of Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, and Polyneices.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANTIGONE: daughter of Oedipus.

ISMENE: daughter of Oedipus, sister of Antigone

CREON: king of Thebes

EURYDICE: wife of Creon

HAEMON: son of Creon and Euridice, engaged to Antigone.

TEIRESIAS: an old blind prophet

BOY: a young lad guiding Teiresias

GUARD: a soldier serving Creon.

MESSENGER

CHORUS: Theban Elders

ATTENDANTS

ANTIGONE

[In Thebes, directly in front of the royal palace, which stands in the background, its main doors facing the audience. Enter Antigone leading Ismene away from the palace]

ANTIGONE

Now, dear Ismene, my own blood sister,
do you have any sense of all the troubles
Zeus keeps bringing on the two of us,
as long as we're alive? All that misery
which stems from Oedipus? There's no suffering,
no shame, no ruin—not one dishonour—
which I have not seen in all the troubles
you and I go through. What's this they're saying now,
something our general has had proclaimed
throughout the city? Do you know of it? 10
Have you heard? Or have you just missed the news?
Dishonours which better fit our enemies
are now being piled up on the ones we love. [10]

ISMENE

I've had no word at all, Antigone,
nothing good or bad about our family,
not since we two lost both our brothers,
killed on the same day by a double blow.
And since the Argive army, just last night,
has gone away, I don't know any more
if I've been lucky or face total ruin. 20

ANTIGONE

I know that. That's why I brought you here,
outside the gates, so only you can hear.

ISMENE

What is it? The way you look makes it seem
you're thinking of some dark and gloomy news. [20]

ANTIGONE

Look—what's Creon doing with our two brothers?
He's honouring one with a full funeral
and treating the other one disgracefully!
Eteocles, they say, has had his burial
according to our customary rites,

ANTIGONE

to win him honour with the dead below. 30
But as for Polyneices, who perished
so miserably, an order has gone out
throughout the city—that's what people say.
He's to have no funeral or lament,
but to be left unburied and unwept,
a sweet treasure for the birds to look at,
for them to feed on to their heart's content. [30]
That's what people say the noble Creon
has announced to you and me—I mean to me—
and now he's coming to proclaim the fact, 40
to state it clearly to those who have not heard.
For Creon this matter's really serious.
Anyone who acts against the order
will be stoned to death before the city.
Now you know, and you'll quickly demonstrate
whether you are nobly born, or else
a girl unworthy of her splendid ancestors.

ISMENE

Oh my poor sister, if that's what's happening,
what can I say that would be any help
to ease the situation or resolve it? 50 [40]

ANTIGONE

Think whether you will work with me in this
and act together.

ISMENE

In what kind of work?
What do you mean?

ANTIGONE

Will you help these hands
take up Polyneices' corpse and bury it?

ISMENE

What? You're going to bury Polyneices,
when that's been made a crime for all in Thebes?

ANTIGONE

Yes. I'll do my duty to my brother—

ANTIGONE

while doing that. I'll lie there with him,
with a man I love, pure and innocent,
for all my crime. My honours for the dead
must last much longer than for those up here.
I'll lie down there forever. As for you,
well, if you wish, you can show contempt
for those laws the gods all hold in honour.

ISMENE

I'm not disrespecting them. But I can't act
against the state. That's not in my nature.

ANTIGONE

Let that be your excuse. I'm going now
to make a burial mound for my dear brother.

ISMENE

Oh poor Antigone, I'm so afraid for you.

ANTIGONE

Don't fear for me. Set your own fate in order.

ISMENE

Make sure you don't reveal to anyone
what you intend. Keep it closely hidden.
I'll do the same.

ANTIGONE

No, no. Announce the fact—
if you don't let everybody know,
I'll despise your silence even more.

ISMENE

Your heart is hot to do cold deeds.

ANTIGONE

But I know
I'll please the ones I'm duty bound to please.

ISMENE

Yes, if you can. But you're after something
which you're incapable of carrying out.

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE

Well, when my strength is gone, then I'll give up.

ISMENE

A vain attempt should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

I'll hate you if you're going to talk that way.
And you'll rightly earn the loathing of the dead.
So leave me and my foolishness alone—
we'll get through this fearful thing. I won't suffer
anything as bad as a disgraceful death.

ISMENE

All right then, go, if that's what you think right.
But remember this—even though your mission
makes no sense, your friends do truly love you.

120

*[Exit Antigone away from the palace. Ismene watches her go and then r
turns slowly into the palace. Enter the Chorus of Theban elders]*

CHORUS

O ray of sunlight,
most beautiful that ever shone
on Thebes, city of the seven gates,
you've appeared at last,
you glowing eye of golden day,
moving above the streams of Dirce,
driving into headlong flight
the white-shield warrior from Argos,
who marched here fully armed,
now forced back by your sharper power.¹

[100]

130

CHORUS LEADER

Against our land he marched,
sent here by the warring claims
of Polyneices, with piercing screams,
an eagle flying above our land,
covered wings as white as snow,

[110]

¹Dirce was one of the rivers beside Thebes.

ANTIGONE

and hordes of warriors in arms,
helmets topped with horsehair crests.

CHORUS

Standing above our homes,
he ranged around our seven gates, 140
with threats to swallow us
and spears thirsting to kill.
Before his jaws had had their fill [120]
and gorged themselves on Theban blood,
before Hephaistos' pine-torch flames
had seized our towers, our fortress crown,
he went back, driven in retreat.¹
Behind him rings the din of war—
his enemy, the Theban dragon-snake,
too difficult for him to overcome. 150

CHORUS LEADER

Zeus hates an arrogant boasting tongue.
Seeing them march here in a mighty stream,
in all their clanging golden pride, [130]
he hurled his fire and struck the man,
up there, on our battlements, as he began
to scream aloud his victory.

CHORUS

The man swung down, torch still in hand,
and smashed into unyielding earth—
the one who not so long ago attacked,
who launched his furious, enraged assault, 160
to blast us, breathing raging storms.
But things turned out not as he'd hoped.
Great war god Ares assisted us—
he smashed them down and doomed them all [140]
to a very different fate.

CHORUS LEADER

Seven captains at seven gates

¹Hephaistos was god of fire.

ANTIGONE

matched against seven equal warriors
paid Zeus their full bronze tribute,
the god who turns the battle tide,
all but that pair of wretched men, 170
born of one father and one mother, too—
who set their conquering spears against each other
and then both shared a common death.

CHORUS

Now victory with her glorious name
has come, bringing joy to well-armed Thebes.
The battle's done—let's strive now to forget 150
with songs and dancing all night long,
with Bacchus leading us to make Thebes shake.

[The palace doors are thrown open and guards appear at the doors]

CHORUS LEADER

But here comes Creon, new king of our land,
son of Menoikeos. Thanks to the gods, 180
who've brought about our new good fortune.
What plan of action does he have in mind?
What's made him hold this special meeting, 160
with elders summoned by a general call?

[Enter Creon from the palace. He addresses the assembled elders]

CREON

Men, after much tossing of our ship of state,
the gods have safely set things right again.
Of all the citizens I've summoned you,
because I know how well you showed respect
for the eternal power of the throne,
first with Laius and again with Oedipus, 190
once he restored our city.¹ When he died,
you stood by his children, firm in loyalty.
Now his sons have perished in a single day,

¹Laius was king of Thebes and father of Oedipus. Oedipus killed him (not knowing who he was) and became the next king of Thebes by saving the city from the devastation of the Sphinx.

ANTIGONE

killing each other with their own two hands,
a double slaughter, stained with brother's blood. [170]
And so I have the throne, all royal power,
for I'm the one most closely linked by blood
to those who have been killed. It's impossible
to really know a man, to know his soul,
his mind and will, before one witnesses 200
his skill in governing and making laws.
For me, a man who rules the entire state
and does not take the best advice there is,
but through fear keeps his mouth forever shut, [180]
such a man is the very worst of men—
and always will be. And a man who thinks
more highly of a friend than of his country,
well, he means nothing to me. Let Zeus know,
the god who always watches everything,
I would not stay silent if I saw disaster 210
moving here against the citizens,
a threat to their security. For anyone
who acts against the state, its enemy,
I'd never make my friend. For I know well
our country is a ship which keeps us safe,
and only when it sails its proper course [190]
do we make friends. These are the principles
I'll use in order to protect our state.
That's why I've announced to all citizens
my orders for the sons of Oedipus— 220
Eteocles, who perished in the fight
to save our city, the best and bravest
of our spearmen, will have his burial,
with all those purifying rituals
which accompany the noblest corpses,
as they move below. As for his brother—
that Polyneices, who returned from exile,
eager to wipe out in all-consuming fire [200]
his ancestral city and its native gods,
keen to seize upon his family's blood 230
and lead men into slavery—for him,
the proclamation in the state declares

ANTIGONE

he'll have no burial mound, no funeral rites,
and no lament. He'll be left unburied,
his body there for birds and dogs to eat,
a clear reminder of his shameful fate.
That's my decision. For I'll never act
to respect an evil man with honours
in preference to a man who's acted well.
Anyone who's well disposed towards our state,
alive or dead, that man I will respect.

240

[210]

CHORUS LEADER

Son of Menoikeos, if that's your will
for this city's friends and enemies,
it seems to me you now control all laws
concerning those who've died and us as well—
the ones who are still living.

CREON

See to it then,
and act as guardians of what's been proclaimed.

CHORUS

Give that task to younger men to deal with.

CREON

There are men assigned to oversee the corpse.

CHORUS LEADER

Then what remains that you would have us do?

250

CREON

Don't yield to those who contravene my orders.

CHORUS LEADER: No one is such a fool that he loves death.

[220]

CREON

Yes, that will be his full reward, indeed.
And yet men have often been destroyed
because they hoped to profit in some way.

[Enter a guard, coming towards the palace]

GUARD

My lord, I can't say I've come out of breath

ANTIGONE

by running here, making my feet move fast.
Many times I stopped to think things over—
and then I'd turn around, retrace my steps.
My mind was saying many things to me, 260
“You fool, why go to where you know for sure
your punishment awaits?”—“And now, poor man,
why are you hesitating yet again?”

If Creon finds this out from someone else, [230]
how will you escape being hurt?” Such matters
kept my mind preoccupied. And so I went,
slowly and reluctantly, and thus made
a short road turn into a lengthy one.
But then the view that I should come to you
won out. If what I have to say is nothing, 270
I'll say it nonetheless. For I've come here
clinging to the hope that I'll not suffer
anything that's not part of my destiny.

CREON

What's happening that's made you so upset?

GUARD

I want to tell you first about myself.
I did not do it. And I didn't see
the one who did. So it would be unjust
if I should come to grief. [240]

CREON

You hedge so much.
Clearly you have news of something ominous.

GUARD

Yes. Strange things that make me pause a lot. 280

CREON

Why not say it and then go—just leave.

GUARD

All right, I'll tell you. It's about the corpse.
Someone has buried it and disappeared,
after spreading thirsty dust onto the flesh
and undertaking all appropriate rites.

ANTIGONE

CREON

What are you saying? What man would dare this?

GUARD

I don't know. There was no sign of digging,
no marks of any pick axe or a mattock. [250]

The ground was dry and hard and very smooth,
without a wheel track. Whoever did it 290
left no trace. When the first man on day watch
revealed it to us, we were all amazed.

The corpse was hidden, but not in a tomb.

It was lightly covered up with dirt,
as if someone wanted to avert a curse.

There was no trace of a wild animal
or dogs who'd come to rip the corpse apart.

Then the words flew round among us all,
with every guard accusing someone else. [260]

We were about to fight, to come to blows— 300
no one was there to put a stop to it.

Every one of us was responsible,
but none of us was clearly in the wrong.

In our defence we pleaded ignorance.

Then we each stated we were quite prepared
to pick up red-hot iron, walk through flames,
or swear by all the gods that we'd not done it,
we'd no idea how the act was planned,
or how it had been carried out. At last,

when all our searching had proved useless, 310

one man spoke up, and his words forced us all
to drop our faces to the ground in fear. [270]

We couldn't see things working out for us,
whether we agreed or disagreed with him.

He said we must report this act to you—
we must not hide it. And his view prevailed.

I was the unlucky man who won the prize,
the luck of the draw. That's why I'm now here,
not of my own free will or by your choice.

I know that—for no one likes a messenger 320
who comes bearing unwelcome news with him.

ANTIGONE

CHORUS LEADER

My lord, I've been wondering for some time now—
could this act not be something from the gods?

CREON

Stop now—before what you're about to say
enrages me completely and reveals [280]
that you're not only old but stupid, too.

No one can tolerate what you've just said,
when you claim gods might care about this corpse.

Would they pay extraordinary honours
and bury as a man who'd served them well 330
someone who came to burn their offerings,

their pillared temples, to torch their lands
and scatter all its laws? Or do you see
gods paying respect to evil men? No, no.

For quite a while some people in the town
have secretly been muttering against me. [290]
They don't agree with what I have decreed.

They shake their heads and have not kept their necks
under my yoke, as they are duty bound to do
if they were men who are content with me. 340

I well know that these guards were led astray—
such men urged them to carry out this act
for money. To foster evil actions,

to make them commonplace among all men,
nothing is as powerful as money.

It destroys cities, driving men from home.
Money trains and twists the minds in worthy men,
so they then undertake disgraceful acts.

Money teaches men to live as scoundrels,
familiar with every profane enterprise. 350

But those who carry out such acts for cash
sooner or later see how for their crimes
they pay the penalty. For if great Zeus
still has my respect, then understand this—

I swear to you on oath—unless you find
the one whose hands really buried him,
unless you bring him here before my eyes,

ANTIGONE

then death for you will never be enough.
No, not before you're hung up still alive
and you confess to this gross, violent act.
That way you'll understand in future days,
when there's a profit to be gained from theft,
you'll learn that it's not good to be in love
with every kind of monetary gain.
You'll know more men are ruined than are saved
when they earn profits from dishonest schemes.

360

[310]

GUARD

Do I have your permission to speak now,
or do I just turn around and go away?

CREON

But I find your voice so irritating—
don't you realize that?

GUARD

Where does it hurt?
Is it in your ears or in your mind?

370

CREON

Why try to question where I feel my pain?

GUARD

The man who did it—he upsets your mind.
I offend your ears.

CREON

My, my, it's clear to see
it's natural for you to chatter on.

[320]

GUARD

Perhaps. But I never did this.

CREON

This and more—
you sold your life for silver.

GUARD

How strange and sad
when the one who sorts this out gets it all wrong.

ANTIGONE

CREON: Well, enjoy your sophisticated views.

But if you don't reveal to me who did this, 380
you'll just confirm how much your treasonous gains
have made you suffer.

[Exit Creon back into the palace. The doors close behind him]

GUARD

Well, I hope he's found.
That would be best. But whether caught or not—
and that's something sheer chance will bring about—
you won't see me coming here again.
This time, against all hope and expectation, 330
I'm still unhurt. I owe the gods great thanks.

[Exit the Guard away from the palace]

CHORUS

There are many strange and wonderful things,
but nothing more strangely wonderful than man.
He moves across the white-capped ocean seas 390
blasted by winter storms, carving his way
under the surging waves engulfing him.
With his teams of horses he wears down
the unwearied and immortal earth,
the oldest of the gods, harassing her,
as year by year his ploughs move back and forth. 340

He snares the light-winged flocks of birds,
herds of wild beasts, creatures from deep seas,
trapped in the fine mesh of his hunting nets.
O resourceful man, whose skill can overcome 400
ferocious beasts roaming mountain heights. 350
He curbs the rough-haired horses with his bit
and tames the inexhaustible mountain bulls,
setting their savage necks beneath his yoke.

He's taught himself speech and wind-swift thought,
trained his feelings for communal civic life,
learning to escape the icy shafts of frost,
volleys of pelting rain in winter storms,
the harsh life lived under the open sky.

ANTIGONE

That's man—so resourceful in all he does. 410 [360]
There's no event his skill cannot confront—
other than death—that alone he cannot shun,
although for many baffling sicknesses
he has discovered his own remedies.

The qualities of his inventive skills
bring arts beyond his dreams and lead him on,
sometimes to evil and sometimes to good.
If he treats his country's laws with due respect
and honours justice by swearing on the gods,
he wins high honours in his city. 420
But when he grows bold and turns to evil, [370]
then he has no city. A man like that—
let him not share my home or know my mind.

[Enter the Guard, bringing Antigone with him. She is not resisting]

CHORUS LEADER

What this? I fear some omen from the gods.
I can't deny what I see here so clearly—
that young girl there—it's Antigone.
Oh you poor girl, daughter of Oedipus,
child of a such a father, so unfortunate,
what's going on? Surely they've not brought you here
because you've disobeyed the royal laws, 430
because they've caught you acting foolishly? [380]

GUARD

This here's the one who carried out the act.
We caught her as she was burying the corpse.
Where's Creon?

[The palace doors open. Enter Creon with attendants]

CHORUS LEADER

He's coming from the house—
and just in time.

CREON

Why have I come "just in time"?
What's happening? What is it?

ANTIGONE

GUARD

My lord,
human beings should never take an oath
there's something they'll not do—for later thoughts
contradict what they first meant. I'd have sworn [390]
I'd not soon venture here again. Back then, 440
the threats you made brought me a lot of grief.
But there's no joy as great as what we pray for
against all hope. And so I have come back,
breaking that oath I swore. I bring this girl,
captured while she was honouring the grave.
This time we did not draw lots. No. This time
I was the lucky man, not someone else.
And now, my lord, take her for questioning.
Convict her. Do as you wish. As for me,
by rights I'm free and clear of all this trouble. 450 [400]

CREON

This girl here—how did you catch her? And where?

GUARD

She was burying that man. Now you know
all there is to know.

CREON

Do you understand
just what you're saying? Are your words the truth?

GUARD

We saw this girl giving that dead man's corpse
full burial rites—an act you'd made illegal.
Is what I say simple and clear enough?

CREON

How did you see her, catch her in the act?

GUARD

It happened this way. When we got there,
after hearing those awful threats from you, 460
we swept off all the dust covering the corpse,
so the damp body was completely bare. [410]
Then we sat down on rising ground up wind,

ANTIGONE

to escape the body's putrid rotting stench.
We traded insults just to stay awake,
in case someone was careless on the job.
That's how we spent the time right up 'til noon,
when the sun's bright circle in the sky
had moved half way and it was burning hot.
Then suddenly a swirling windstorm came, 470
whipping clouds of dust up from the ground,
filling the plain—some heaven-sent trouble.
In that level place the dirt storm damaged
all the forest growth, and the air around [420]
was filled with dust for miles. We shut our mouths
and just endured this scourge sent from the gods.
A long time passed. The storm came to an end.
That's when we saw the girl. She was shrieking—
a distressing painful cry, just like a bird
who's seen an empty nest, its fledglings gone. 480
That's how she was when she saw the naked corpse.
She screamed out a lament, and then she swore,
calling evil curses down upon the ones
who'd done this. Then right away her hands
threw on the thirsty dust. She lifted up
a finely made bronze jug and then three times [430]
poured out her tributes to the dead.
When we saw that, we rushed up right away
and grabbed her. She was not afraid at all.
We charged her with her previous offence 490
as well as this one. She just kept standing there,
denying nothing. That made me happy—
though it was painful, too. For it's a joy
escaping troubles which affect oneself,
but painful to bring evil on one's friends.
But all that is of less concern to me
than my own safety. [440]

CREON

You there—you with your face
bent down towards the ground, what do you say?
Do you deny you did this or admit it?

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE

I admit I did it. I won't deny that.

500

CREON [*to the Guard*]

You're dismissed—go where you want. You're free—
no serious charges made against you.

[*Exit the Guard. Creon turns to interrogate Antigone*]

Tell me briefly—not in some lengthy speech—
were you aware there was a proclamation
forbidding what you did?

ANTIGONE

I'd heard of it.

How could I not? It was public knowledge.

CREON

And yet you dared to break those very laws?

ANTIGONE

Yes. Zeus did not announce those laws to me.

[450]

And Justice living with the gods below
sent no such laws for men. I did not think
anything which you proclaimed strong enough
to let a mortal override the gods
and their unwritten and unchanging laws.

510

They're not just for today or yesterday,
but exist forever, and no one knows
where they first appeared. So I did not mean
to let a fear of any human will
lead to my punishment among the gods.

I know all too well I'm going to die—
how could I not?—it makes no difference
what you decree. And if I have to die
before my time, well, I count that a gain.

[460]

When someone has to live the way I do,
surrounded by so many evil things,
how can she fail to find a benefit
in death? And so for me meeting this fate
won't bring any pain. But if I'd allowed
my own mother's dead son to just lie there,

520

ANTIGONE

an unburied corpse, then I'd feel distress.
What's going on here does not hurt me at all. 530
If you think what I'm doing now is stupid,
perhaps I'm being charged with foolishness [470]
by someone who's a fool.

CHORUS LEADER

It's clear enough
the spirit in this girl is passionate—
her father was the same. She has no sense
of compromise in times of trouble.

CREON [*to the Chorus Leader*]

But you should know the most obdurate will
are those most prone to break. The strongest iron
tempered in the fire to make it really hard—
that's the kind you see most often shatter. 540
I'm well aware the most tempestuous horses
are tamed by one small bit. Pride has no place
in anyone who is his neighbour's slave.
This girl here was already very insolent [480]
in contravening laws we had proclaimed.
Here she again displays her proud contempt—
having done the act, she now boasts of it.
She laughs at what she's done. Well, in this case,
if she gets her way and goes unpunished,
then she's the man here, not me. No. She may be 550
my sister's child, closer to me by blood
than anyone belonging to my house
who worships Zeus Herkeios in my home,
but she'll not escape my harshest punishment—
her sister, too, whom I accuse as well.¹
She had an equal part in all their plans [490]
to do this burial. Go summon her here.
I saw her just now inside the palace,
her mind out of control, some kind of fit.

¹Zeus Herkeios refers to Zeus of the Courtyard, a patron god of worship within the home.

ANTIGONE

[Exit attendants into the palace to fetch Ismene]

When people hatch their mischief in the dark
their minds often convict them in advance, 560
betraying their treachery. How I despise
a person caught committing evil acts
who then desires to glorify the crime.

ANTIGONE

Take me and kill me—what more do you want?

CREON

Me? Nothing. With that I have everything.

ANTIGONE

Then why delay? There's nothing in your words
that I enjoy—may that always be the case! [500]
And what I say displeases you as much.
But where could I gain greater glory 570
than setting my own brother in his grave?
All those here would confirm this pleases them
if their lips weren't sealed by fear—being king,
which offers all sorts of various benefits,
means you can talk and act just as you wish.

CREON

In all of Thebes, you're the only one
who looks at things that way.

ANTIGONE

They share my views,
but they keep their mouths shut just for you.

CREON

These views of yours—so different from the rest—
don't they bring you any sense of shame? 580 [510]

ANTIGONE

No—there's nothing shameful in honouring
my mother's children.

CREON

You had a brother
killed fighting for the other side.

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE

Yes—from the same mother and father, too.

CREON

Why then give tributes which insult his name?

ANTIGONE

But his dead corpse won't back up what you say.

CREON

Yes, he will, if you give equal honours
to a wicked man.

ANTIGONE

But the one who died
was not some slave—it was his own brother.

CREON

Who was destroying this land—the other one
went to his death defending it.

590

ANTIGONE

That may be,
but Hades still desires equal rites for both.¹

CREON

A good man does not wish what we give him
to be the same an evil man receives.

[520]

ANTIGONE

Who knows? In the world below perhaps
such actions are no crime.

CREON

An enemy
can never be a friend, not even in death.

ANTIGONE

But my nature is to love. I cannot hate.

¹Hades, a brother of Zeus, was god of the underworld, lord of the dead.

ANTIGONE

CREON

Then go down to the dead. If you must love,
love them. No woman's going to govern me— 600
no, no—not while I'm still alive.

[Enter two attendants from the house bringing Ismene to Creon]

CHORUS LEADER

Ismene's coming. There—right by the door.
She's crying. How she must love her sister!
From her forehead a cloud casts its shadow
down across her darkly flushing face—
and drops its rain onto her lovely cheeks. [530]

CREON

You there—you snake lurking in my house,
sucking out my life's blood so secretly.
I'd no idea I was nurturing two pests,
who aimed to rise against my throne. Come here. 610
Tell me this—do you admit you played your part
in this burial, or will you swear an oath
you had no knowledge of it?

ISMENE

I did it—
I admit it, and she'll back me up.
So I bear the guilt as well.

ANTIGONE

No, no—
justice will not allow you to say that.
You didn't want to. I didn't work with you.

ISMENE

But now you're in trouble, I'm not ashamed [540]
of suffering, too, as your companion.

ANTIGONE

Hades and the dead can say who did it— 620
I don't love a friend whose love is only words.

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

You're my sister. Don't dishonour me.
Let me respect the dead and die with you.

ANTIGONE

Don't try to share my death or make a claim
to actions which you did not do. I'll die—
and that will be enough.

ISMENE

But if you're gone,
what is there in life for me to love?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon. He's the one you care about.

ISMENE

Why hurt me like this? It doesn't help you.

[550]

ANTIGONE

If I am mocking you, it pains me, too.

630

ISMENE

Even now is there some way I can help?

ANTIGONE

Save yourself. I won't envy your escape.

ISMENE

I feel so wretched leaving you to die.

ANTIGONE

But you chose life—it was my choice to die.

ISMENE

But not before I'd said those words just now.

ANTIGONE

Some people may approve of how you think—
others will believe my judgment's good.

ISMENE

But the mistake's the same for both of us.

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE

Be brave. You're alive. But my spirit died
some time ago so I might help the dead

640 [560]

CREON

I'd say one of these girls has just revealed
how mad she is—the other's been that way
since she was born.

ISMENE

My lord, whatever good sense
people have by birth no longer stays with them
once their lives go wrong—it abandons them.

CREON

In your case, that's true, once you made your choice
to act in evil ways with wicked people.

ISMENE

How could I live alone, without her here?

CREON

Don't speak of her being here. Her life is over.

ISMENE

You're going to kill your own son's bride?

650

CREON

Why not? There are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE

No one will make him a more loving wife
than she will.

CREON

I have no desire my son
should have an evil wife.

ANTIGONE

Dearest Haemon,
how your father wrongs you.

CREON

I've had enough of this—
you and your marriage.

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

You really want that?
You're going to take her from him?

CREON

No, not me.
Hades is the one who'll stop the marriage.

CHORUS LEADER

So she must die—that seems decided on.

CREON

Yes—for you and me the matter's closed. 660

[Creon turns to address his attendants]

No more delay. You slaves, take them inside.
From this point on they must act like women
and have no liberty to wander off.
Even bold men run when they see Hades [580]
coming close to them to snatch their lives.

*[The attendants take Antigone and Ismene into the palace, leaving Creon
and the Chorus on stage]*

CHORUS

Those who live without tasting evil
have happy lives—for when the gods
shake a house to its foundations,
then inevitable disasters strike,
falling upon whole families, 670
just as a surging ocean swell
running before cruel Thracian winds
across the dark trench of the sea
churns up the deep black sand [590]
and crashes headlong on the cliffs,
which scream in pain against the wind.

I see this house's age-old sorrows,
the house of Labdakos' children,
sorrows falling on the sorrows of the dead,
one generation bringing no relief 680
to generations after it—some god

ANTIGONE

strikes at them—on and on without an end.
For now the light which has been shining
over the last roots of Oedipus' house
is being cut down with a bloody knife
belonging to the gods below—
for foolish talk and frenzy in the soul.¹

[600]

O Zeus, what human trespasses
can check your power? Even Sleep,
who casts his nets on everything,
cannot master that—nor can the months,
the tireless months the gods control.
A sovereign who cannot grow old,
you hold Olympus as your own,
in all its glittering magnificence.²
From now on into all future time,
as in the past, your law holds firm.
It never enters lives of human beings
in its full force without disaster.

690

[610]

Hope ranging far and wide brings comfort
to many men—but then hope can deceive,
delusions born of volatile desire.
It comes upon the man who's ignorant
until his foot is seared in burning fire.
Someone's wisdom has revealed to us
this famous saying—sometimes the gods
lure a man's mind forward to disaster,
and he thinks evil's something good.
But then he lives only the briefest time
free of catastrophe.

700

[620]

[The palace doors open]

¹Labdakos was the father of Laius and hence grandfather of Oedipus and great-grandfather of Antigone and Ismene.

²Olympus was a mountain in northern Greece where, according to tradition, the major gods live.

ANTIGONE

CHORUS LEADER

Here comes Haemon, 710
your only living son. Is he grieving
the fate of Antigone, his bride,
bitter that his marriage hopes are gone? [630]

CREON

We'll soon find out—more accurately
than any prophet here could indicate.

[Enter Haemon from the palace]

My son, have you heard the sentence that's been passed
upon your bride? And have you now come here
angry at your father? Or are you loyal to me,
on my side no matter what I do?

HAEMON

Father, I'm yours. For me your judgments 720
and the ways you act on them are good—
I shall follow them. I'll not consider
any marriage a greater benefit
than your fine leadership.

CREON

Indeed, my son,
that's how your heart should always be resolved,
to stand behind your father's judgment [640]
on every issue. That's what men pray for—
obedient children growing up at home
who will pay back their father's enemies,
evil to them for evil done to him, 730
while honouring his friends as much as he does.
A man who fathers useless children—
what can one say of him except he's bred
troubles for himself, and much to laugh at
for those who fight against him? So, my son,
don't ever throw good sense aside for pleasure,
for some woman's sake. You understand
how such embraces can turn freezing cold [650]
when an evil woman shares your life at home.
What greater wound is there than a false friend? 740

ANTIGONE

So spit this girl out—she’s your enemy.
Let her marry someone else in Hades.
Since I caught her clearly disobeying,
the only culprit in the entire city,
I won’t perjure myself before the state.
No—I’ll kill her. And so let her appeal
to Zeus, the god of blood relationships.
If I foster any lack of full respect
in my own family, I surely do the same
with those who are not linked to me by blood. 750 [660]
The man who acts well with his household
will be found a just man in the city.¹
I’d trust such a man to govern wisely
or to be content with someone ruling him.
And in the thick of battle at his post 670 [670]
he’ll stand firm beside his fellow soldier,
a loyal, brave man. But anyone who’s proud
and violates our laws or thinks he’ll tell
our leaders what to do, a man like that
wins no praise from me. No. We must obey 760
whatever man the city puts in charge,
no matter what the issue—great or small,
just or unjust. For there’s no greater evil
than a lack of leadership. That destroys
whole cities, turns households into ruins,
and in war makes soldiers break and run away.
When men succeed, what keeps their lives secure
in almost every case is their obedience.
That’s why they must support those in control,
and never let some woman beat us down. 770
If we must fall from power, let that come
at some man’s hand—at least, we won’t be called
inferior to any woman. [680]

¹Following common editorial practice, the lines of the Greek have been rearranged here, so that 663-7 come after 671, hence the apparently odd numbering of the lines.

ANTIGONE

CHORUS LEADER

Unless we're being deceived by our old age,
what you've just said seems reasonable to us.

HAEMON

Father, the gods instill good sense in men—
the greatest of all the things which we possess.
I could not find your words somehow not right—
I hope that's something I never learn to do.
But other words might be good, as well. 780
Because of who you are, you can't perceive
all the things men say or do—or their complaints.
Your gaze makes citizens afraid—they can't
say anything you would not like to hear. [690]
But in the darkness I can hear them talk—
the city is upset about the girl.

They say of all women here she's least deserves
the worst of deaths for her most glorious act.
When in the slaughter her own brother died,
she did not just leave him there unburied, 790
to be ripped apart by carrion dogs or birds.

Surely she deserves some golden honour?
That's the dark secret rumour people speak. [700]
For me, father, nothing is more valuable
than your well being. For any children,
what could be a greater honour to them
than their father's thriving reputation?

A father feels the same about his sons.
So don't let your mind dwell on just one thought,
that what you say is right and nothing else. 800

A man who thinks that only he is wise,
that he can speak and think like no one else,
when such men are exposed, then all can see
their emptiness inside. For any man, [710]
even if he's wise, there's nothing shameful
in learning many things, staying flexible.

You notice how in winter floods the trees
which bend before the storm preserve their twigs.
The ones who stand against it are destroyed,

ANTIGONE

root and branch. In the same way, those sailors
who keep their sails stretched tight, never easing off,
make their ship capsize—and from that point on
sail with their rowing benches all submerged.
So end your anger. Permit yourself to change.
For if I, as a younger man, may state
my views, I'd say it would be for the best
if men by nature understood all things—
if not, and that is usually the case,
when men speak well, it good to learn from them.

[720]

CHORUS LEADER

My lord, if what he's said is relevant,
it seems appropriate to learn from him,
and you too, Haemon, listen to the king.
The things which you both said were excellent.

CREON

And men my age—are we then going to school
to learn what's wise from men as young as him?

HAEMON

There's nothing wrong in that. And if I'm young,
don't think about my age—look at what I do.

CREON

And what you do—does that include this,
honouring those who act against our laws?

[730]

HAEMON

I would not encourage anyone
to show respect to evil men.

830

CREON

And her—
is she not suffering from the same disease?

HAEMON

The people here in Thebes all say the same—
they deny she is.

ANTIGONE

CREON

So the city now
will instruct me how I am to govern?

HAEMON

Now you're talking like someone far too young.
Don't you see that?

CREON

Am I to rule this land
at someone else's whim or by myself?

HAEMON

A city which belongs to just one man
is no true city.

CREON

According to our laws,
does not the ruler own the city?

840

HAEMON

By yourself you'd make an excellent king
but in a desert.

CREON

It seems as if this boy
is fighting on the woman's side.

[740]

HAEMON

That's true—
if you're the woman. I'm concerned for you.

CREON

You're the worst there is—you set your judgment up
against your father.

HAEMON

No, not when I see
you making a mistake and being unjust.

CREON

Is it a mistake to honour my own rule?

ANTIGONE

HAEMON

You're not honouring that by trampling on
the gods' prerogatives.

850

CREON

You foul creature—
you're worse than any woman.

HAEMON

You'll not catch me
giving way to some disgrace.

CREON

But your words
all speak on her behalf.

HAEMON

And yours and mine—
and for the gods below.

CREON

You woman's slave—
don't try to win me over.

HAEMON

What do you want—
to speak and never hear someone reply?¹

CREON

You'll never marry her while she's alive.

[750]

HAEMON

Then she'll die—and in her death kill someone else.

CREON

Are you so insolent you threaten me?

860

HAEMON

Where's the threat in challenging a bad decree?

¹Following the suggestion of Andrew Brown and others, I have moved lines 756-7 in the Greek text so that they come right after line 750.

ANTIGONE

CREON

You'll regret parading what you think like this—
you—a person with an empty brain!

HAEMON

If you were not my father, I might say
you were not thinking straight.

CREON

Would you, indeed?
Well, then, by Olympus, I'll have you know
you'll be sorry for demeaning me
with all these insults.

[Creon turns to his attendants]

Go bring her out—
that hateful creature, so she can die right here,
with him present, before her bridegroom's eyes.

[760]

870

HAEMON

No. Don't ever hope for that. She'll not die
with me just standing there. And as for you—
your eyes will never see my face again.
So let your rage charge on among your friends
who want to stand by you in this.

[Exit Haemon, running back into the palace]

CHORUS LEADER

My lord, Haemon left in such a hurry.
He's angry—in a young man at his age
the mind turns bitter when he's feeling hurt.

CREON

Let him dream up or carry out great deeds
beyond the power of man, he'll not save these girls—
their fate is sealed.

880

CHORUS LEADER

Are you going to kill them both?

[770]

CREON

No—not the one whose hands are clean. You're right.

ANTIGONE

CHORUS LEADER

How do you plan to kill Antigone?

CREON

I'll take her on a path no people use,
and hide her in a cavern in the rocks,
while still alive. I'll set out provisions,
as much as piety requires, to make sure
the city is not totally corrupted.¹

Then she can speak her prayers to Hades,
the only god she worships, for success
avoiding death—or else, at least, she'll learn,
although too late, how it's a waste of time
to work to honour those whom Hades holds.

890

[780]

CHORUS

O Eros, the conqueror in every fight,
Eros, who squanders all men's wealth,
who sleeps at night on girls' soft cheeks,
and roams across the ocean seas
and through the shepherd's hut—
no immortal god escapes from you,
nor any man, who lives but for a day.²

900

And the one whom you possess goes mad.
Even in good men you twist their minds,
perverting them to their own ruin.

[790]

You provoke these men to family strife.
The bride's desire seen glittering in her eyes—
that conquers everything, its power
enthroned beside eternal laws, for there
the goddess Aphrodite works her will,
whose ways are irresistible.³

[800]

¹The killing of a family member could bring on divine punishment in the form of a pollution involving the entire city (as in the case of Oedipus). Creon is, one assumes, taking refuge in the notion that he will not be executing Antigone directly.

²Eros was the young god of erotic sexual passion.

³Aphrodite was the goddess of sexual desire.

ANTIGONE

[Antigone enters from the palace with attendants who are taking her away to her execution]

CHORAL LEADER

When I look at her I forget my place. 910
I lose restraint and can't hold back my tears—
Antigone going to her bridal room
where all are laid to rest in death.

ANTIGONE

Look at me, my native citizens,
as I go on my final journey,
as I gaze upon the sunlight one last time,
which I'll never see again—for Hades,
who brings all people to their final sleep,
leads me on, while I'm still living, [810]
down to the shores of Acheron.¹ 920
I've not yet had my bridal chant,
nor has any wedding song been sung—
for my marriage is to Acheron.

CHORUS

Surely you carry fame with you and praise,
as you move to the deep home of the dead.
You were not stricken by lethal disease
or paid your wages with a sword. [820]
No. You were in charge of your own fate.
So of all living human beings, you alone
make your way down to Hades still alive. 930

ANTIGONE

I've heard about a guest of ours,
daughter of Tantalus, from Phrygia—
she went to an excruciating death
in Sipylus, right on the mountain peak.
The stone there, just like clinging ivy,
wore her down, and now, so people say,
the snow and rain never leave her there, [830]

¹Acheron was one of the major rivers of the underworld.

ANTIGONE

as she laments. Below her weeping eyes
her neck is wet with tears. God brings me
to a final rest which most resembles hers.

940

CHORUS

But Niobe was a goddess, born divine—
and we are human beings, a race which dies.
But still, it's a fine thing for a woman,
once she's dead, to have it said she shared,
in life and death, the fate of demi-gods.¹

ANTIGONE

O you are mocking me! Why me—
by our fathers' gods—why do you all,
my own city and the richest men of Thebes,
insult me now right to my face,
without waiting for my death?
Well at least I have Dirce's springs,
the holy grounds of Thebes,
a city full of splendid chariots,
to witness how no friends lament for me
as I move on—you see the laws
which lead me to my rock-bound prison,
a tomb made just for me. Alas!
In my wretchedness I have no home,
not with human beings or corpses,
not with the living or the dead.

950

[850]

960

CHORUS

You pushed your daring to the limit, my child,
and tripped against Justice's high altar—

¹The last two speeches refer to Niobe, daughter of Tantalus (a son of Zeus). Niobe had seven sons and seven daughters and boasted that she had more children than the goddess Leto. As punishment Artemis and Apollo, Leto's two children, destroyed all Niobe's children. Niobe turned to stone in grief and was reportedly visible on Mount Sipylus (in Asia Minor). The Chorus' claim that Niobe was a goddess or semi-divine is very odd here, since her story is almost always a tale of human presumption and divine punishment for human arrogance.

ANTIGONE

perhaps your agonies are paying back
some compensation for your father.¹

ANTIGONE

Now there you touch on my most painful thought—
my father's destiny—always on my mind,
along with that whole fate which sticks to us, [860]
the splendid house of Labdakos—the curse
arising from a mother's marriage bed,
when she had sex with her own son, my father. 970
From what kind of parents was I born,
their wretched daughter? I go to them,
unmarried and accursed, an outcast.
Alas, too, for my brother Polyneices,
who made a fatal marriage and then died— [870]
and with that death killed me while still alive.²

CHORUS

To be piously devout shows reverence,
but powerful men, who in their persons
incorporate authority, cannot bear
anyone to break their rules. Hence, you die 980
because of your own selfish will.

ANTIGONE

Without lament, without a friend,
and with no marriage song, I'm being led
in this miserable state, along my final road.
So wretched that I no longer have the right [880]
to look upon the sun, that sacred eye.
But my fate prompts no tears, and no friend mourns.

CREON

Don't you know that no one faced with death
would ever stop the singing and the groans,

¹The Chorus here is offering the traditional suggestion that present afflictions can arise from a family curse originating in previous generations.

²Polyneices married the daughter of Adrastus, an action which enabled him to acquire the army to attack Thebes.

ANTIGONE

if that would help? Take her and shut her up, 990
as I have ordered, in her tomb's embrace.
And get it done as quickly as you can.
Then leave her there alone, all by herself—
she can sort out whether she wants suicide
or remains alive, buried in a place like that.
As far as she's concerned, we bear no guilt.
But she's lost her place living here with us.¹ [890]

ANTIGONE

O my tomb and bridal chamber—
my eternal hollow dwelling place,
where I go to join my people. Most of them 1000
have perished—Persephone has welcomed them
among the dead.² I'm the last one, dying here
the most evil death by far, as I move down
before the time allotted for my life is done.
But I go nourishing the vital hope
my father will be pleased to see me come,
and you, too, my mother, will welcome me,
as well as you, my own dear brother.
When you died, with my own hands I washed you. [900]
I arranged your corpse and at the grave mound 1010
poured out libations. But now, Polyneices,
this is my reward for covering your corpse.³
However, for wise people I was right
to honour you. I'd never have done it

¹Creon's logic seems to suggest that because he is not executing Antigone directly and is leaving her a choice between committing suicide and slowly starving to death in the cave, he has no moral responsibility for what happens.

²Persephone is the wife of Hades and thus goddess of the underworld.

³In these lines Antigone seems to be talking about both her brothers, first claiming she washed and dressed the body of Eteocles and then covered Polyneices. However, the pronoun references in the Greek are confusing. Lines 904 to 920 in the Greek text have prompted a great deal of critical debate, since they seem incompatible with Antigone's earlier motivation and do not make much sense in context (in addition most of them appear closely derived from Herodotus 3.119). Hence, some editors insist that the lines (or most of them) be removed. Brown provides a useful short summary of the arguments and some editorial options (199-200).

ANTIGONE

for children of my own, not as their mother,
nor for a dead husband lying in decay—
no, not in defiance of the citizens.

What law do I appeal to, claiming this?

If my husband died, there'd be another one,
and if I were to lose a child of mine

1020

I'd have another with some other man.

[910]

But since my father and my mother, too,
are hidden away in Hades' house,

I'll never have another living brother.

That was the law I used to honour you.

But Creon thought that I was in the wrong
and acting recklessly for you, my brother.

Now he seizes me by force and leads me here—

no wedding and no bridal song, no share
in married life or raising children.

1030

Instead I go in sorrow to my grave,
without my friends, to die while still alive.

[920]

What holy justice have I violated?

In my wretchedness, why should I still look
up to the gods? Which one can I invoke

to bring me help, when for my reverence
they charge me with impiety? Well, then,

if this is something fine among the gods,

I'll come to recognize that I've done wrong.

But if these people here are being unjust
may they endure no greater punishment

1040

than the injustices they're doing to me.

CHORUS LEADER

The same storm blasts continue to attack
the mind in this young girl.

[930]

CREON

Then those escorting her
will be sorry they're so slow.

ANTIGONE

Alas, then,
those words mean death is very near at hand.

ANTIGONE

CREON

I won't encourage you or cheer you up,
by saying the sentence won't be carried out.

ANTIGONE

O city of my fathers
in this land of Thebes— 1050
and my ancestral gods,
I am being led away.

No more delaying for me.
Look on me, you lords of Thebes, [940]
the last survivor of your royal house,
see what I have to undergo,
the kind of men who do this to me,
for paying reverence to true piety.

[Antigone is led away under escort]

CHORUS

In her brass-bound room fair Danaë as well
endured her separation from the heaven's light, 1060
a prisoner hidden in a chamber like a tomb,
although she, too, came from a noble line.¹

And she, my child, had in her care
the liquid streaming golden seed of Zeus. [950]
But the power of fate is full of mystery.

There's no evading it, no, not with wealth,
or war, or walls, or black sea-beaten ships.

And the hot-tempered child of Dryas,
king of the Edonians, was put in prison,
closed up in the rocks by Dionysus, 1070
for his angry mocking of the god.²

There the dreadful flower of his rage [960]

¹Danaë was daughter of Acrisus, King of Argos. Because of a prophecy that he would be killed by a son born to Danaë, Acrisus imprisoned her. But Zeus made love to her in the form of a golden shower, and she gave birth to Perseus, who, once grown, killed Acrisus accidentally.

²These lines refer to Lycurgus son of Dryas, a Thracian king. He attacked the god Dionysus and was punished with blinding or with being torn apart.

ANTIGONE

slowly withered, and he came to know
the god who in his frenzy he had mocked
with his own tongue. For he had tried
to hold in check women in that frenzy
inspired by the god, the Bacchanalian fire.
More than that—he'd made the Muses angry,
challenging the gods who love the flute.¹

Beside the black rocks where the twin seas meet, 1080
by Thracian Salmydessos at the Bosphorus,
close to the place where Ares dwells, [970]
the war god witnessed the unholy wounds
which blinded the two sons of Phineus,
inflicted by his savage wife—the sightless holes
cried out for someone to avenge those blows
made with her sharpened comb in blood-stained hands.²

In their misery they wept, lamenting
their wretched suffering, sons of a mother
whose marriage had gone wrong. And yet, 1090 [980]
she was an offspring of an ancient family,
the race of Erechtheus, raised far away,
in caves surrounded by her father's winds,
Boreas' child, a girl who raced with horses
across steep hills—child of the gods.
But she, too, my child, suffered much
from the immortal Fates.³

[Enter Teiresias, led by a young boy]

¹The anger of the Muses at a Thracian who boasted of his flute playing is not normally a part of the Lycurgus story but refers to another Thracian, Thamyras.

²The black rocks were a famous hazard to shipping. They moved together to smash any ship moving between them. The Bosphorus is the strait between the Black Sea and the Propontis (near the Hellespont). This verse and the next refer to the Thracian king Phineas, whose second wife blinded her two step sons (from Phineas' first wife Cleopatra) by stabbing out their eyes.

³Cleopatra was the grand-daughter of Erechtheus, king of Athens. Boreas, father of Erechtheus, was god of the North Wind.

ANTIGONE

TEIRESIAS

Lords of Thebes, we two have walked a common path,
one person's vision serving both of us.
The blind require a guide to find their way.

1100 [990]

CREON

What news do you have, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS

I'll tell you—and you obey the prophet.

CREON

I've not rejected your advice before.

TEIRESIAS

That's the reason why you've steered the city
on its proper course.

CREON

From my experience
I can confirm the help you give.

TEIRESIAS

Then know this—
your luck is once more on fate's razor edge.

CREON

What? What you've just said makes me nervous.

TEIRESIAS

You'll know—once you hear the tokens of my art.
As I was sitting in my ancient place
receiving omens from the flights of birds
who all come there where I can hear them,
I note among those birds an unknown cry—
evil, unintelligible, angry screaming.
I knew that they were tearing at each other
with murderous claws. The noisy wings
revealed that all too well. I was afraid.
So right away up on the blazing altar
I set up burnt offerings. But Hephaestus
failed to shine out from the sacrifice—
dark slime poured out onto the embers,

1110

[1000]

1120

ANTIGONE

oozing from the thighs, which smoked and spat,
bile was sprayed high up into the air, [1010]

and the melting thighs lost all the fat
which they'd been wrapped in. The rites had failed—
there was no prophecy revealed in them.

I learned that from this boy, who is my guide,
as I guide other men.¹ Our state is sick—
your policies have done this. In the city
our altars and our hearths have been defiled, 1130

all of them, with rotting flesh brought there
by birds and dogs from Oedipus' son,
who lies there miserably dead. The gods
no longer will accept our sacrifice,
our prayers, our thigh bones burned in fire. [1020]

No bird will shriek out a clear sign to us,
for they have gorged themselves on fat and blood
from a man who's dead. Consider this, my son.

All men make mistakes—that's not uncommon.
But when they do, they're no longer foolish 1140
or subject to bad luck if they try to fix
the evil into which they've fallen,
once they give up their intransigence.

Men who put their stubbornness on show
invite accusations of stupidity.
Make concessions to the dead—don't ever stab
a man who's just been killed. What's the glory
in killing a dead person one more time? [1030]

I've been concerned for you. It's good advice.
Learning can be pleasant when a man speaks well, 1150
especially when he seeks your benefit.

CREON

Old man, you're all like archers shooting at me!
For you all I've now become your target—
even prophets have been aiming at me.

¹Teiresias' offering failed to catch fire. His interpretation is that it has been rejected by the gods, a very unfavourable omen.

ANTIGONE

I've long been bought and sold as merchandise
among that tribe. Well, go make your profits.
If it's what you want, then trade with Sardis
for their golden-silver alloy—or for gold
from India, but you'll never hide that corpse
in any grave. Even if Zeus' eagles
should choose to seize his festering body
and take it up, right to the throne of Zeus,
not even then would I, in trembling fear
of some defilement, permit that corpse
a burial. For I know well that no man
has the power to pollute the gods.
But, old Teiresias, among human beings
the wisest suffer a disgraceful fall
when, to promote themselves, they use fine words
to spread around abusive insults.

1160 [1040]

1170

TEIRESIAS

Alas, does any man know or think about . . .

CREON [*interrupting*]

Think what? What sort of pithy common thought
are you about to utter?

TEIRESIAS [*ignoring the interruption*]

. . . how good advice
is valuable—worth more than all possessions.

[1050]

CREON

I think that's true, as much as foolishness
is what harms us most.

TEIRESIAS

Yet that's the sickness
now infecting you.

CREON

I have no desire
to denigrate a prophet when I speak.

TEIRESIAS

But that's what you are doing, when you claim
my oracles are false.

ANTIGONE

CREON

The tribes of prophets—
all of them—are fond of money

1180

TEIRESIAS

And kings?
Their tribe loves to benefit dishonestly.

CREON

You know you're speaking of the man who rules you.

TEIRESIAS

I know—thanks to me you saved the city
and now are in control.¹

CREON

You're a wise prophet,
but you love doing wrong.

TEIRESIAS

You will force me
to speak of secrets locked inside my heart.

[1060]

CREON

Do it—just don't speak to benefit yourself.

TEIRESIAS

I do not think that I'll be doing that—
not as far as you're concerned.

CREON

You can be sure
you won't change my mind to make yourself more rich.

1190

TEIRESIAS

Then understand this well—you will not see
the sun race through its cycle many times
before you lose a child of your own loins,
a corpse in payment for these corpses.
You've thrown down to those below someone

¹This is the second reference to the fact that at some point earlier Teiresias has given important political help to Creon. It is not at all clear what this refers to.

ANTIGONE

from up above—in your arrogance
you’ve moved a living soul into a grave,
leaving here a body owned by gods below— [1070]
unburied, dispossessed, unsanctified. 1200
That’s no concern of yours or gods above.
In this you violate the ones below.
And so destroying avengers wait for you,
Furies of Hades and the gods, who’ll see
you caught up in this very wickedness.
Now see if I speak as someone who’s been bribed.
It won’t be long before in your own house
the men and women all cry out in sorrow,
and cities rise in hate against you—all those [1080]
whose mangled soldiers have had burial rites 1210
from dogs, wild animals, or flying birds
who carry the unholy stench back home,
to every city hearth.¹ Like an archer,
I shoot these arrows now into your heart
because you have provoked me. I’m angry—
so my aim is good. You’ll not escape their pain.
Boy, lead us home so he can vent his rage
on younger men and keep a quieter tongue
and a more temperate mind than he has now. [1090]

[Exit Teiresias, led by the young boy]

CHORUS LEADER

My lord, my lord, such dreadful prophecies— 1220
and now he’s gone. Since my hair changed colour
from black to white, I know here in the city
he’s never uttered a false prophecy.

CREON

I know that, too—and it disturbs my mind.
It’s dreadful to give way, but to resist

¹Teiresias here is apparently accusing Creon of refusing burial to the dead allied soldiers Polyneices brought with him from other cities. There is no mention of this anywhere else in the play, although the detail is present in other versions of the story.

ANTIGONE

and let destruction hammer down my spirit—
that's a fearful option, too.

CHORUS LEADER

Son of Menoikeos,
you need to listen to some good advice.

CREON

Tell me what to do. Speak up. I'll do it.

CHORUS LEADER

Go and release the girl from her rock tomb.
Then prepare a grave for that unburied corpse.

1230

[1100]

CREON

This is your advice? You think I should concede?

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, my lord, as fast as possible.
Swift footed injuries sent from the gods
hack down those who act imprudently.

CREON

Alas—it's difficult. But I'll give up.
I'll not do what I'd set my heart upon.
It's not right to fight against necessity.

CHORUS LEADER

Go now and get this done. Don't give the work
to other men to do.

CREON

I'll go just as I am.
Come, you servants, each and every one of you.
Come on. Bring axes with you. Go there quickly—
up to the higher ground. I've changed my mind.
Since I'm the one who tied her up, I'll go
and set her free myself. Now I'm afraid.
Until one dies the best thing well may be
to follow our established laws.

1240

[1100]

[Creon and his attendants hurry off stage]

ANTIGONE

CHORUS

O you with many names,
you glory of that Theban bride,
and child of thundering Zeus, 1250
you who cherish famous Italy,
and rule the welcoming valley lands
of Eleusianian Deo—

O Bacchus—you who dwell
in the bacchants' mother city Thebes,
beside Ismenus' flowing streams,
on land sown with the teeth
of that fierce dragon.¹

Above the double mountain peaks,
the torches flashing through the murky smoke 1260
have seen you where Corcyian nymphs
move on as they worship you
by the Kastalian stream. [1130]

And from the ivy-covered slopes
of Nysa's hills, from the green shore
so rich in vines, you come to us,
visiting our Theban ways,
while deathless voices all cry out
in honour of your name, "Evoe."²

You honour Thebes, our city, 1270
above all others, you and your mother
blasted by that lightning strike.³
And now when all our people here [1140]
are captive to a foul disease,
on your healing feet you come

¹In these lines the Chorus celebrates Dionysus, the god born in Thebes to Semele, daughter of King Cadmus. The bacchants are those who worship Dionysus. Eleusis, a region on the coast near Athens, was famous for the its Eleusinian Mysteries, a secret ritual of worship. Deo is a reference to the goddess Demeter, who was worshipped at Eleusis. The Theban race sprang up from dragon's teeth sown in a field by Cadmus, founder of the city.

²*Evoe* is a cry of celebration made by worshippers of Bacchus.

³Semele, Dionysus' human mother, was destroyed by Zeus lightning bolt, because of the jealousy of Hera, Zeus' wife.

ANTIGONE

across the moaning strait
or over the Parnassian hill.

You who lead the dance,
among the fire-breathing stars,
who guard the voices in the night, 1280
child born of Zeus, oh my lord, [1150]
appear with your attendant Thyiads,
who dance in frenzy all night long,
for you their patron, Iacchus.¹

[Enter a Messenger]

MESSENGER

All you here who live beside the home
of Amphion and Cadmus—in human life
there's no set place which I would praise or blame.²
The lucky and unlucky rise or fall
by chance day after day—and how these things
are fixed for men no one can prophesy. 1290 [1160]
For Creon, in my view, was once a man
we all looked up to. For he saved the state,
this land of Cadmus, from its enemies.
He took control and reigned as its sole king—
and prospered with the birth of noble children.
Now all is gone. For when a man has lost
what gives him pleasure, I don't include him
among the living—he's a breathing corpse.
Pile up a massive fortune in your home,
if that's what you want—live like a king. 1300
If there's no pleasure in it, I'd not give
to any man a vapour's shadow for it, [1170]
not compared to human joy.

CHORUS LEADER

Have you come with news of some fresh trouble
in our house of kings?

¹Thyiads were worshippers of Dionysus, and Iacchus was a divinity associated with Dionysus.

²Amphion was legendary king of Thebes, husband of Niobe.

ANTIGONE

MESENTER

They're dead—
and those alive bear the responsibility
for those who've died.

CHORUS LEADER

Who did the killing?
Who's lying dead? Tell us.

MESENTER

Haemon has been killed.
No stranger shed his blood.

CHORUS LEADER

At his father's hand?
Or did he kill himself?

MESENTER

By his own hand—
angry at his father for the murder.

1310

CHORUS LEADER

Teiresias, how your words have proven true!

MESENTER

That's how things stand. Consider what comes next.

CHORUS LEADER

I see Creon's wife, poor Eurydice—
she's coming from the house—either by chance,
or else she's heard there's news about her son.

[1180]

[Enter Eurydice from the palace with some attendants]

EURYDICE

Citizens of Thebes, I heard you talking,
as I was walking out, going off to pray,
to ask for help from goddess Pallas.
While I was unfastening the gate,
I heard someone speaking of bad news
about my family. I was terrified.

1320

I collapsed, fainting back into the arms
of my attendants. So tell the news again—
I'll listen. I'm no stranger to misfortune.

[1190]

ANTIGONE

MESSENGER

Dear lady, I'll speak of what I saw,
omitting not one detail of the truth.
Why should I ease your mind with a report
which turns out later to be incorrect?
The truth is always best. I went to the plain,
accompanying your husband as his guide. 1330
Polyneices' corpse, still unlamented,
was lying there, the greatest distance off,
torn apart by dogs. We prayed to Pluto
and to Hecate, goddess of the road,
for their good will and to restrain their rage. [1200]
We gave the corpse a ritual wash, and burned
what was left of it on fresh-cut branches.
We piled up a high tomb of his native earth.
Then we moved to the young girl's rocky cave,
the hollow cavern of that bride of death. 1340
From far away one man heard a voice
coming from the chamber where we'd put her
without a funeral—a piercing cry.
He went to tell our master Creon,
who, as he approached the place, heard the sound,
an unintelligible scream of sorrow.
He groaned and then spoke out these bitter words, [1210]
"Has misery made me a prophet now?
And am I travelling along a road
that takes me to the worst of all disasters? 1350
I've just heard the voice of my own son.
You servants, go ahead—get up there fast.
Remove the stones piled in the entrance way,
then stand beside the tomb and look in there
to see if that was Haemon's voice I heard,
or if the gods have been deceiving me."
Following what our desperate master asked,
we looked. In the furthest corner of the tomb [1220]
we saw Antigone hanging by the neck,
held up in a noose—fine woven linen. 1360
Haemon had his arms around her waist—
he was embracing her and crying out

ANTIGONE

in sorrow for the loss of his own bride,
now among the dead, his father's work,
and for his horrifying marriage bed.

Creon saw him, let out a fearful groan,
then went inside and called out anxiously,
"You unhappy boy, what have you done?

What are you thinking? Have you lost your mind?

Come out, my child—I'm begging you—please come."

1370

[1230]

But the boy just stared at him with savage eyes,
spat in his face and, without saying a word,
drew his two-edged sword. Creon moved away,
so the boy's blow failed to strike his father.

Angry at himself, the ill-fated lad
right then and there leaned into his own sword,
driving half the blade between his ribs.

While still conscious he embraced the girl
in his weak arms, and, as he breathed his last,
he coughed up streams of blood on her fair cheek.

1380

Now he lies there, corpse on corpse, his marriage
has been fulfilled in chambers of the dead.

[1240]

The unfortunate boy has shown all men
how, of all the evils which afflict mankind,
the most disastrous one is thoughtlessness.

[Eurydice turns and slowly returns into the palace]

CHORUS LEADER

What do you make of that? The queen's gone back.
She left without a word, good or bad.

MESSENGER

I'm surprised myself. It's about her son—
she heard that terrible report. I hope
she's gone because she doesn't think it right
to mourn for him in public. In the home,
surrounded by her servants, she'll arrange
a period of mourning for the house.

1390

She's discreet and has experience—
she won't make mistakes.

[1250]

ANTIGONE

CHORUS LEADER

I'm not sure of that.
to me her staying silent was extreme—
it seems to point to something ominous,
just like a vain excess of grief.

MESSENGER

I'll go in.
We'll find out if she's hiding something secret,
deep within her passionate heart. You're right—
excessive silence can be dangerous.

1400

[The Messenger goes up the stairs into the palace. Enter Creon from the side, with attendants. Creon is holding the body of Haemon]

CHORUS LEADER

Here comes the king in person—carrying
in his arms, if it's right to speak of this,
a clear reminder that this evil comes
not from some stranger, but his own mistakes.

[1260]

CREON

Aaiii—mistakes made by a foolish mind,
cruel mistakes that bring on death.
You see us here, all in one family—
the killer and the killed.
Oh the profanity of what I planned.
Alas, my son, you died so young—
a death before your time.
Aaiii . . . aaiii . . . you're dead . . . gone—
not your own foolishness but mine.

1410

CHORUS LEADER

Alas, it seems you've learned to see what's right—
but far too late.

[1270]

CREON

Aaiiii . . . I've learned it in my pain.
Some god clutching a great weight struck my head,
then hurled me onto pathways in the wilderness,
throwing down and casting underfoot
what brought me joy.

1420

ANTIGONE

So sad . . . so sad . . .
the wretched agony of human life.

[The Messenger reappears from the palace]

MESSENGER

My lord, you come like one who stores up evil,
what you hold in your arms and what you'll see
before too long inside the house.

[1280]

CREON

What's that?

Is there something still more evil than all this?

MESSENGER

Your wife is dead—blood mother of that corpse—
slaughtered with a sword—her wounds are very new,
poor lady.

CREON

Aaiiii . . . a gathering place for death . . .
no sacrifice can bring this to an end.

1430

Why are you destroying me? You there—
you bringer of this dreadful news, this agony,
what are you saying now? Aaiiii . . .

You kill a man then kill him once again.

What are you saying, boy? What news?

A slaughter heaped on slaughter—
my wife, alas . . . she's dead?

[1290]

MESSENGER *[opening the palace doors, revealing the body of Eurydice]*

Look here. No longer is she hidden in the house.

CREON

Alas, how miserable I feel—to look upon
this second horror. What remains for me,
what's fate still got in store? I've just held
my own son in my arms, and now I see
right here in front of me another corpse.
Alas for this suffering mother.

1440

Alas, my son.

[1300]

ANTIGONE

MESSENGER

Stabbed with a sharp sword at the altar,
she let her darkening eyesight fail,
once she had cried out in sorrow
for the glorious fate of Megareos,
who died some time ago, and then again
for Haemon, and then, with her last breath, 1450
she called out evil things against you,
the killer of your sons.¹

CREON

Aaaii . . . My fear now makes me tremble.
Why won't someone now strike out at me,
pierce my heart with a two-edged sword?
How miserable I am . . . aaiii . . . [1310]
how full of misery and pain . . .

MESSENGER

By this woman who lies dead you stand charged
with the deaths of both your sons.

CREON

What about her?
How did she die so violently?

MESSENGER

She killed herself, 1460
with her own hands she stabbed her belly,
once she heard her son's unhappy fate.

CREON

Alas for me . . . the guilt for all of this is mine—
it can never be removed from me or passed
to any other mortal man. I, and I alone . . .
I murdered you . . . I speak the truth.
Servants—hurry and lead me off, [1320]

¹Megareos was Haemon's brother, who, we are to understand on the basis of this reference, died nobly some time before the play begins. It is not clear how Creon might have been responsible for his death. In another version of the story, Creon has a son Menoeceos, who kills himself in order to save the city.

ANTIGONE

get me away from here, for now
what I am in life is nothing.

CHORUS LEADER

What you advise is good—if good can come
with all these evils. When we face such things
the less we say the better. 1470

CREON

Let that day come, O let it come,
the fairest of all destinies for me,
the one which brings on my last day. [1330]
O let it come, so that I never see
another dawn.

CHORUS LEADER

That's something for the times ahead.
Now we need to deal with what confronts us here.
What's yet to come is the concern of those
whose task it is to deal with it. 1480

CREON

In that prayer
I spoke of everything I long for.

CHORUS

Pray for nothing.
There's no release for mortal human beings,
not from events which destiny has set.

CREON

Then take this foolish man away from here.
I killed you, my son, without intending to, [1340]
and you, as well, my wife. How useless I am now.
I don't know where to look or find support.
Everything I touch goes wrong, and on my head
fate climbs up with its overwhelming load. 1490

[The Attendants help Creon move up the stairs into the palace, taking Haemon's body with them]

CHORUS

The most important part of true success

ANTIGONE

is wisdom—not to act impiously
towards the gods, for boasts of arrogant men
bring on great blows of punishment—
so in old age men can discover wisdom.

[1350]

ANTIGONE

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is a retired instructor (now a Research Associate) at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*
Aristophanes, *Birds*
Aristophanes, *Clouds*
Aristophanes, *Frogs*
Aristophanes, *Knights*
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
Aristophanes, *Peace*
Cuvier, *Discourse on Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
Euripides, *Bacchae*
Euripides, *Medea*
Euripides, *Orestes*
Homer, *Iliad* (Complete and Abridged)
Homer, *Odyssey* (Complete and Abridged)
Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*
Kant, *On Perpetual Peace*
Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*
Nietzsche, *Uses and Abuses of History*
Sophocles, *Ajax*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
Sophocles, *Philoctetes*

A number of these translations have been published by Richer Resources Publications, and some of these titles are available as recordings from Naxos Audiobooks.

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