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A READING OF SOPHOCLES' ANTIGONE: II

S. BENARDETE

24 (384-405). 24.1. The guard’s answer to the Chorus’ question proves that he can be brief and to the point; but in answering Creon he seems to be as garrulously impertinent as he had been on his first entrance (cf. § 15.1). His chief concern is still himself: on each occasion he is the tenor of his first and last remarks to Creon. His joy now prompts him to as much self-justification as his fear had done before; but there are differences. He then spoke only of himself; he now begins with a generalization that he finds applicable to himself (ἀπώμοτος—ἀπώμοτος). He then explicitly distinguished between soul and self; he now implicitly distinguishes between gods and mortals. He then expressed his resignation to his fate; he now glories in his luck. His parting remark—οὐκ ἠθέν τις ἀνδρὶς ἃνθρωπος ὅτι ἢ δεήσαι ἢ ἀλάνθοντα με—did not suggest that he later would replace it with an oath. He must have thus bound himself while the Chorus were singing of the boundlessness of human daring. But the guard now admits that he could not maintain that self-imposed limitation. He accordingly brings out the difference between human and divine law. In ignorance of future circumstances mortals cannot obligate themselves; only the gods, it seems, could stipulate that some action be unqualifiedly binding on men. And yet one might ask whether men must acknowledge such an obligation; and if so, in what way. Does the divine command alone automatically establish the obligation? Or must each man swear to it before he can be punished for his failure to abide by it? Antigone, in her second self-justification, tries to account for the source of her obligation (cf. § 27).

24.2. The guard speaks of hope and expectation three times, twice before and once after the first stasimon (235, 330, 392). When Creon frustrated the guard’s expectation that he would meet his fate, the latter attributed to the gods the cause of his survival, so contrary to his expectation and judgment (330-1). The Chorus then sang of man’s artfulness beyond expectation and its entire independence from the gods. The guard now speaks of his stroke of luck that set at naught

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* The text used is Pearson’s OCT except where otherwise indicated. I have myself, however, not always accepted his readings wherever I am silent, for if I did not see any connection between the reading chosen and my interpretation of the passage, I have passed over my own preference.

Each line or group of lines interpreted is given a section number, with the line numbers in parentheses after it.

Each paragraph of every section is numbered as well for ease of cross-reference.
his expectation, of which he had been so certain that he had confirmed it with an oath. But the guard does not now give thanks to the gods, perhaps because he thinks that the gods would not pardon even his trivial and harmless perjury. He now tells of his unexpected joy and boundless pleasure (392-3); and he later asserts that the greatest pleasure lies in the escape from evils, and that for him everything else naturally (περὶ φύσεως) takes second place to his own safety (436-40). He had not mentioned pleasure when he expressed his gratitude to the gods. Not the gods but chance is the author of his joy (cf. 328): he does not owe the gift of Hermes (θοῦκημανον) to Hermes (cf. 274). He no longer needs either oaths or gods to prove his innocence. The movement from the guard’s first entrance to his final departure seems to be from fate to art (the first stasimon) to chance. The movement reminds one of the argument of the tenth book of Plato’s Laws. Three causes, according to the Athenian Stranger, are said by some to be the sole causes of everything: φύσις, τέχνη, τοῦχη (Lgs. 88e4-90a2). The Athenian Stranger then goes on to trace this understanding of nature to the supposed priority of body to soul, a priority that necessarily leads to the assertion that pleasure is the greatest good (886a9-b2). The Stranger himself, however, asserts the temporal and hierarchical priority of soul or mind to body, a priority that he links up with the existence of gods and the goodness of a providential order. Now the guard’s understanding of fate is plainly not the same as this, for fate for him is no less unintelligible than it is unjust; but it is remarkable that he drops the soul and fate when he drops the gods, and that pleasure, chance, and nature take their place (cf. OT 977-83). The guard, who originally had spoken about what the first stasimon omitted, now speaks in accordance with the first stasimon. Antigone is entirely isolated.

24.3. The guard uses the verb θάπτω three times: “we caught her burying” (385), “she was burying the man” (402), “I saw her burying the corpse you had forbidden” (404-5). The guard offers the last of these as a plainer formulation of the second; and it is the only one that seems to be literally true (cf. § 6.2); for the first fails to say what Antigone was burying (the only case out of seven where θάπτω lacks an object), and the second uniquely refers to Polynices’ corpse as the man (τὸν ἄνθρωπα). Their inexactness, however, seems to catch Antigone’s own understanding of what she is doing better than the literal third. If burial is not indispensable for conveying the soul to Hades, as the silence about it throughout the play implies (cf. § 4.3), θάπτω would not be essentially a transitive verb, but would mean the whole set of rites that the mourner performs, regardless of whether any of them involves the corpse or not (cf. 395-6). Nothing, even if done to the corpse, would be done for the corpse. That the guard, moreover, when he does say what Antigone was burying, can call it “the man” suggests how readily Antigone can disregard the difference between Polynices’ corpse and Polynices himself (cf. § 4.3). The unity of body, soul, and
self, which the guard’s words convey, hardly squares with his former attempts to distinguish them. Now that the guard is not compelled through fear to disassociate himself from himself, he finds no difficulty in attributing a similar unity to the dead (cf. § 20.3).

25 (406-40). 25.1. The guard’s speech falls into four main parts, the first three of which describe in turn the waiting of the guards (407-21), the discovery of Antigone (422-31), and the arrest of Antigone (432-5), while the last part concerns the guard’s own reaction to her arrest (436-40). One καὶ clearly marks off the second from the first part, and another the third from the second. The guard distinguishes between the time prior and subsequent to the dust storm (415-22), during which the guards had their eyes shut. Antigone thus approached the corpse undetected; she was able to move straight toward it despite the fact that she too must have shut her eyes against the dust that totally filled the air. She moved through the storm with the same assurance that the blind Oedipus displayed when he went unassisted to his sacred grave (OC 1541-6, 1588-9). Antigone is as irresistibly drawn to the corpse as any beast that feeds on carrion would be: the guard speaks of her capture as if she were a beast (432). There is no need, then, to assume that the gods directed Antigone’s steps through the trackless plain (250-2). The most one could say, if one is too fastidious to attribute to her a canine sense of smell, would be that Antigone homes in on Polynices’ corpse by “instinct.” Polynices’ corpse is her home.

25.2. The first stasimon implicitly denied that either the chthonic or the celestial imposed any limitation on man, and that man as man had any concern with understanding what manifestly stands above him or exploiting what lies hidden below him (cf. § 22.5). The dust storm, then, seems at first to refute it; but the refutation lies wholly in the language in which the facts are couched, not in the facts themselves. The guard uses the words ντυφώς, σκεπτός, and οὔφανον metaphorically. ντυφώς, by itself, could mean a fireless thunderbolt, and σκεπτός any kind of lightning that strikes the earth [(Arist.) de mundo 395a21-5]; but as the ablative-genitive χθονός makes plain, the guard is describing a terrestrial phenomenon. “Heavenly harm” and “divine plague” are thus equally inexact (cf. Aesch. Pers. 573, 581); indeed, the guard, when he could have used οὔφανος in its precise sense, preferred to speak of the air (415-6). The dust storm, in any case, has only to be endured, and that is easy enough (cf. 356-60); it does not entail a response of reverence or of awe. The dust storm, moreover, even if it does not hinder Antigone, does not help her. An eclipse of the sun would perhaps have let her get away undetected a second time; but the dust storm seems only to conceal Antigone when she does not have to be concealed,

56 Cf. Th. 2.64.2; L. Strauss, The City and Man, 161.
for the guards seize her only when she already has begun the rites of burial. In spite of Creon's prohibition against ritual lamentations (204), the guards choose to convict her for her deeds (strictly understood) and not for the sounds and curses that she utters, let alone for any intention to be inferred from her presence with a pitcher of libations (cf. 384, 434-5; § 4.4). The dust storm, then, is more indicative of Antigone's unerring sense of direction than of the gods' support. The dust storm also seems to fail her in another way: it does not re-cover Polynices' corpse. That moist and putrescent flesh should be as bare of dust after such a storm as before it looks like the single most uncanny event in the play. (But we must note that the guard never calls the storm a dust storm, and that this is directly due to his bringing down to earth a celestial vocabulary.) If the dust storm had continued for days on end, even Creon might have had to admit that the gods themselves buried Polynices; just as the Chorus of the first stasimon might then have had no less to acknowledge a limitation to man's power. But burial is something that men themselves must do; the simple vanishing of the body is not enough; for burial consists at least as much in the rites themselves as in whatever effects those rites might have (cf. § 24.3). On this ground, then, it seems safer to say that Antigone sees the corpse as still unburied because she recognizes that the dust of the storm is not her own. What distinguishes the two dusts is this. What is unseemly for Polynices' unburied corpse to suffer from birds and dogs is the opposite of the unseemliness that the dust storm inflicted on the foliage in the plain (206, 419). The guard ascribes malicious intent to the storm; and this malice that blasted every vestige of life cannot be the same as the love that Antigone poured into the dust that covered Polynices' corpse. Furthermore, no matter how unelaborate her original arrangements might have been, they might yet have borne the marks of human artifice, which the haphazard swirling of the dust could not duplicate. Perhaps, however, Antigone's ritual dust and whatever dust clung to Polynices' corpse during the storm differ not so much (if at all) because artifice and chance differ as because Antigone had stamped that dust with herself. It carried in the eyes of the loving Antigone her own signature. No rule or law that governs a performance can be so strict as to exclude all variations (cf. Pl. Rep. 473al-3); at best, it can only exclude those variations that would make a difference; and yet the indifference of the law to an indifferent difference would not make that difference irrelevant to Antigone. Antigone's recognition, then, that the storm's dust is not her dust perfectly agrees with the law's prescription that man must bury man. The law Antigone obeys shines through Antigone (cf. § 1.2).

25.3. The guard likens Antigone to a bird that on seeing her bed bereft of its nestlings burst out with a piercing cry of lamentation. The guard is the first, except perhaps for the Chorus (113), to make use of a likeness. The strangeness of Antigone compels him to find in the familiar
something comparable to her; but the differences between the image and the imaged seem to outweigh the similarities. The cries of a bird are not the same as ritual cries of mourning; Polynices is not Antigone's son; and while the bird grieves because she does not see her young, Antigone grieves because she does see Polynices. That a probable source for this simile (in Aeschylus' Agamemnon), which tries to compare vultures bewailing the loss of their young to Agamemnon and Menelaus setting out as plaintiffs in a legal action against Troy for the loss of Helen, should be equally inexact in its parallelism does not seem to be accidental (Ag. 40-67; see Fraenkel ad loc.); for beasts can no more unqualifiedly be called νέκτολ or νεκτύες than they can be subject to justice (cf. Ag. 308-9). What defeats the guard in his attempt to make Antigone intelligible is her humanity, for the purity of her devotion, which surpasses a mother's love for her children,\(^57\) is due to the law. Antigone lives the law. She has nothing in common with beasts. The guard in borrowing the word λέχος from the human world only stresses its inapplicability to Antigone. She is the very opposite of generation. The guard succeeds in humanizing the likeness by being false to what he likens. And yet only if one takes the guard literally can one grasp the peculiarity of the bond that obtains between Antigone and Polynices. The likeness is revealing because it is misleading. Polynices' corpse stripped of its ritual dust affects Antigone in the way in which the loss of her brood affects the mother bird. The corpse is Antigone's nest, the dust her young. The corpse now stands tenantless; it was occupied when Antigone clothed it in dust. The corpse is lifeless now that it no longer houses the dust. The life of the corpse is the dust; it is the dust that is Antigone's own. The guard in sweeping away the dust swept away what Antigone looked on as strictly her own—not Polynices, not his corpse, not his head, and not his soul. Antigone's attachment is not just manifest in the dust; her attachment consists in the dust. The dust is as much the object as the means of her devotion, for it comprises the two sources of her devotion, the law and Polynices. The law makes the thirsty dust (246, 429) an essential property of Polynices' corpse, so that without it the corpse is ψυλός, i.e., deprived of what properly belongs to it; and Polynices turns the dust into his nourishment, so that Antigone is compelled to keep on returning with it like a mother bird who leaves her brood only in order to forage for them (cf. Luc. de luctu 19).\(^58\)

25.4. The well-wrought brazen pitcher from which Antigone poured the libations does not seem to have been a sacred object, but merely

\(^{57}\) That Antigone speaks of burial as a "lightening" (κουρφείς, 43) indicates the extent to which she regards it as caring for the most helpless of beings; cf. Tr. 1025; Or. 218.

\(^{58}\) One has to reckon with the possibility that εὔνη here bears the secondary and poetic meaning of tomb, and λέχος the meaning of bed on which a corpse is laid out (cf. 1224-5).
a domestic instrument that could serve the purpose (cf. OC 472). The pitcher seems to illustrate that neutrality of art that was the burden of the first stasimon. Its use for libations rather than for washing or wine-pouring wholly depends on the user. In this case, moreover, its artfulness does not either add to its usefulness or give delight to Antigone and Polynices. The beautiful does not of itself belong to the sacred (cf. § 32.11). Yet it does not seem to be accidental that the pitcher is of bronze, for bronze often occurs in sacred contexts (cf. fr. 534,3 P; Her. 2.37.1, 147.4); and, according to a Theocritean scholium (2.36), bronze was thought to be pure, effective in averting pollution, and therefore employed for every kind of expiation and purification (cf. Macro. Sat. 5.19.11). Antigone, then, seems to think herself polluted or liable to pollution, as if she were somehow at fault because Polynices now lies unburied. One can readily imagine such self-reproach in the case of a mother whose absence from her young leaves them defenseless before predators. But if Antigone thus comes prepared to make amends, she must have either guessed that the guards would sweep away the dust—Creon did not order it—or know by "instinct" of their desecration. In either case, Antigone's understanding of her obligation must have deepened. She now interprets the law as commanding her continual presence by the side of Polynices' corpse; and since his corpse is eternally helpless, she can never quit her vigil. The guards' naive way of trapping Antigone—it assumed that the criminal always returns to the scene of his crime—succeeded because Antigone accepted the trap as pointing to the true intention of the law. To bury the dead is not just "for form's sake" (cf. § 22.10). Antigone's reinterpretation, however, exposes her to another difficulty. Is not Antigone now obliged to stay alive in order to preserve through the performance of yearly rites the tranquility of the dead (cf. Wyse ad Isae. 2.25.4)? Should she not thus have resorted to the utmost guile to escape detection? And is not Ismene's appeal to the perpetuation of the family as faithful to τὰ νομοπόμονα as Antigone's desire to die (cf. § 8.1)? Only the union, it seems, of Antigone and Ismene could fulfill the law. But the guard, in passing over in silence one part of the burial rites, indicates how impossible that union is. A prayer to the dead that asked them to send up good things accompanied the pouring of funeral libations (Aristoph. fr. 488, 12-4 K; cf. Aesch. Ch. 147-9). Antigone utters evil curses against the guards and Creon; but one cannot conceive of what good things she could ask for (cf. § 17.5). She rejects the very notion of worldly benefits; and for her to ask the dead to bring about her own death so that she can join them would make Creon's impiety serve a pious end (cf. § 9.4). Antigone's unlimited devotion to the dead thus precludes her praying to the dead. She can satisfy her desire to die only by failing to satisfy the letter of the law.

59 Cf. Th. 2.34.5; Xen. Mem. 3.8.8-10.
26 (441-8). 26.1. Creon does not dismiss the guard until Antigone confirms the guard’s testimony—so reluctant is he to let the guard go free and convict his niece. He seems loath to have his suspicion falsified, that the burial of Polynices was a political crime, directed not at upholding the divine law but at upsetting his authority. It does not now occur to him that his enemies could have put Antigone up to it, for no one in his opinion would have done it except for worldly gain (221-2). Antigone’s confession, however, does not suffice to make her punishable; she must have known that she was violating his proclamation (cf. Pl. Plt. 297el-3). Creon thus acknowledges what he had before denied, that someone could have buried Polynices in perfect innocence, i.e., in accordance with the demands of custom (cf. § 17.2). It seems, then, to be a remarkable coincidence that Antigone, who knew of Creon’s decree, should have tried to bury Polynices, while Ismene, who had not known of it (Antigone knew that she would not know, 18), should not have at once begun the rites of mourning, even if she just confined herself to ritual cries of lamentation, which Creon had no less prohibited. Ismene’s grief—and Antigone never accuses her of being unfeeling—does not express itself of necessity in conventional ways. Creon’s decree does not go against her grain. Antigone, on the other hand, is thwarted precisely along the lines of her nature. She was at once aware of Creon’s prohibition, as later of the guards’ desecration, because as the living embodiment of the law no violation of it could be unknown to her. In this sense, the Chorus correctly suspected that the first burial of Polynices was thelatov, i.e., the automatic consequence of the divine law (278); for it is through Antigone that the law’s execution follows at once on the law’s existence.

26.2. Of the seven occurrences of kávoa, three are in similar forms of address (1, 899, 915, cf. § 1.1), three in phrases describing some bodily movement (269, 291, 441), and one in a periphrasis for the personal pronoun (1272, cf. 764, 1345). In six of these cases kávoa is not the inevitably right word for a matter of fact: Antigone could have addressed her sister and brothers in a different way; the guard could have said that he and his colleagues were afraid without ever mentioning how they hung their heads; and Creon could have rephrased his suspicion that some Thebans were champing at his rule. kávoa seems to be an affective word: Creon enhances the pathos by saying that a god heavily struck his head. Only in Creon’s address to Antigone—“You who bow your head to the ground”—does kávoa occur in a phrase that could not

60 Creon’s question is even more damaging than in this regard to his own case; for, as Aristotle remarks (EN 1113b32-14a3), ignorance of a prohibition of positive law that one could only be ignorant of through negligence is punishable. So Creon tacitly admits that his decree is not a self-evident consequence of his soul’s laws that everyone must acknowledge.

61 Cf. Müller, 74.
be altered. The sameness of the guard’s ἐς πέδον κάρα νεώσαι and Creon’s σὲ τὴν νεύοσαν ἐς πέδον κάρα is deceptive. Creon perhaps does not think, any more than we should if we were seeing Antigone for the first time, that her posture is compatible with defiance and contempt. But nothing suggests that Antigone now bows her head out of fear or shame; she is the same now as she was when she betrayed no emotion on her capture (433). Antigone, however, is not just meditating whether she will admit to Creon what she admitted to the guards; rather, she faces the ground because she believes that the dead are there (cf. § 4.1). Her body follows her thoughts. She is a “fundamentalist.” It is more inevitable that Antigone look down than that the three-footed Oedipus did (cf. OT 795, Hes. OD 433-4). She is one step beyond her father. Oedipus spoke in exactly and metaphorically what was literally true; Antigone acts out exactly and literally what law and convention may not have meant so strictly. Antigone cannot live the law unless she takes it literally.

27 (449-70). 27.1. Antigone’s reply to Creon’s question as to how she could bring herself to transgress his decree—Creon persists in speaking of it as a law—falls into three parts plus an epilogue of two lines (450-60 διώκεων, 460-4, 465-8). Each part contains its own key word, repeated three times (cf. § 12.1). The first is “gods” (451, 454, 459), the second “die” (460, 462, 464), the third “pain” (466, 468bis), and the epilogue contains the triplet “foolishness,” “folly,” and “fool.”

Gods are understood as opposed to men, to whom Antigone refers three times as ἄνθρωποι, θνητοὶ, and ἀνήρ (452, 456, 458); death is understood as opposed to life (464); but pain is not understood as the opposite of pleasure and joy. The ordinary pleasures of human life are not considered, for the divine law that unconditionally commands burial is linked with Antigone’s pain at Polynices’ nonburial through the fact that she counts her own death as a gain. The link between gods and pain is death: θανομένη γὰρ ἔξηθη τι δ’ οὐ is the central line of the whole speech.

27.2. In each part of her speech Antigone suppresses something the seeming absence of which makes each part incoherent. Her enthymemes presuppose that Creon accepts her unstated major premises. Although she believes that Zeus failed to inflict no possible evil upon herself and Ismene (cf. § 2.2), she does not believe that he could have prohibited her from burying Polynices. Zeus is forever constrained by the laws that

62 Cf. Wolff-Bellermann; L. Campbell. On the form of Creon’s address see T. Wendel, Die Gesprächsanrede im griechischen Epos und Drama der Blutezeit, 118.


64 K. Reinhardt rightly says that Antigone comprehends the uranian and chthonic gods with the “polar expression” Zeus and Dike (Sophokles, 85-6 with note on 86, 264); cf. 1075.
either he and Justice or the gods below have established among men.\textsuperscript{65} Mortal Creon with all his proclamations is powerless to override the unwritten and unchanging νόμμα of the gods, for these have eternal life, and no one knows when (or from what cause) they first came to light; and Antigone was not one, in fear of any man’s pride, to face punishment before the gods’ tribunal for violating them. Antigone opposes human to divine law, and human to divine punishment; but she inserts between these two arguments an argument of another kind, whose omission would apparently not have injured her case, or, if she had given it by herself, it would have been a sufficient defense. Aristotle, in order to illustrate the rhetorical use of natural right, quotes lines 456-7 alone (\textit{Rhet.} 1373b6-13); for neither Antigone’s assertion that Zeus (or the chthonic gods) established the law nor her appeal to divine punishment properly belongs to the argument from natural right.\textsuperscript{66} If the gods have established these νόμμα, they can be in accordance with human nature only if human beings cannot by themselves discover or are not immediately aware of what is in accordance with human nature; and if it is not known when these νόμμα were first established (i.e., whether they are coeval with man), they are not self-evidently in accordance with human nature, for their antiquity, however remote, does not confirm their naturalness, though it may confirm their sanctity.\textsuperscript{67} Antigone seems unable to square either their eternity with their antiquity, or their self-evident sanctity with the need for divine sanctions. Her argument would be in order if she supposes that the gods had to reveal the practice of burial in the past because of man’s rude beginnings, which required that the gods thus supplement man’s understanding; but now man has rediscovered for himself the eternal validity of these ancient practices. Antigone would thus point to man’s moral progress and deny the separation between art and morality that the first stasimon had affirmed: ἀστυνόμοι ὁργαί would not be neutral to the difference between good and bad (cf. § 22.10). Such a supposition, however, would not account for Antigone’s fear of divine punishment unless she understands that punishment as the pain she would suffer if she allowed Polynices to lie unburied (cf. 94). Antigone does not have to learn the νόμμα from another; she knows them because they live in her heart, and their violation affects her at once (cf. §§ 25.1, 26.1). But this automatic self-

\textsuperscript{65} I am inclined to accept Earle’s correction (also proposed by Bruhn), \textit{oī τὸν... ὁρμαν}.

\textsuperscript{66} Cf. Cicero \textit{de re publica} III.33.

\textsuperscript{67} That the law is unwritten means that man cannot change it consciously; but since it also entails that if it changes one does not remember what it was before Antigone says ἀφαλή (cf. § 52.4). The addition of θεῶν to ὡραστα νόμμα here seems to be unattested before Philo; νόμοι θεῶν ὡρασαῖ occurs in a spurious fragment of Archytas (Stob. \textit{flor.} IV.1, 132). Antigone does not want Creon to understand the unwritten laws as merely habits, the violation of which brings shame (Th. 2.27.3).
punishment would be restricted to those who are, like Antigone but unlike Ismene, capable of experiencing such pain (cf. § 8.5). The gods would still have to mete out another kind of punishment to those who are as insensitive as Creon. Of the thirteen occurrences of ἀλγος and its derivatives, six are in the mouth of Antigone, none in Creon’s (4, 12, 64, 230, 436, 439, 466, 468 bis, 551, 630, 767, 857; cf. 316-9; Ai. 1332-3; §§ 3.1, 10.11).

27.3. Antigone connects her knowledge of divine punishment if she violates the divine law with her knowledge of her own mortality that she possessed prior to Creon’s decree. She did not need a proclamation in either case to know her obligations. Antigone does not distinguish between the lawful and the natural: her death is obligatory because she is mortal, her burying Polynices is obligatory because she is human. The one is certainly, the other may well be equally imposed on men by the gods. She is indifferent to the possibility that she may suffer a violent and painful death, for such suffering will be as nothing compared to that which would have awaited her if she had not observed the laws of burial. To this tacit argument Antigone adds another: death is in fact a gain for those as miserable as she is. Antigone, however, does not argue thus before she adds that she counts her death before her time as a gain. τὸδ χειρόνον πρόσθεν is inconsequent, for it would seem to be her present misery and not her failure to live out her allotted span that turns her imminent death into gain (cf. 1326-7). We expect Antigone to say: (1) there is no hope that I could live forever; (2) death is a gain if one is miserable; and (3) since I am miserable, death is a gain for me. With her “before my time” Antigone makes a different point. There is no hope that she will ever cease to be miserable (cf. § 3.2); and there is no such hope because man is born mortal. Man’s mortality is either the necessary and sufficient condition for man’s misery, or it itself constitutes man’s misery. Antigone believes that the sooner she dies, the more she gains (cf. OC 1224-38), for the only eternity open to mortals is death (cf. § 9.4). She seems to be as much oppressed as exhilarated by the eternal life of the law.

27.4. Antigone says that her death is a painless nothing, and disobedience to Creon equally unpainful, but her not burying Polynices would be painful. That not burying Polynices is painful does not seem to have anything to do with her death being painless; her death could be no less painful. If she had stopped at παρ’ ὀθδέν, everything, in thought as in language, would have been in order; but her thought, in racing on to what truly pains her, makes her cast her own death in its terms. Her death is both painless and gainful. It is gainful because she will then be with those she loves; it is painless because she regards it as a reward for obeying the divine law. Creon’s decree is the unwitting instrument of divine benefaction. For Antigone, it is the indispensable coda to the divine law, without which the law carries in itself an
automatic punishment only for its nonobservance, but no automatic reward for its observance. Death by public stoning, to which only Antigone refers as part of Creon's decree (cf. § 4.9), is therefore a necessity for her; the punishment Creon later devises will not do, for if Creon has a change of heart, it allows for her being condemned to live. Antigone, accordingly, confers upon herself suicide as her reward. Only suicide can make her suicidal mission strictly suicidal (cf. § 10.5) and extract from the divine law its hidden reward. The apparent defect in the plot of Antigone, that Creon seems to be just a little too late to save Antigone (cf. § 9.1), and which was justified as revealing the way in which the gods punish intention no less severely than act, now turns out to be the same as the way in which the gods reward piety (cf. §§ 14.2, 17.4). It is, however, of the utmost importance that Antigone does not here express the true content of her reward (cf. § 48.9).

27.5 Antigone does not mention Polynices by name; instead, she so awkwardly refers to him—τὸν ἔξ ἔμης μετρὸς θανότα—that she seems to make Polynices solely her mother's son and Jocasta her brother's murderer. Antigone never acknowledges that her brothers killed one another (cf. § 2.4). Does she think that her mother killed them? She could think so if her abstraction from the war and its consequences led to a reflection on mortality: Jocasta by giving birth to Polynices assured his death (cf. Xen. Ap.S. 27). Life is a process of dying; the source of one is the source of the other; and pain for her consists solely in her mother giving birth to an unburied son.68 As members of the family keep their relationships with one another regardless of whether they are alive or dead (cf. § 3.4), Antigone is as indifferent to generation as to death. But she is antigeneration, the true offspring of an incestuous marriage. Only the abstraction from that which constitutes the family can normalize the family of Oedipus (cf. § 12.2) and make Antigone a model of familial piety. Only in Hades can her family be at home, not just when it dies and goes there—"for with what eyes," says Oedipus, "if I went to Hades could I ever behold my father and wretched mother?" (OT 1371-3)—but only if it was formed and never left there. Antigone, then, must unsex her family and cleanse it of its origins; but she thereby removes the source of her own peculiar devotion to her family. She is made up out of the impossible demand that she combine the abstraction from the incest of her parents with the compulsion to fulfill a sacred duty that can come only from that incest (cf. § 10.9). However ironical σχέδον τι may be in intention, with which Antigone seemingly qualifies her scorn for Creon, it indicates in fact that not only the fool would convict her of folly (cf. § 10.12).

27.6 It is not accidental that Antigone's only defense of her actions in terms of the law should bring to light the relation in which she stands

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68 Read σιδόμωρ with H. D. Broadhead, Tragica, 73.
to her incestuous parents; for if they have caused her the most painful concern (857-68; cf. § 10.4), they cannot be far from her consciousness when she speaks of the unwritten law. Lines 456-7 could equally serve to characterize the prohibition against incest. We do not know as yet whether Antigone reveals an essential bond between these two sacred injunctions. Must the unholiest of families breed the champion of all that is most holy in the family? Does Antigone embody the prohibition against incest as much as she embodies the law of burial? Her third defense suggests a way to answer these questions (cf. § 48).

27.7. Agathias in his Histories (2.30-31) tells the following story. Seven Greek philosophers, dissatisfied with the prevailing opinion about God and falsely informed about the state of Persia, that its people were just and its ruler Plato's philosopher-king, decided to leave the place where the laws forbade them from living without fear and to settle in Persia, despite its alien and incompatible customs. Although they were royally entertained, they found that neither the Persians nor their king lived up to what they had heard; and on their journey back—the Persian king stipulating in his treaty with Byzantium that they were to be left alone regardless of their opinions—they came across the corpse of a man lately dead, tossed aside in accordance with Persian custom without burial. Out of compassion for the lawlessness of barbarian law and in the belief that it was not holy to allow, as far as it lay in their power, nature to be wronged, they had their attendants prepare the body for burial and then bury it in a mound of earth. That night one of the philosophers had a dream: a man whom he did not know and who bore no resemblance to anyone he knew, but for all of that with an august countenance and the beard and dress of a philosopher, seemed to address him with the following injunction: "Do not bury the unburiable; let him be prey to dogs. Earth, mother of all, does not accept the mother-corrupting man." Neither the dreamer nor his comrades could make anything of the dream; but on continuing their journey, and the lay of the land being such that they were compelled to retrace their steps, they came across the corpse they had buried the day before lying naked on the ground, "as though the earth of its own accord had cast it up and refused to save it from being eaten." Thunderstruck at the sight, the philosophers made no further attempt to perform any of the burial rites. They concluded that the Persians remain unburied as a punishment for their committing incest with their mothers and are justly torn apart by dogs.

28 (471-2). 28.1. It at first astonishes us that the Chorus seem to remark on the tone rather than on the content of Antigone's speech; they are as silent about her argument from the divine law as Creon will be. But the Chorus do not speak of tone (note Moschopoulou's φωνημε'); they speak of a father's and a daughter's savagery. Their meaning is not plain, and even the way in which they phrase it seems strange: "It is
plain: the offspring is savage from the savage father of the girl." 69
It is as though the Chorus wanted to separate Antigone the generated (τὸ γέννημα) from Antigone the daughter (τῆς παῖδος). The hyperbaton, whether fully conscious or not, effects the same separation as Antigone desires: consanguinity without generation (cf. § 8.6). The Chorus detect Antigone’s secret while ignoring the plain meaning of her speech. Perhaps they noticed that her τὸν ἐξ ἐμῆς μητρὸς equally applies to Oedipus. In any case, their ὁμὸν ἐξ ὁμοῦ πατρὸς is too emphatic to be translated, with Jebb, “passionate child of a passionate sire”; nor does their own explanation, that Antigone does not know how to bend before evils, account for what they ascribe to Oedipus. Are they thinking of his blinding himself when he saw his mother dead (cf. OC 437)? But Antigone’s dread of and Oedipus’ horror at violating a divine law do not look the same, unless her glorying in the reward of death seems as brutal to them as his self-inflicted punishment. And yet why are they ὁμολ? The Chorus once thought that the love of death marked the fool (220). Now ὁμός occurs once more, in the compound ὁμηρήτης, of the flesh-eating dogs that Antigone tried to keep away from Polynices’ corpse (697). Are Oedipus and Antigone raw like carrion? Or are they like dogs that become what they feed on? Are they cannibals? Are the violator of a most sacred law and the defender of a most sacred law united in their equal violation of a third unwritten law? Cannibalism and incest have one thing in common: both are extreme examples of the love of one’s own. And some tribes bury their dead by eating them (Her. 3.38.4). Antigone was not disgusted by the corpse’s stench (cf. § 4.6), to which she found her way back in a blinding dust storm (cf. § 25.1), and whose devouring by birds she thought would be a sweet treasure of delight (cf. § 4.7). The Chorus, then, do comment on Antigone’s argument. They sense that her devotion is incompatible with civility (cf. § 22.10). The law, whose political effect is mansuetude, shows itself through Antigone as the instrument of bestialization. The Chorus shy away from attributing such opposite effects to the law; they prefer to charge Oedipus wholly with the responsibility for Antigone, which the law must share with him.

29 (473-96). 29.1. Creon picks up the Chorus’ remark and directs his entire speech to them; not until Antigone claims that the Chorus side with her does Creon again speak to her (508). His speech falls into three parts—Antigone (473-483), Antigone’s and Ismene’s punishment (484-9a), Ismene and Antigone (489b-96)—and eight smaller sections: (1) Antigone’s twofold character (473-479), (2) her hybris of deed (480-1), (3) her hybris of boasting (482-3), (4) the necessity for her punishment (484-5), (5) the necessity for Antigone’s and Ismene’s punishment (486-489a), (6) Ismene’s crime of plotting (489b-90), (7) her

69 The repunctuation is due to J. Jackson, Marginalia Scaenica, 176 n.1.
character (491-4), (8) Antigone’s *hybris* of boasting (495-6). The lack of complete symmetry between the first and the last four sections—despite the balance between the *sententiae* οὐγάρ έκπέλει...πέλασ (478-9) and φίλεί δ’ θυμός...τεχνομένων (494-5)—indicates that Creon regards Ismene’s as the lesser crime. Her punishment has only to exemplify Creon’s impartiality when it comes to dealing with his own relations; Antigone’s punishment has to be corrective as well, for she does not acknowledge that she has committed a crime (cf. § 19.5). Yet Creon mistakes the meaning of Ismene’s frenzy. It is not the sign of a guilty conscience but of sisterly concern; and when Creon learns this, he lets her off (at the Chorus’ prompting), even though she had not told him of Antigone’s intent. Creon does not hold her guilty knowledge to be punishable (cf. 266-7, 535). He allows her this measure of loyalty to her own, for he does not expect full devotion to the city of anyone except himself (cf. § 12.5). But even if Ismene had conspired with Antigone, her frenzy would not necessarily have meant her acknowledgment that what she did was wrong; it could merely have signified her fear of punishment. Creon identifies the fear of punishment with remorse. To go in stealth against his decree, trying in every way to avoid detection, without thereby admitting that his decree is just, seems as impossible to Creon as to Antigone (cf. § 0.5). They both deny that caution can be an ally of defiance. It is for this reason that Creon ignores almost everything except Antigone’s stubbornness. Only punishment can teach her the error of her ways, so certain is he that his own case is irrefutable. Her arguments do not deserve an answer.

29.2. Creon assures the Chorus that excessive wilfulness is particularly liable to collapse. He gives two examples: overtempered iron snaps and shivers of its own accord, and a small bridle disciplines the spirited horse. Creon suggests that Antigone’s iron nature has been turned by the unskilled application of art into brittleness; she tried to be both uncompromising and resilient; but she failed, and the slightest resistance will destroy her. On the other hand, Antigone suffers from being nothing but untamed nature, easily brought into line with the slightest force and skill. She is both altogether artful and altogether artless (cf. § 22.12). She has a nature that has been made over by art and a nature untouched by art. For art we must read law. Antigone is nothing but the law and nothing but her nature. Her nature has put on the law, but the law does not temper but exaggerate her nature. Creon understands Antigone’s appeal to the law as the rationalization and not the expression of her natural wilfulness. He thereby admits in a way the uncompromising character of the law; but he believes that Antigone is not tough enough to live up to it. She is principle without power, so that the very burden she has assumed will break her. Yet Creon is far more certain that he can subdue her than that he has correctly read her character: he replaces the *πλείστος ἄν εἰλιδος* of his first example with *olibc* for the second. Creon must tame Antigone
because it is out of the question, he says, for a slave to be proud. He takes her wilfulness more seriously than her crime. If she goes unpunished, she derogates from his authority. He seems to see her as a possible rallying point of his political enemies, whom he had suspected of exploiting the issue of Polynices' burial (cf. § 19.3). Creon thus offers three reasons in the course of his speech for punishing Antigone, only one of which applies to Ismene as well. Antigone must admit her crime—educative punishment, Antigone must have the humility proper to her position as a slave and as a woman—preventive punishment. And through Antigone and Ismene Creon must show his own willingness to punish all lawbreakers alike—exemplary punishment. We are reminded of Ismene's threefold attempt to dissuade Antigone: they would be violating the law, they are women, and they are ruled by those stronger than themselves (cf. §§ 8.4-5). Ismene now proves to have predicted exactly Creon's response. His educative punishment assumes the weakness of Antigone; his preventive punishment is designed to keep Antigone in her place; and his exemplary punishment presupposes that his decree is a fundamental law, the violator of which must be punished if the city's fabric is not to be impaired. Exemplary punishment, however, counts far less with Creon than either preventive punishment, which occupies the two central lines of his speech, or educative punishment, with which he ends (and in a sense begins) his speech. He refers to the law, but he does not mention the city (cf. § 22.14).

29.3. Creon says that Antigone and Ismene, regardless of their kinship with him, will not avoid the most miserable death; indeed, it seems to be because of their kinship that their death must be miserable (cf. 531-3). He thinks perhaps that they relied on kinship to save them from punishment. In order to indicate the norm of kinship Creon says, ὁ πάς ἡμιν Ζεὺς ἔχειος. The phrase means no more than "everyone who worships at our household altar of Zeus," i.e., Creon's immediate family. Creon, however, does not mention worship; Zeus merely stands in for the family. He therefore is unimpressed by Antigone's argument that she dared to transgress his decree because Zeus did not prohibit her. He took her ὅ γὰρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἤρ ὁ κηροῦσας τάδε as a specious periphrasis for "My family did not proclaim your laws" (cf. 658-9). The Zeus who should be fatal to his position is but part of a formula devoid of any sacred significance (cf. 192); and since this Zeus is his to do with as he likes, he prides himself on his willingness to sacrifice his own. In Plato's Euthydemus, one of the last arguments Socrates has with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus concerns the status of Socrates' own (301c10-303a3). On Socrates' admission that his own consists in those things that he can use as he wants and, in the case of living beings, to sell, give, or sacrifice to any god, Dionysodorus forced Socrates to admit that, among other gods, Ζεὺς ἔχειος is his. Creon accepts this argument. His ἡμιν shows that he confuses the genitive
of belonging with the dative of possession, a distinction of which he
was aware when he spoke of the temples, dedications, and lands of
the gods (ἐξείσων, cf. § 19.2), but which, if he had admitted here,
would have at once destroyed his case against Antigone. ἡμῶν Ζεὺς ἐρμεῖος
is not subject to his will.

30 (497-507). 30.1. Creon says that his entire satisfaction consists
in the killing of Antigone, and this in spite of his intention of converting
Antigone. Her recantation, perhaps because he is so certain of it, is
less important than her death (cf. § 43.2). Antigone then says that the
time for talking is over, and in a three-part speech—their mutual anti-
pathy (499-501), her claim to the greatest glory (502-4), the Chorus' silent approval of her deed (504-7)—provokes Creon into talking to her
(cf. § 29.1). Of the eight occurrences of the notion "pleasing," seven
are in the mouth of Antigone (75, 89bis, 500bis, 501, 504), of which
the first three refer to her deed pleasing the dead (cf. § 9.4.), the next
three to the displeasure she takes (and always hopes to take) in Creon's
words and the natural displeasure Creon takes in her (as a woman, as
a slave, and in her pride), and the last to her deed pleasing the Chorus.
Antigone here starts out with an opposition between Creon's deed and
word, and in saying that nothing Creon says or (she hopes) will say in
the future can make her recant, she implies that Creon's deed meets
with her entire approval, an implication that checks her from saying
"How else could I have more pleased the dead than by burying Polyn-
ices?" Her piety but not her fame is independent of her own death.
Antigone, moreover, wants to show that though they cannot possibly
agree on principles Creon must concede that only hers are compatible
with fame. Creon is no less satisfied with his arguments than she with
hers; and they will both find satisfaction in her death; but there the
resemblance ends. Her glory, which derives from her piety, is the
opposite of Creon's happiness that consists in his doing and saying
whatever he wants. Nothing pleases her if it is not honorable; but Creon's
self-gratification is at the expense of honor. He can through fear compel
the acquiescence but not the admiration of the Chorus (cf. § 13.1). One
wonders whether Antigone understood the Chorus' remark, that she is no
less savage than her father, as praise (cf. 38).

30.2. Creon is for Antigone a tyrant (cf. § 8.4). He betrayed
himself when he called her a slave (479). When it was open to him
to say *δοῦλος ἐστί τῆς πόλεως or *τῶν νόμων, he chose τῶν πέλας
(cf. Pl. Crito 50e4). He thus revealed that he took the household as
his model for ruling; and the punishment of Antigone, far from proving
his impartiality, testifies to his understanding the citizen as his property.
Creon never speaks of πολίται (79, 806, 907) but only of ἀστόλ
(186, 193); nor does he ever mention Thebes by name (cf. 844, 937,
940). He calls the Chorus Cadmeans (508). Creon does not represent
the city over against the family; he represents their identification, for
which the loss of his family is the only fitting punishment. He is the direct opposite of Sophocles’ Oedipus, who largely is the public man he thinks himself as being; but Creon is the private man who can only mimic his sister’s son. It is Antigone who speaks of the πάνθημος πόλις and public punishment (7, 36).

31 (508-25). 31.1. The stichomythia falls into three parts, each of which presents in turn the Chorus (508-11), Eteocles (512-7), and Hades (518-25) as the proper judge of Antigone’s deed. Antigone has implied that she does what she does because she is who she is; that Creon does what he does because he is now a tyrant; but that the Chorus do not say what they want to because fear constrains them. Creon ignores the first two and denies the last of Antigone’s assertions (cf. 23). She is entirely alone in her vision; she does not see what is self-evident.70 But Antigone’s denial of her isolation compels Creon to phrase his point hypothetically: “Aren’t you ashamed if you think apart from them [the Chorus]?” Antigone then drops the claim to glory: regardless of what they think, the reverent regard for one’s flesh and blood can never be shameful (cf. 5). Her use of the plural τῶν ὀμοσπλάγχνων lets Creon ask whether Eteocles is not equally her own brother. He is, Antigone replies, from one (mother) and the same father. Antigone again avoids saying mother and father in the same breath (cf. § 27.5); when she later brings herself to do so, she bewails their incestuous marriage (865). Antigone, moreover, does not speak of one mother and one father—”ἐκ μᾶς τε κὰξ ἐνὸς πατρός (cf. Pl. Lgs. 627c4). Their mother is one, but their father is the same; the same, we should otherwise suppose, for each of them; but, in light of Antigone’s most painful concern, we are forced to remember that their father too is the same as themselves, their mother’s son. Creon believes that Antigone has admitted what is fatal to her argument. Eteocles must regard her honor of Polynices as an impious favor. Antigone denies it, perhaps because Eteocles would neither think that private burial is an honor, nor hold himself to be the judge of what is impious (cf. 744-5). Antigone calls Eteocles “the dead corpse” (cf. § 4.3). Creon never calls Eteocles a corpse; indeed, after the first scene (197, 217, 283), he never uses the word νεκρὸς again—he never uses νεκρόο—until he sees the corpse of his wife in front of him (1299).71

70 For this meaning of ὅπως, cf. Pl. Hipp. Mai. 300c4-6: ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἰδὼν καθεξής δοκεῖν μὲν τι ὅπως ἀντις ἔχων ὃς σὺ φῆς ἀδύνατον εἶναι, ὅπως δ’ οὐδεν.

71 There seems to be a recognizable difference in meaning between νεκρόος and νέκροος as both Sophocles and Herodotus use them. In Herodotus, νέκροος only occurs in the first four books (always singular), νεκρόος throughout. νεκρόος is the corpse as something bodily, to which one can do things, while νέκροος, which often takes a defining genitive (rare for νεκρόος), is the corpse in its relation to the living person, a being that can itself do something: Herodotus has νεκρομαντήθαι, not νεκρόο—(5.92η2; cf. Soph. fr. 399P). So the shepherd puts the νεκρόο of his own

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on the other hand, does not hesitate to make a corpse bear witness—she could have said "ὅ τιναθάνων ἀνήγε" (cf. § 24.3)—so little does her imagination move beyond the grave (cf. § 9.6). That Eteocles was patriotic and Polynices impious does not count beside their consanguinity. Polynices is Eteocles' equal by relation, and nothing that he did can affect what he is (cf. § 15.3). He lived and died a brother. Neither the origin of their relationship nor its result is of any importance. Hades demands that she fulfill the law, even if the good Eteocles does not want to be treated like the bad Polynices (cf. Ai. 1344-5) The earth, in whose defense Eteocles perished, has no connection with what is below (cf. § 4.1). "Who knows," Antigone says, "if this [the burial of Polynices] is free from pollution below?" Antigone pleads ignorance in the face of Creon's attributing his own opinion to Eteocles. She is as uncertain about the meaning as about the origin of the law (cf. 457). Her ultimate defense must therefore be that the law exactly coincides with her nature. Her nature validates the law. "It is not my nature to side with either of them in his enmity but to side with both of them in the kindness of their kind" (cf. § 9.5). To bury Polynices is an act of love, of compassion and tenderness, that unites her with her own (cf. § 25.3). This is the essence of the law that enjoins the burial of one’s own; and Antigone is that essence by nature. Creon understands and fails to understand when he scornfully says, "Go then below, and love them if love you must." His literalness shows how paradoxical is Antigone's living of the law. Burial for him is an honor and a reminder; it cannot be a way of life. In punishing Antigone, however, he will literalize her understanding of the law (cf. § 47.3); and Antigone in a way cannot but be grateful for his easing the burden that nature and law have jointly imposed upon her (cf. § 29.2).

31.2. Antigone hardly ever speaks to anyone in the expectation that she will be listened to. In her exchange with Creon (but never with Ismene or the Chorus) she twice drives home a point with τοι, once at the beginning in order to appeal to him on the only ground they could possibly share, the concern with reputation (502), and once at the end in order to define her nature (523). After that she does not use τοι son in the casket that carried the prince's but offers to show τοῦ παιδίου τῶν νέκων to Harpagus (1.113.1-2); Tomerys seeks among the dead Persians for τῶν Κύρου νέκων, but while abusing its head, she speaks over τῶν νεκρῶν (1.214.4); and most strikingly, in the story in 2.121, the corpse of the brother is always νέκως, but the corpse whose arm is cut off to fool the king's daughter is νεκρός 121ε4,5); cf. 4.71.4. In Antigone, in those cases where the two are metrically equivalent, Antigone contrasts Eteocles τοῖς ἐνεργοῖς ἐντιμον νεκροῖς with τὸν Πολυνήσους νέκων (26-6); Tiresias says, τῶν σῶν ἓκαστὰς ἐνα νέκων νεκρῶν ἀμοιβῶν (1066-7); cf. 515. νέκως is surprisingly rare in the other plays of Sophocles as well as in the other playwrights; cf. El. 433; OC 621-2.

again until in a single speech it occurs three times when she addresses the dead (897, 904, 913; cf. Ai. 854-5). They are her only friends (cf. § 11.1).

32 (526-30). 32.1. The last word Creon utters before Ismene enters is γυνή. It applies far better to her than to Antigone, who hardly thinks of herself as a woman (cf. § 8.5). Ismene sheds the tears of a loving sister; and if the tears fall down (σάρω), it is not because she has bowed her head to gaze at what lies below the earth (cf. § 26.3). She shows a woman’s way of expressing love and grief (cf. Ai. 579-80). But Antigone never weeps (cf. 831-2, 881-2), though even the Chorus are later moved to tears (802-3). Ismene’s cloud of grief-laden tears makes her face ugly and wets her fair cheeks. Nothing is said of Antigone’s beauty; all we know about her looks is that in death her cheek was white (1239). She does not become uglier in her grief: she is a τέρας (cf. § 23.1). Nothing of Antigone’s ever provokes the Chorus to such concentrated poetic expression as Ismene has done. Antigone is recalcitrant to poetry: the guard’s attempt at a simile was most notable for its failure (cf. § 25.3), Ismene’s face is bloody, not from any blush of shame (cf. 540-1), but from raking her cheeks in accordance with a woman’s way of mourning (cf. Aesch. Ch. 24; Soph. El. 90).73 She has to mar herself in order to show to herself and to others how she has been affected. Creon saw her raving witlessly in the palace (492). Antigone has no need of such signs. If she had wished to go undetected, she would never have betrayed herself. She is thus the perfect vessel to be filled with the law’s impersonality. Nothing of her own stands in the way of her observing the love of her own. In her passion she is neutral (cf. § 34.2).

33 (531-7). 33.1. If one adopts Creon’s triad of ψυχή, φρόνημα, and γνώμη (cf. § 12.4), and Creon’s first attack on Antigone (473-96) be regarded as mostly concerned with Antigone’s φρόνημα, the kind of resolution she has brought to her action, and their exchange prior to Ismene’s entrance (508-25) as his attempt to discover Antigone’s γνώμη, the reasons she may have for her action, then these lines between himself and Ismene prepare the way for Antigone’s declaration of her ψυχή (538-60), what she is most devoted to or loves. Antigone’s ψυχή, however, can be revealed only if Antigone confronts Ismene, for only her rejection of Ismene can show that that which distinguishes them in φρόνημα has its ground in the difference of their ψυχή. Up to then Creon cannot but suppose that Ismene’s γνώμη would have been the same as Antigone’s, which Creon mistook for a woman’s reasons. Creon, moreover, primarily thinks of the soul as nothing more than an aspect of the self (cf. § 15.2). When he likens Ismene to a viper

73 Heath, W. Schmid (RhM 57, 624-5), and G. H. Macurdy (CP 1946, 163-4) offered this interpretation; Bruhn did too but doubtfully.
lurking in his palace, he does not say, as Clytemnestra says of Electra, that she drinks dry his pure life’s blood (τοδυμον ἐκπίνουσα Ἱείς ψυχῆς ἄργαθον ἄμα. El. 785-6), but merely that she drinks him dry. Creon cannot understand the soul as something distinct from the self or stronger than the body (cf. § 20.2); the possibility, which Antigone in herself presents, that the soul in being what one most loves is the same as what one is, must look to him like madness (562).

33.2. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Creon persists in the belief that Antigone and Ismene are part of a political conspiracy, directed to the overthrow of his rule (cf. 525), and which their punishment will prevent (cf. § 29.2). Antigone was in a sense responsible for this error; by calling his rule a tyranny, she questioned his legitimacy, on which he had put such stress (cf. § 12.2). He suspects that Antigone and Ismene have buried Polynices in order to embarrass him; for though Eteocles could be honored as his country’s champion, Polynices contributed as much as Eteocles to Creon’s right to succeed them (cf. 173-4). He cannot believe that Polynices was buried because he had to be buried. His first and last question is always, cut bono?

33.3. Creon asks Ismene whether she will swear to her ignorance of Polynices’ burial; he did not ask Antigone whether she would swear that she did not do the deed (442). His estimate of Ismene’s θυμός makes him suppose that only the fear of committing perjury would stop her from lying (493-4); he did not believe that Antigone’s impudence would go as far as to deny, while not being under oath, what she had freely admitted to his servants. Creon thus acknowledges that her impudence has nothing to do with cleverness or impiety (cf. 300-1).

33.4. Ismene says that she did the deed; she does not admit her guilty knowledge, which not even Antigone could have denied her. Ismene exaggerates her culpability, on the assumption that intention counts as much as act. One cannot therefore help wondering whether Antigone’s vehemence in insisting that act must be strictly understood does not arise from her fear that those below will hold her own act to be no more than an intention (cf. §§ 10.1-3, 48.4).

34 (538-60). 34.1. There are seventeen exchanges between Antigone and Ismene, the same number as there were between Antigone and Creon. Their exchange also falls into three parts (cf. § 31.1), each of which in turn decides whose deed it was (538-45), whose death it should be (546-54), and whose choice it was (555-60). The “subjectivity” of its theme requires that Antigone use ἔγω (five times), which she did not use once in talking with Creon. Parallel to Creon’s assertion that Antigone’s vision is her own stands Antigone’s assertion that justice forbids Ismene from claiming Antigone’s deed as her own; and just as then Antigone asserted that reverence for one’s own cannot be shameful, regardless of human opinion, so she now makes Hades and those below bear witness to her deed being her own, regardless of what
Ismene says. That the guards could testify on her behalf does not count. Yet she cannot bring herself to say that the nether world does not love her who loves in speech ("λόγοις φιλοδοσεῖ δ' οὐ φιλοδοσεί την φιλην"). She cannot be certain of what holds there (cf. 521); nor can she be unaware that she too might have to plead intention. Ismene, at least, senses that Antigone's death is somehow the same as Antigone's sanctifying of the dead; for to share in one is to share in the other. If Creon understands the unsuccessful crime to be punishable, perhaps Hades will not determine too exactly the degree of failure on either's part. Punishment will validate the equation of act and intention. Antigone, however, decides, as Creon does later (771), that the actual touching of the corpse by hand makes all the difference (cf. 900). Perhaps she condemns Ismene in light of her own willingness (and more than willingness) to handle the rotting corpse, for which, she might suspect, Ismene had the same repugnance as the guards (cf. § 28.1).

34.2. Creon had tried to argue that if Antigone granted that Eteocles was no less a brother than Polynices, she could not justify the burial of Polynices before his brother; but Antigone granted Creon's premise without drawing his conclusion, for their sameness of origin outweighed any subsequent difference. Now, however, Antigone has to distinguish between her sister and herself, while Ismene tries to die with her solely on the ground that they are sisters. She wants to die because her life without Antigone would cease to be φιλοχ. Life (βιοσ) for Ismene can be dear or hateful; life (ζωή) for Antigone is merely what she still lives (cf. § 3.2). Ismene does not have the strength to live alone; Antigone has the strength to die alone. Antigone does not need to be helped; Ismene has Creon to care for. Ismene thinks that Antigone thus pains her gratuitously; Antigone replies that her mockery has its source in her pain. Creon had said that Antigone's favor to Polynices was impious in the eyes of his brother; Antigone had replied that Eteocles could not, as a brother, object, and if he did, the laws of Hades took precedence. The mockery of Ismene matches the dishonor of Eteocles; and Antigone's pain excuses her mockery as Hades' laws excuse the insult to Eteocles. Antigone can only live up to the law by putting aside the difference between her brothers; and she can only die in accordance with her choice if she puts aside the difference between βιοσ and ζωή. She can console Eteocles with the law; she cannot acknowledge his merits; and she can offer Ismene life; she cannot make her happy. Antigone consists of the choice of death and her obedience to Hades' laws; they are both necessarily painful; for the laws in their insistence on uniformity suppress the difference between goodness and badness that partly constitutes the ground for love and hatred, no less than the choice of death suppresses the difference.

between misery and happiness (cf. § 27.3). Antigone can only live abstractly, i.e., piously. There are no words or even sounds for her pain (554, cf. 49, 82, 86). She has a hot heart for cold things (cf. § 10.6).

34.3. Antigone implies that Ismene’s choice of life and her own choice of death are irrevocable; Ismene replies that as Antigone’s choice was made in the face of her own warning, the choice was merely a lapse of judgment, and no more than a proof of her own inability to persuade Antigone. The arguments as arguments were sound. Antigone, however, denies that anyone else could have put a stronger case. Ismene’s arguments met with the full approval of the living, she herself with the full approval of the dead. Ismene has no ground for self-reproach, for Antigone’s choice was not based on argument, on reasons that someone could possibly refute. Ismene then tries one last time. As her warnings prove her guilty knowledge, their fault is equal. Antigone brushes this aside and continues her own line of thought. The fact that Ismene talks at all in terms of fault shows that she persists in accepting life. Ismene still believes that it could have been otherwise; but Antigone did not mean that either chose what she did among other possibilities. “My soul has long been dead, so as to be [exclusively] fit to help the dead.” For Antigone, it is a “natural result,” to use the language of the grammarians, that her soul in being dead helps the dead. ἥ ἐμὴ ψυχὴ—Antigone nowhere else speaks of ψυχή—is not a periphrasis for ἐγὼ: Philoctetes’ τέθηκεν ὄμην πάλαι, as ὄμην shows, is not comparable (Ph. 1030). Antigone’s way of being alive has been to be in the state of death. Creon thought he was exposing Antigone’s unconscious premise when he bid her in death love the dead below. Antigone now answers that she had been doing that all along. θάπτειν means συμφιλεῖν, and συμφιλεῖν means to be alive in death (cf. § 31.1). Her choice of death has nothing to do with Creon’s punishment; it is the same as her obedience to Hades’ laws. Her performance of the rites of burial is her love of death (cf. § 25.3). She is what she loves. Ismene cannot die with her because it would

75 It is remarkable to what an extent Antigone refrains from using the conventional interjections that express grief and other intense feelings. aii occurs only in the mouth of Creon (1267, 1288, 1290, 1306); even Ajax uses it (370). ἰὼ Antigone uses four times (844, 850, 862, 869), as does Creon (1261, 1266, 1284, 1320, cf. 1310 Erfurtd), the Chorus once (1146). Antigone never uses φεῦ, the guard and Tiresias each once (323, 1048), Creon five times (1276bis, 1300 ter, cf. 1310 codd). οἷον Antigone and Ismene each use thrice (86, 838, 933; 49, 82, 554), Creon five times (320, 1105, 1271, 1275, 1294), the Chorus once (1270). Other interjections are entirely absent: πασαὶ (Ph., OC, El); ὁτοτοτοῖ (El); ἐ (OC, Tr., El); ἀπασπασαῖ (Ph.); πόσοι (OT, Tr.).

76 Almost as paradoxical as Antigone’s assertion is Pl. Lgs. 927al-3: αἱ τῶν τελευτησάντων ψυχαί δύναμιν ἐχουσίν τίνα τελευτήσασαι, ἢ τῶν κατ’ ἀνθρώπων πραγμάτων ἐπιμελοῦνταί.
be only as punishment that it confirmed that Ismene buried Polynices; it would not be what it is for Antigone, the worldly equivalent to the truth of the unwritten law.

35 (561-73). 35.1. Creon again shows that his hatred of Antigone lets him see more deeply into Antigone than Ismene's love for her. Ismene's willingness to die is a momentary aberration; Antigone was senseless from birth. πάλαι in her ἦ δὲ ἐμῇ ψυχῇ πάλαι τέθνηκεν means, according to Creon, φύσει. Ismene, however, pleads—she hopes her deferential ὄναξ will have some effect—that no one in misery keeps a balanced mind. Creon concedes that that holds true for Ismene; but Antigone is not miserere (κακῶς πράσσει), she is bad and does bad things (πράσσειν κακά). It is part of Antigone's senseless nature to be bad; Ismene only made a bad and senseless choice. But Ismene says that she has no other choice; her life alone without Antigone is not worth living, for if Creon will kill the future wife of his own son, her own hopes for their family's survival collapse (cf. § 8.1). Creon answers in such a way as to suggest that Ismene understands neither his own inflexibility nor her sister's nature; Antigone is not a ἴδις; she no longer is here among the living (cf. § 13.1). Her life in death can therefore have no place for survival through generation. However cruelly Creon expresses Antigone's ἦ δ' ἐμῇ ψυχῇ πάλαι τέθνηκεν, he does not wholly mistake its meaning. Since Antigone is not a "this," to whom someone living can be attached, Creon can be crude: there are other fields for his son to plow. Antigone is particularly liable to others' abstraction: Ismene calls her "bridal rites" (cf. 891, 1205). But Ismene protests Creon's denial of Antigone's individuality. The betrothal of Antigone and Haemon was unique in its fitness. Ismene points to their concordance in a legal relationship; she cannot bring herself to say that they love one another (cf. 73). Creon again generalizes: "I loathe bad wives for sons." Antigone is no more unique morally than she is sexually. Ismene then despairs of dissuading Creon, for he holds his son's wishes to be of no account. In calling Haemon "dearest," Ismene underlines, not only how far Creon has gone in the dismissal of his own (cf. 486-7), but how much her own hope rests on Haemon. But Creon brushes Ismene aside: she and her talk of marriage annoy him.

35.2. There are three objections to giving line 572 to Antigone. First, we must then suppose that Creon's dishonoring of Haemon consists in his calling Antigone a bad wife; but Creon does not criticize his son. Antigone is as bad for Haemon as she is bad in herself; Creon hates her on both counts (cf. 495-6). Creon, moreover, would then be saying to Antigone that he has no patience with her and her marriage; but Antigone neither speaks of marriage (even if line 572 be hers),

77 See Porson on Eur. Or. 1051.
nor has she been pleading for pardon on this or any other account. Creon could not answer Antigone in terms of what Ismene had said. His reply to Antigone would have to have been: "I do not dishonor him in loathing you." And, finally, ἀγαν γε λυπεῖσ suits Creon's annoyance with Ismene, but not his violent hatred of Antigone (cf. 760, 1084; Ai. 589, 592; fr. 314, 1.393P).

36 (574-81). 36.1. Creon now faces his third opponent, the Chorus, whose remonstrance is so mild that they can hardly be said to oppose him. They do not take up Antigone's argument that she obeys a divine law, nor even Ismene's first plea that a deranged Antigone should not be punished, but merely repeat with a tone of wonder Ismene's second plea: "Is it really certain that you will deprive your own offspring of her?" They are surprised that Creon will not relent merely to indulge his son. The Chorus know nothing of the law, either in its sacredness or in its mercy. "It is the nature of Hades," Creon replies, "to put a stop to this marriage." Creon means that he is not going to put to death Antigone the bride—his son's wife is of little importance one way or the other—but Antigone's death guarantees the end of Haemon's marriage. It seems proper that Creon should thus rebuke the Chorus for speaking so girlishly. Yet Creon's refusal to be a fond parent precipitates the destruction of his family. The worst reason in light of the law proves to be the strongest argument in light of individuals. If Creon had been "un-principled," he would have gone unpunished. That a concession, moreover, the very reverse of holy—a father gratifying a son's desires—would have made Creon do what is holy (ὅσια δεῖα) brings out as nothing else could the uncanniness of Antigone's piety (cf. § 9.3). It is one thing to act in accordance with the sacred, it is another to live it from within. The Chorus, at any rate, have just shown that it is one thing to act prudently, it is another to be wise (cf. §§ 11.2.4).

36.2. The Chorus inadvertently introduce for the first time since Ismene's entrance a quasi-political note: "It is resolved, it seems, that she be killed." Creon is quick to pick up the cue: "Yes, resolved by you as well as by me." Creon reminds the Chorus of his request, to which they never assented, that they stand fast against those who break the law (219-20). But his decree, even if accepted by the Chorus, would still not thereby become the city's resolution—he could not have said ὡς σοι ἡ γάμοι καὶ τόλημεν ἐδογμεν ἃν (cf. 749, OT 64), for Creon

78 Cf. Schneidewin.
79 For the pros and cons on the attribution of this line, see Müller, 109. His arguments for Antigone as the speaker do not come to grips with the difficulties. Creon's reply is correctly interpreted by A. Taccone, Mouséion 1923, 187.
80 L's ἐμοί puts too great a stress on Creon's satisfaction in killing his son's fiancee; his satisfaction still largely consists in killing a lawbreaker.
convened the Chorus because he mistook their adaptability to circumstance for their loyalty to the royal house (cf. § 12.3). Creon senses that the Chorus are lukewarm, as incapable of opposing as supporting him. If he wants anything to be done, he must rely on his own servants. The Chorus could no more guard two women than they could keep watch over a corpse (cf. 215-7). The word δυσμένη, moreover, which does not recur in Sophocles (cf. 1189, 1249), indicates how unpolitical Creon himself has become. His domain is now restricted to his own household, in which Antigone is a slave (cf. § 30.2).

36.3. Creon thinks that Antigone and Ismene, who each in her own way has rashly chosen death, will try to escape, now that they see Hades drawing close to their life. It is plain, however, why Ismene would not desert Antigone; but why Antigone should not do everything she can to avoid an unjust punishment cannot be based on the reasons Socrates (either Plato’s or Xenophon’s) gave to justify his acceptance of the Athenians’ condemnation. Plato’s Socrates does not know whether there is a Hades; Antigone never doubts its existence—she only hopes that her family will love her (897-9). A young Socrates might have escaped; Antigone seems to have as much to live for as to die for. Socrates accepts his punishment as the price he pays for his choice of remaining in Athens; Antigone accepts her punishment as the reward for her piety. Socrates divines but does not wish that the Athenians will be punished (Ap.S. 39c3-d3; cf. Rep. 366c3-d3); Antigone wishes but does not divine that Creon will be punished (925-8). These differences recall Solon’s double account of human happiness (Her. 1. 30-2). When Croesus asked Solon who he thought was the happiest of men, Solon had “truthfully” answered Tellus; and when he asked who was in second place, Solon answered Cleobis and Biton. Solon’s descriptions indicate why he ranked them as first and second. While Athens was flourishing, Tellus had “beautiful and good” sons, all of whom in turn had children that were still alive; he himself had a modest fortune and met with a “most brilliant end of life”; for in a battle at Eleusis he routed the enemy and died “most beautifully”; and “the Athenians buried him where he fell at public expense and honored him greatly.” Cleobis and Biton were Argives, whose livelihood was “adequate” and whose “bodily strength” had won them prizes in athletic contests. A story was told that when their mother had to appear at a festival to Hera, and the oxen to draw her cart were not at hand, they put themselves under the yoke and drew it forty-five stades to the sanctuary; for which they obtained the “best end of life,” since “god showed in their case that it is better for a man to die than to live.” The Argive men “blessed the strength of the youths,” the Argive women their mother, who “joyful at their deed and report” prayed to the statue of Hera to grant her sons, who had honored her greatly, “what is best for a man to obtain.” Cleobis and Biton were found dead in the sanctuary, and the Argives made images of them,
which they dedicated at Delphi, "thinking that they had proved to be the best men." The first story turns on seeing, the second on hearing. Solon knows about Tellus—Crosuses asked him whom he had seen most happy; he only knows a "story" about Cleobis and Biton, whose mother prayed because of the φήμη her sons received. Tellus had "beautiful and good" sons; Cleobis and Biton were strong. Tellus had a "most brilliant death"; Cleobis and Biton had the best. Tellus was honored by the city and buried at public expense, for he had fought for the sake of the city. Cleobis and Biton had helped their own mother; nothing is said about who buried them. Tellus lived at a time when Athens was flourishing; nothing is said about Argos' prosperity—its preeminence had been at the time of Io's rape (1.1.2). Tellus dies in a political setting, Cleobis and Biton in a sanctuary. Tellus' death at a ripe age was the most brilliant from a civil point of view, Cleobis' and Biton's from the divine. Tellus freely chose to die; a god gave to Cleobis and Biton their end. Tellus lived and died within the human horizon, the horizon of the city. He obtained everything that men regard as desirable. Cleobis and Biton obtained what gods thought best for men. The city looks to the beautiful and fine things, the gods to the best. The human good and the divine good are not the same. One restricts the end to visible and tangible goods—money, beautiful children, grandchildren, public honor. The other cares more for nonpolitical and even antipolitical ends; it says that life is not worth living. Socrates' life resembles the political Tellus, Antigone's the holy Cleobis and Biton. Socrates, however, transcends the political and its καλά while retaining its estimate of the sweetness of human life (cf. Ap. S. 33c4, 41b5 and context); Antigone remains within the political and its καλά while transcending the human (cf. § 27.3).

37 (582-625). 37.1. The theme of the second stasimon is human happiness and misery, but it is not easy to formulate its unity more exactly. Only three nouns occur in both strophic pairs: θεός, ἄτα, φρένες. One might therefore say that the Chorus are mainly concerned with how the gods and the human soul work together for man's destruction. But even if this does run through and bind together both strophic pairs, their differences seem to separate them more. The first strophic pair sees the individual as part of his family; the second sees him as part of mankind. The first strophic pair speaks of generation, root, and house (γενεά, γένος, ὀλίγα, ὀλομοσ, ὀλοκοι); the second speaks of mortals and men (θνατοί, ἄνδρες). The first strophic pair contains no nonmetaphoric substantive for the individual; the second contains no proper names except Olympus and Zeus. The stasimon, then, as a whole turns on the ambiguity of "kind" (γένος): man in his parentage and man in his humanity. The first strophic pair speaks of man's past (ἀρχαῖα) and his becoming and perishing (φθατοῖ); the second speaks of man's future (ἔλαπτος, ἔφως) and his existence (βίοτος)—sleep, old age, and time. The stasimon,
however, nowhere considers man as part of the city, perhaps because the city does not properly constitute a γένος in any natural way (cf. 342-5).

37.2. The first strophe begins with a general statement, which the elaborate simile that follows it is meant to illustrate. The second strophe begins with a general statement, which the facts that follow it are meant to prove; and the second strophe ends with the statement of a law binding for all time. The first antistrophe begins with an example, which the Chorus have themselves seen, that confirms the first strophe’s statement, the operation of which is then illustrated more particularly in the case of Antigone. The second antistrophe begins with an explanation of the law’s universal validity, which it then illustrates in a homely way, and whose meaning is in turn revealed by a renowned adage. The first strophic pair is vivid and imprecise—every one of its substantives occurs elsewhere in Sophocles; the second is plain, and distinct—δρεπβασία and δυνάστας occur only here, δύναστας only again at 951. The first strophic pair seems to be the poetic interpretation, the second seems to be the wise (620) interpretation of human life. The second strophic pair explains why a god leads a man astray (δρεπβασία); the first accounts for the continuance of disaster within a family but not for its initial subversion by the gods. The gods of the first strophic pair are chthonic, the gods of the second Olympian. The chthonic has to do with the irrational, which it itself represents, the Olympian with the immoral, whose delusions it brings. The first strophic pair seems to condemn Antigone, the second to pardon Antigone.

37.3. The simile of the first strophe likens the Thracian winds that set the surge in motion to the gods who once they have shaken a house never let its tremors cease. The ruffled surge in racing across the darkness of the sea’s depths, and from which it stirs up dark sand, must be the present generation of a family (all of whom now lie below in darkness), which likewise stirs up the original ἄτη, and which the individual of this last generation confronts as a shore confronts the storm. But the simile, however vividly it conveys that of which it is a simile, still more looks forward to the antistrophe’s description of Antigone. The parallelism is remarkable for its inversion. The surge that races over the nether darkness under the sea is turned upside down in the light of hope that stretches over the last root of Oedipus’ house; the dark sand rolled up from the depths is echoed inversely in the blood-red dust of the nether gods that buries Antigone; and the headlands in their groaning and

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82 It cannot be accidental that ἕδβος everywhere else in classical poetry is connected with Tartarus and death; cf. OC 1389-90; Trag. adesp. 377 N.
83 ἄμφη is difficult if σωζει is kept, but I venture to suggest that it has nothing to do with the verb to mow, but that it is found in διαμάω (cut through) with the basic meaning *to dig, the nominal forms of which are δίμη (mattock) and δίμηγα.
rumbling are taken up, again backwards, in the senselessness of speech and fury of wits that Antigone adds to the sacred law of burial. Antigone once more enters poetry under duress (cf. § 32.1). She resists the poetry; she is antigeneration, who cannot embody, as Ismene and the Chorus believe she does, the hope in generation. The Chorus cast her in this role only to discover that the original crime of her family (the dark sand) proves to be the blood-red dust owed to the nether gods. The paradox of equating a sacred law with an original crime can be avoided only by concluding that it is better not to be born. Thus there culminates in Antigone—manifest to the Chorus in her inherited savagery and to Creon in her inborn senselessness—the very character of her family, which wiped out through Oedipus that succession of generations on which the Chorus’ argument rests. But if the Labdacids’ original crime consists in generation itself, Antigone strangely is the hope of her race, not in perpetuating but in reconstituting it in Hades (cf. § 27.5); and her senselessness of speech and fury of wits are the deepest wisdom (cf. §§ 22.10, 11). That which buries Antigone is that which finally purifies her kind.

37.4 The second stasimon sings of all that the first stasimon had omitted (cf. §§ 22.7, 25.2). Nothing remains of man’s δεινότης—the light-witted birds that man snares become the light-witted desires that delude man—unless it be hope, to which the second antistrophe here ascribes the same moral neutrality as the second antistrophe there had ascribed to art. But the goodness of art depended on its alliance with the laws of the land and the justice of the gods; the goodness of far-ranging hope seems to depend on nothing. The city no longer mediates between the confrontation of gods and men, for it does not administer the law that the Chorus now lay down. Yet the benefits of hope without the city seem to be limited to the life untouched by evils, the life, according to the Chorus, of the happy. Such happiness is consistent with the guard’s understanding of the greatest pleasure, the unexpected escape from evils (cf. § 24.2), but neither with the splendor of Solon’s Tellus nor with the happiness of tyranny (506-7). Everything beautiful and brilliant belongs to Olympian Zeus. Man’s delusion consists in his hope that he can acquire for himself these prerogatives of Zeus; but he is

(channel). καταμάκω would then have the same sense as κατορφύσαω. Frisk also thinks that two distinct roots might be involved (Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch); but Chantraine does not (Dictionnaire étymologique de grec). See further N. B. Booth’s defense, CQ 1959, 76-7. Heinrich’s σαμα (for ὁμα) is to be preferred to κοπίς; but if κοπίς must be accepted, the best parallel to the whole passage would be Aesch. Ch. 286-90. Even κοπίς, however, makes the passage no easier to understand; for if λόγου ἄνοια and φρενῶν ἔφηνε are in apposition to it, the Chorus can only be saying that Antigone’s destruction is due to some chthonic power, which power can only be the law of burial.

84 Laius was held to be the first homosexual.
always held in check. This check is formulated as a law, in which unfortunately the key term is corrupt; but the sense seems to have been that everything wholly loved and desired comes disastrously to man. If one strips Antigone’s devotion to her family both of its divine origin through generation and of its divine sanction in the unwritten law and looks upon it as an entirely individual and human phenomenon, no different in kind from Haemon’s love of Antigone, then the Chorus simply condemns Antigone for her lack of moderation. But it is then not easy to say how Antigone transgresses the power of Zeus. Or do the Chorus mean that Antigone’s love of her own offends Zeus through its denial of everything noble and splendid as much as the emulation of his splendor would? The Olympian gods would thus represent a twofold prohibition, forbidding equally the exclusive love of one’s own, which turns away from everything higher than itself, and the exclusive love of the beautiful, which challenges their supremacy. The human embodiment of this twofold prohibition is the city, which looks up to the gods as both its defender and its aspiration. But the Chorus do not mention the city. Their silence would seem to indicate that they are aware that the city does not embody but rather uneasily contains this twofold prohibition. If, however, one keeps Antigone’s character as an individual human being together with her character as the expression of her origins and of the sacred, Antigone herself looks like the perfect resolution between the love of one’s own and the love of the beautiful (cf. § 9.3.4). But Antigone is a monster in the eyes of the Chorus (cf. § 23.1). It seems, in any case, to be the counsel of despair if the perfect resolution necessarily entails the love of death.

37.5 One might suppose that the second stasimon does not exclusively refer to Antigone, but that only the first strophic pair does, while the second refers to Creon. Creon is willfully, Antigone helplessly guilty. Human misery has two different sources, one to be traced back through one’s own ancestors to an original crime, the other directly attributable to an individual’s hybris. On this view, Antigone represents the final.

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85 H. Lloyd-Jones has shown that Heath’s τάμπολι γ’ is impossible (CQ 1957, 10-20); but his own βίοτος τάμπολος (also proposed by Kayser) does not satisfy, for βίοτος is not ἀλβος, nor is τάμμεγας τάμπολος, and the hope of prosperity cannot by itself be the ground for the disastrousness of prosperity. τάμπολος, moreover, does not occur in extant tragedy; it seems to be avoided in formal prose; Isocrates does not have it; see further Müller, 145, note 1. When Jebb paraphrases the impossible τάμπολι γ’ in order to explain the antistrophe’s γῆς, he says, “No inordinate desire comes to men....” I suggest then either the unattested παμφυλές or παροφιλές. The other possibility is the often conjectured παντελές: “Nothing comes complete to human life except disaster,” i.e., only ἄτη stands at the peak of human hopes. Possibly πάρ πόδας should be read: “Nothing follows as closely on the heels of human life as ἄτη.” Sophocles would have deformed the proverb, νέμεσις δὲ γε πάρ πόδα βαλει (παρὰ πόδας codd.).
working out of her inheritance, and Creon the beginning of a new chain of disasters. Ismene does not yet pose a problem, for the Chorus believe that she will share in the fate of Antigone; but Creon not only commits the first crime, he sees its destructive force at work in his own family. There will be no later generations to assume Creon's crime. Creon's punishment, which lies in the loss of his family, illustrates the operation of inheritance so perfectly that it fails to illustrate the operation of inheritance. Ismene's survival, on the other hand, could be taken as auguring a fresh onset of Laius' crime (cf. second hypothesis). The second strophic pair, then, cannot be thus reconciled with the first. If, however, one ignores the Chorus' restriction in the first antistrophe to the individual's family, and generalizes it to pertain to man as man, the first crime of a race would become man's original sin. This sin could have been Prometheus' theft of fire, or, to keep to the presentation of the first stasimon, man's own invention of the arts, the punishment for which was, according to Hesiod, first Pandora and then the race of women, or, to keep again to the play, generation itself, of which no more telling example on either account could be found than the race of Laius. The second strophic pair would then come into its own as the proper pendant of the first. Although man's hope—the second, according to Aeschylus, of Prometheus' crimes (cf. § 23.1), and the gift to man, according to Hesiod, of Pandora—is inevitably frustrated by Zeus' power, hope is both a blessing as the indispensable companion to man's ineradicable misery and a curse as the irresistible lure to transgression. The second stasimon would thus have been the Chorus' meditation on the first stasimon, to which the intervention of Antigone would have provoked them. It is a mark of Sophocles' restraint that he did not let the Chorus express this meditation; and it is a mark of his wisdom that he encouraged us to make it (cf. § 11.4).

38 (626-38). 38.1. The Chorus tell Creon of Haemon's coming. They remind him that the hope of his own race depends on his only surviving son. They thus obliquely refer to Megareus (1303), whose sacrificial death in appeasing the wrath of Ares has just now helped to save Thebes. It would seem, then, that Creon has already shown that he rules in accordance with his own laws: he gave up his son for the sake of his fatherland. Yet he did not decide to glorify Megareus' death but strangely chose Eteocles' as the highest form of patriotism. The need to prove his own legitimacy apparently outweighed what no one would have rated at less than a pardonable pride in his own consistency. His punishment would surely have gained in poignancy if the loss of his elder son underlay his hatred of Polynices and Antigone. But could a man who has just sacrificed his son in obedience to a soothsayer's word have failed to consult him about the prohibition of Polynices'

86 Creon's relation to Megareus is often misunderstood; see, e.g., Schneidewin, Einleitung, 8.
A Reading of Sophocles' Antigone

burial? And if he had, would he then abuse Tiresias as Creon does? Creon has given no indication up to now that he has ever experienced suffering (cf. § 27.2). Are we then to suppose that Creon was indifferent to his son's sacrifice and his own? Or that he regarded them as so obligatory that he ceased to count them as obligations? Creon does not impress us as a humble man. If, moreover, one accepts Euripides' version, that Creon tried to abet Megareus' (Menoeceus') ostensible avoidance of self-sacrifice (*Phoen*. 962-85), Creon would be nothing but a hypocrite, more than willing to save his own at the expense of his fatherland. One of two conclusions would then follow: either Creon punishes Antigone out of shame from his own lapse from patriotism, or Creon thinks Megareus' sacrifice was unnecessary, a pious invention of Tiresias. In the former case, one would expect some hint of a remorse that takes so spiteful a form; and in the latter, his claim to have never departed from Tiresias' advice would be demonstrably false (993). When, however, the Chorus ask whether Haemon has come in grief and pain for his blighted hopes, Creon gratuitously replies: "We shall soon know better than soothsayers."

In the mouth of Creon μάρτις is no more to be strictly understood than Ζεύς ἀφεῖσος, unless, perhaps, Creon now shows his resentment of Tiresias, whose unerring advice might rankle. His glorification of Eteocles would be his way of getting back at Tiresias. Yet perhaps Creon cannot be simply explained. The truth about him might lie in his very lack of any overwhelming passion or principle. Nothing dominates but petty suspicion, spite, and resentment. He is cold without being magnanimous.

It would then call for much reflection on the ways of the gods if Creon's punishment consists in the loss of those who have never meant much to him (cf. §§ 63.1,3). He does not, at any rate, address the dead Haemon or Eurydice with one term of affection; and he then addresses the messenger as he had just addresed his son; ὅ παῖ (1289).87

38.2. The Chorus ask Creon whether Haemon has come in pain and grief; Creon asks Haemon whether he has come in fury and anger; but Creon asks the alternative as well, whether he remains dear to Haemon regardless of what he does. Creon does not ask whether Haemon remains loyal to him despite his pain. If he is angry with his father, he is against his father; if he loves his father, he approves of him. Creon refuses to take love and pain into account. But he expects a loyalty on the part of Haemon that he otherwise condemns, for Creon despised anyone who put his φίλος before his country (cf. § 12.4). Haemon does not answer Creon's question. He defers to his judgment but not necessarily to his actions. That he is Creon's does not mean that Creon can do with him as he likes (cf. § 29.3). As Creon is his guide because his judgment is sound, Haemon implies that he does not simply defer to

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87 Hermann remarks that this ordinary form of address is absent from tragedy except here and Aesch. Ch. 653-4; for Creon only the master-slave relation counts (cf. 479).
Interpretation

him as a father. Haemon knows what a sound judgment is. Does he need then anyone at all to guide him? Haemon also knows that love does not and cannot affect his judgment. He is a competent judge of wisdom and free of self-interest. In order to prove the first, he would have to defer to someone whom Creon acknowledged to be wise—could he have cited at this point Tiresias?—and to prove the second, he would have to do something against his self-interest—offer, for example, to marry anyone of his father's choosing. It is partly because he does not do this that neither Creon nor the Chorus accept his silence about his love for Antigone as a proof of his disinterestedness (cf. § 43.1). Haemon does not know how to argue; he knows only how to be right.

39 (639-80). 39.1. The theme of Creon's speech is hierarchy, whose two central lines concern the consequence of his failing to keep in order those who are naturally of his own kind. The speech falls into three parts: fathers and sons (639-54), the private and the public (655-67), obedience and disobedience (668-80). In each part Antigone exemplifies something different: the bad wife (651), the improper claims of the private (658), and woman (678). Only in the first part does Creon speak directly to Haemon (639, 648), though not even there does he ever use the second person pronoun, which, indeed, in the entire confrontation with Haemon he uses but twice, first to ask whether Haemon is unqualifiedly loyal to him (634), last to declare that Haemon's speech is wholly on Antigone's behalf (748).

39.2. Creon says that Haemon must hold to the sentiments he has expressed, which Creon interprets to mean that a son must set his father's judgment before everything else. Thebes no less than Antigone falls under this rule. Men pray that the offspring they beget—Creon does not restrict the prayer to sons—be obedient, in order that they requite their father's enemy with evil and honor their father's friend as their father does. Children are useless unless they conform to this purpose, for the father has then sown nothing but troubles for himself as well as his enemies' ridicule. Children are a calculated risk that can pay off in benefits; they have nothing to do with pleasure or love. One wonders what Creon would have said about the duty of sons to bury their fathers (cf. Lys. 13.45; Isae. 2.25.4). Creon himself, moreover, is aware of a difficulty. Sons get married and become fathers in their own homes (ἐν δόμοις) they do not as a rule stay at home (ἐν δόμοις ἔχειν), forever obedient to their fathers. The son acquires his own φίλοι, whom he could not expect his father in turn to honor. Creon therefore has to imply that no enemy of his is good and no friend bad; so Haemon, simply on the basis of calculation (εἰδῶς), should not marry Antigone, unless he wants to inflict troubles on himself. Creon thus gives a tripartite argument, the inner coherence of which is not self-evident. It would

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88 I do not accept Seidler's displacement of 668-71; see below § 39.3.
follow at once from the subordination of everything to a father's judgment that Haemon must reject Antigone, for Creon says that she is bad. The opposition between judgment and pleasure could not be more clear-cut. And yet Creon inserts between the premise and the conclusion the prayer of fathers. But why should Haemon obey Creon because Creon has prayed for his obedience? Haemon must obey because that is what Creon wants. The duty of the son is grounded in the pleasure of the father. But Creon does not want anything else than what would be good for Haemon. Creon, however, can give no other reason why he wants Haemon's good except that it is his own good. He does not say that he cares for Haemon. His argument founders on the tension between a father's judgment and judgment simply, which he in vain tries to ease through prayer.

39.3. Creon knows that Haemon cannot loathe Antigone simply on Creon's command; he is content if Haemon will let her go as if (δόσει) she were ill-disposed to him. Creon does not ask that Haemon literally fulfill the prayer of fathers; he does not have to be his father's champion. Creon goes even further. It makes no difference whether Haemon obeys him or not; he will kill Antigone—he has always before spoken euphemistically of killing (308, 489, 581) or let someone else give it its name (220, 497, 576)—because as she alone out of the whole city was openly disobedient—he does not forget for a moment his secret enemies (291)—he will not prove himself false to the city. The "ethical dative" πόλει is ambiguous. It can mean either that Creon will not pardon Antigone because he could not then bear the city's mockery of his indulgence to Haemon or that Antigone's disobedience threatens the supremacy of the city. Antigone can harp all she wants on Ζεύς ξύναιμος. Zeus is again in Creon's mouth an empty term (cf. § 29.3). Creon takes only the Olympian and celestial Zeus seriously (184, 758, 1040-1; cf. § 37.2). He pretends that Antigone's appeal to the Zeus of kinship is the same as her asking for pardon on the basis of her kinship with him. The natural relation between Creon and Antigone does not differ from the allegedly sacred relation between Antigone and Polynices. To cherish one's own natural kind to the point of disorder entails the encouragement of disorder in the city. Creon implies that he would not hesitate to kill Haemon if he found him disobedient. What can only be a father's prayer to hope for becomes a ruler's power to enforce. Lines 661-2 look as though they could mean only one of two things: either that whoever is just in his dealings with his own will be just in his dealings with the city (cf. Her. 5.29) or that whoever as ruler subordinates his own good to the city's good—ἐν τοῖς ὤικείοισιν ἄνηγ χειροτός—is a just ruler. Creon, however, can mean neither of them. If the ὄστις of 663 is the same as the ὄστις of 661, and it means the ruler, the ruler's justice consists in his obedience to the city's laws; but since the law in question is Creon's own decree, Creon has to replace it with the ruler's will, from which it follows that the ruler obeys his own self-interest. If, on the
other hand, the ὃσις of 663 is the same as the ὃσις of 661, but it means the subject, the subject is just if he obeys the ruler whom he, along with the other citizens, has established; but his justice then consists in an obedience that is independent of justice; he simply subordinates his own interests to the ruler's. If Creon thinks that the ruler's interests are identical with the subject's, it would be very easy to be good in dealing with one's own. Only out of mistaken self-interest could the private man disobey. But how does the private man know that his own interests coincide with the ruler's? It would seem that the subject banks on his becoming a ruler in turn. The city is nothing but a mutual exploitation society, in which every citizen has his chance as ruler to compensate for the injustices he has suffered as subject. Creon, however, cannot say that. The obedient subject is the noble ruler. He is noble because he subordinates his own interests to the city and its laws; but the laws of the city are Creon's decree. Creon could avoid this consequence, which no less faces him as ruler, if he supposes that the tacit obedience of the citizens to his decree is equivalent to their subordination of their own interests to the city. He would thus imply that everyone regards τὰ ἐγγενή φῶςει of Creon as his own ὀρκιεία. As this cannot literally be true, Creon must mean that every citizen sees in Antigone a threat to his rule within his own family. Every citizen is a father or potential father, who must base his present or future rule on the superiority of men. Creon seems to oppose the city to the family; but he in fact models the city on the family (cf. § 30.2). Obedience to the unjust ruler depends on obedience to the father, and not vice versa. Lines 661-2, then, mean: "Whoever keeps his own family in its proper order will also maintain the proper order of the city." Creon, however, has to admit that the family is not an actual model, for fathers have to pray for obedient children. The actual family therefore needs the city in order for it to become the model family. Without the other fathers no father could be certain of obedience. The city guarantees that the superior male be the actually superior father. But the city exacts a quid pro quo: the city will support the family in all its dignity if the family subordinates itself to the city; but the family cannot exist in all its dignity if it is subordinate to the city. Creon does not see this vicious circle because he is the ruler of the city. He can thus subordinate the family to the city at the same time that he can maintain the dignity of the father.

39.4. Whoever scrupulously obeys the city's ruler would be a noble ruler, a good subject, and in a storm of spears would stick to his assigned post, a just and good comrade-in-arms. That he would be a good subject follows only if obedience by itself turns him into the perfect instrument of the ruler's will; and that he be a just and good παραστάτης follows only if his martial competence can be presumed; but that he would be a noble ruler follows at once on his realization that the ruler must exact obedience. The threefold consequence of obedience seems to be matched by the threefold consequence of disobedience, which
Creon treats as being equivalent to lack of order. When it does occur
to him that πειθαρχία and ἀραρχία could fall together, he relies on the
subordination of women to men, which is far more firmly established
than either the subordination of children to fathers, which depends on
prayer and the city, or the subordination of wives to husbands, which
depends on judgment overriding pleasure. Disobedience destroys cities,
ruins households, and routs an army in battle. The third consequence
of disobedience is the counterpart of the third consequence of obedience,
which, however, Creon now admits, does not invariably guarantee
success. The first consequence of disobedience is the counterpart of the
first and second consequence of obedience; but the second consequence
of disobedience—the ruination of households—cannot have its proper
correlate, for the father does not give up his own rule when he obeys
the city’s ruler, nor does a son prove his competence to rule in his
obedience to his father, a wife in her obedience to her husband, or a
woman in her obedience to a man. Creon’s praise of unqualified
obedience, so that whoever practices it automatically acquires the right
to rule, undercuts the very basis of the hierarchy on which Creon models
political rule. Creon avoids the self-contradiction by explicitly restricting
the right to rule to men (τοῦτον τῶν ἀνδρῶν) and implicitly to fathers.
The Chorus, at any rate, though they think that Creon speaks prudently,
wonder whether they have not been deceived by time (681-2). As loyal
old men, all of whom could by now have been fathers, they cannot but
be pleased with Creon’s granting them the right to rule (cf. 988). Haemon,
on the other hand, cannot be much moved by an argument that promises
him the right to rule as a man while it deprives him of the way to become
a father.

40 (683-723). 40.1. The theme of Haemon’s speech is wisdom, whose
center consists of two parallel sentences, the first saying that Haemon
has no more prized possession than his father’s success, the second asking
what greater delight could children have than their father’s glory, or a
father than his children’s. The speech turns on three sententiae, each
of which contradicts in turn the three parts of Creon’s speech. To Creon’s
demand that a son must set his father’s judgment before everything else,
Haemon answers that judgment does not reside with fathers qua fathers
(683-4); to Creon’s claim that whoever is good in his own things will
be just in the city, Haemon answers that whoever thinks most highly
of his own understanding is empty (708-9); and to Creon’s praise of
unqualified obedience, Haemon answers that it can be only the second-
best (720-3). Haemon connects his threefold opposition to Creon’s
opinions with a threefold attack on Creon himself: his ignorance (688-91),
his pride (705-6), his obduracy (711, 718). Throughout his speech
Haemon speaks directly to Creon. The second person pronoun and
possessive adjective here occur seven times, and in the exchange that
follows seven times more (cf. § 39.1).
40.2. Creon began with the superiority of a father's judgment and ended with the superiority of men; Haemon begins with the gods implanting (φάσων) sense (φάνες) in human beings, the highest of human possessions (κτημάτων Λτ; cf. 1050, fr. 210, 36P), and ends with his assigning the highest rank to the man who is by nature (φόνει) wholly full of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Haemon is incapable, nor does he wish to be capable, of denying the correctness of what Creon has said. But his own incapacity, which seems to be due as much to the gods' unequal distribution of wisdom as to his own filial piety, does not prevent him from reporting the criticism of others. Although Creon inspires terror in the ordinary citizen (δημότης), Haemon relies not only on his adopting the messenger's role (cf. 277) but on his father's affection to offset his displeasure. But the impossible task Haemon has thus set himself wipes out any gain his self-effacement might have won him. He must now prove that the ordinary Theban is the wise man. And Haemon faces another difficulty. Creon does not need Haemon to learn of the city's disapproval; he counted his disregard of it as his greatest merit (178-81). He is not ignorant of either the secret murmuring of his enemies (290-1) or the hidden defiance of his rule (655). Haemon tries to sidestep the first difficulty by shifting from the correctness (δοθώς) of Creon's speech to the moral beauty (καλός) of a counter view (cf. 706, 723). And he tries to sidestep the second difficulty by appealing to Creon's own concern for reputation. Creon betrayed such a concern twice: he spoke of the mockery of a father's enemies (647), and he refused to be called a woman's inferior (680). Haemon exploits this concern in a peculiar way. He virtually identifies Creon's good fortune with Creon's glory; and he urges his own cherishing of the one and delight in the other. For Haemon to cite Antigone's glory while appealing to Creon's only looks absurd; he in fact obliquely threatens Creon with the power of the city. He could lose everything if the city acts on its now-secret opinion (ἐρεμνὴ φάτας), for Antigone can obtain the golden honor (χρυσῆς τιμῆς) she deserves only if the city publicly grants it. Haemon therefore puts Creon's good fortune and repute in terms of his own possession and delight in order to show that he would take no pleasure in Creon's downfall. Yet he adds that a father has no greater delight than in his children's glory. Is he thinking of his brother Megareus (cf. § 38.1)? Or does he insinuate that Creon can bask through Haemon in Antigone's glory? However this may be, Haemon tries to link wisdom as the highest human possession with public opinion through his own most precious possession, the good fortune of Creon. In the absence of his own wisdom, Haemon must esteem most highly what can be his; and Creon's success can flourish and thus remain Haemon's only if Creon abides by public opinion, his knowledge of which depends on his devoted son. It is Haemon's care for Creon that eases the tension between public opinion and wisdom (cf. § 39.2).
40.3. According to the city, Antigone's most glorious deed—the city does not say "ἀτε ἔγγυν εὐαμείατέων"—consists in the burial of her brother fallen in bloody slaughter (ἐν φόναις), whom she did not allow to be destroyed (ἀλέσθαι) by ravenous dogs or any bird (cf. 1314). The city does not say that Polynices died in battle (ἐν μάχῃ); indeed, it speaks more euphemistically of his death than of his threatened consumption by beasts (cf. 1018, 1029). It prefers to forget, as the Chorus had advised themselves to do (150-1), both the war and the kind of war in which Polynices was engaged. The city, therefore, does not say, any more than Haemon does, that Antigone's glory lies in her resistance to Creon's decree. The city speaks cryptically even outside of Creon's hearing. It speaks as if the very handling of her brother's body, and not the fulfillment of a divine law, distinguished Antigone. The city speaks of neither the divine law nor Antigone's piety. It interprets Antigone's deed as intended to prevent dogs and birds from destroying Polynices.\(^{89}\) Antigone saved her brother. That she saved a corpse no one mentions: neither νέκυς nor νεκρὸς occurs between 515 and 818.\(^{90}\) Creon, however, just spoke of the many bodies (σώματα) that obedience saves (676). The city understands Antigone militarily. It tries to assimilate her deed as much as possible to a victory like Tellus' (cf. § 36.3). Thebes does not see Antigone as Argos saw Cleobis and Biton. Creon had ordered Polynices' body (δέμας) to be left unburied in order that the city might see the birds and dogs eat and disgrace it (cf. § 4.6). The city itself, however, speaks of the brother being eaten and perishing. Antigone is to die disgracefully (κάωστα φθίνει); Polynices would have suffered something more, the loss of self. Tiresias can speak of the unholy consequences of Polynices' punishment, and hence of the sacred reasons for the divine law (cf. § 52); and he can speak as well of its meanness (1029-30); but the city knows nothing about any of this. Just to be eaten, and nothing else, constitutes in the city's opinion the whole meaning of lack of burial. To be incorporated into the nonhuman, the literal bestialization of man, one can say, is the primal terror (cf. 1081).\(^{91}\)

\(^{89}\) On the inexactness of the city's speech, see A. B. Drachmann, Hermes 1908, 69. It is of a piece with the city's (or Antigone's) misunderstanding of the reason for Creon's calling the extraordinary assembly of the Chorus; cf. note 7.

\(^{90}\) Their joint intonation from the word seems to be in accordance with Athenian speech: no Thucydidean speaker (unlike Herodotus) ever uses νεκρὸς. When Socrates refers to the corpses the generals failed to recover at Arginusae, he says τῶν ἐκ τῆς ναυμαχίας (Pl. Ap.S. 32b3); likewise Lysias 5.36. When orators use νεκρὸς, it almost invariably refers to the dead buried at Marathon. On no Greek verse inscription is νεκρὸς/νέκυς used, as far as I know, before the third century; see W. Peck, Griechische Grabgedichte, numbers 129, 195, 220. Peck's remark about the increasingly euphemistic language about death (p. 37) would have to be modified.

\(^{91}\) Cf. Moschion fr. 6, 30-3 N: καὶ τοῦτο τῶν θανότας ὄμησιν νόμος / τῶμβοις καλύπτειν κάψαμοράζοντα κόνων / νεκροῖς ἄβατοις, μηδὲ ἐν ὀρθαλμοῖς ἐὰν / τῆς πρόθεσε θολῆς μημάζειμα δυσεποβός.
The question whether this terror is part of the core out of which man’s need for gods arises or whether the gods, having given man his humanity, enjoin through the law that man live up to their gift underlies all of Antigone. Antigone herself seems to point to the truth of either answer (cf. § 28.1).

40.4. Haemon follows up the veiled threat of the city with an argument that seems to have nothing to do with the city. He has wisdom yield to public opinion only to have public opinion yield in turn to moderation. Regardless of the city and regardless of what the issue is, Creon must in himself (ἐν σαντῷ) be more adaptable. The Chorus, not Antigone, should be his model. Haemon now adopts for his own purposes two remarks of Creon. The triad of ψυχή, φρόνημα, and γνώμη, which Creon had said come to sight only in rule (cf. § 12.4), becomes the triad of φρονεῖν, γλώσσα, and ψυχή; and the two likenesses that Creon had used to illustrate Antigone’s character and his way of dealing with it—overtempered iron and spirited horses (cf. § 29.2)—are matched by the likenesses of trees facing a winter torrent and a seaman overstraining the sail’s sheet. Haemon’s triad, however, does not exactly correspond with Creon’s; it resembles much more the first stasimon’s triad of φθέγμα, φρόνημα, and ἀπτυσμοῦ ὁμαί (cf. § 22.11). Since Haemon has to attack Creon in his pride—his fearless resolve (φρόνημα) to maintain what he is most devoted to (ψυχή)—and the question of argument (γνώμη) is hence irrelevant, Haemon presents Creon’s resolution as vanity, his arguments as specious, and his devotion as hollow. Creon’s distinction between rulers and nonrulers is false. What comes to sight in the ruler must be the same as that which is latent in everyone else. The ruler’s laws (cf. 191) must be the hidden opinion that the city has at any moment. Haemon speaks of the people and later of the gods but never of the city’s laws (cf. § 52.3). Between the divine law and the opinion of the people, which Haemon tacitly likens to the irresistible force of a stormy stream or sea (cf. Her. 3.81.2), there is nothing to guide the ruler. The ruler’s moderation consists solely in doing anything to save his own skin. Haemon thus shows his care for Creon: he argues self-preservation at the expense of a futile but possibly noble resistance. Creon’s high-mindedness, he believes, is mere bluster, concealing a fear for his own safety. He is the typical tyrant, according to Thucydides, who takes no risks (1.17). It is for this reason that Haemon keeps silent for so long about the divine law, for he does not know whether its violation involves punishment.

40.5. According to Creon, Antigone is unskilful art and/or artless nature; according to Haemon, though Creon runs the risk of becoming the same, he does not have to be like the uprooted trees or the unskilful seaman who drowns. He can restrain his nature (ἡθος) or improve his skill. He can yield to what cannot be resisted (τὸ μὴ τεῖνειν ἁγαν) or he can accept the opinion of others (τὸ μανθάνειν πολλά). They are
equivalent, for the opinion of others is what cannot be resisted. Creon could object, however, that it is pointless to learn mere opinion (φάτις) and base to yield to it. Haemon therefore has to go further. The best thing is to be born wise; but as that rarely happens, it is noble too to learn from others who speak well. To speak well is the result of either being born wise or learning from still others who speak well. As Haemon can hardly claim that everyone in Thebes was born wise except Creon (cf. Pl. Ap.S. 24d3-35a11), he implies that the people learnt their wisdom from others, who must be either their more than human ancestors or the gods themselves. Haemon defers to his father’s wisdom only to establish the wisdom of his father’s fathers. He thus presents a sophisticated version of Antigone’s appeal to the unwritten laws of the gods (cf. § 27.2). These live in the φάτις of the city, which has inherited the wisdom the gods implanted in human beings long ago. Haemon can therefore replace the divine punishment for the law’s violation, which Antigone saw in her pain, with the people’s punishment, which now threatens to sweep Creon away.

41 (724-7). 41.1. The Chorus now speak the only ridiculous lines in the play. They advise Creon to learn from Haemon and Haemon to learn from Creon, “for it is well said on both sides.” The Chorus show their wisdom to be only a mimicry of wisdom. They suggest that Creon, who argues for the paternal authority of the ruler, can compromise with Haemon, who argues for the divine authority of the city’s voice. Fathers, however, are not ancestors. They begin to become ancestors as soon as they are dead (cf. OT 987). Such a transformation can occur only through burial rites, which declare that the father is not carrion and does not perish (cf. § 40.3). Now Creon talks of fathers as begetters (φονοτες) who pray for obedient children (γονατις), Haemon of the gods begetting (φονοσι) wisdom (φενας). To endow parents with the authority of wisdom, it is first of all necessary to look upon them as nonsexual beings, i.e., as not possible objects of sexual desire. The prohibition against incest embodies this reverence. It thus belongs together with the injunction to bury one’s parents under the prohibition against seeing them naked (cf. § 16.2). Antigone’s burial of her brother points only to this issue; it is the confrontation between father and son that makes it plain.

41.2. Creon asks the Chorus whether “we old men” (οι τηλυκολδε) —perhaps he means the Chorus as well as himself (cf. § 39.4)—are to be taught by a man as young as Haemon is by nature (την φανιν). Creon does not add that “we” too are old men by nature, for nature links age as closely with decay as with wisdom. Something more than natural ageing is needed to turn men into respected fathers. But Creon

92 Cf. Pl. Lgs. 717d7-el.
93 Cf. Thomas Summa contra gentiles III.124.
does not see fathers except as begetters; and fathers cannot become more than begetters unless they pattern themselves after the ancestors, which Creon could do only if he abandoned his position (cf. 1113-4). He conceives of his own interests too narrowly to ally himself for long with the ancestral. Once he has finished with Antigone, he never again argues the case of the fatherland against Polynices.

42 (728-65). 42.1. The exchange between Haemon and Creon falls into three parts, in each of which Creon tries to force Haemon's capitulation, first through argument (728-39), next through abuse (740-9, 756), and last through threats, to which Haemon finally replies in kind (757, 754-5, 750-3, 758-65). The theme of the exchange is reverence and devotion, or, better perhaps, honor and love: what one looks up to and what one cares for (cf. § 12.7). The exchange begins with Haemon's interruption of the Chorus, before they can answer Creon's question. His disrespect toward the Chorus prepares for his refusal to defer to Creon and admit his own youthfulness to be a defect (cf. 719-20). He says that his teaching is not unjust and that Creon should examine, not what time has made him, but what he himself has done. Creon asks whether Haemon's reverence of the unruly is something to be proud of. Haemon probably meant that to warn Creon of the city's mood, which could cost Creon his life, showed his devotion to his father's welfare. Creon prefers, however, to ignore his self-interest and argue his case on its merits. Haemon does not directly answer Creon; rather than deny Antigone's unruliness, he denies that he would even urge the show of reverence toward the bad. The good citizen, he implies, is not necessarily the good man. Creon then asks an ambiguous question. He can mean either that Antigone is bad or that Antigone revered the bad Polynices. If he means the latter, Haemon's answer would be startling: all the people of Thebes now think that Eteocles was in the wrong. If he means the former, Creon drops the issue of Polynices' criminality in

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84 Some rearrangement of the lines seems necessary; and I accept Enger's transposition of 756-7 and Palli's of 750-3. I understand the sequence thus: Creon upbraids Haemon for trying to avoid affirming his total devotion to Antigone (756); Haemon asks whether Creon will just revile him or listen to argument (757); Creon says that the witless Haemon will regret his attempt at instruction (754); Haemon says that Creon must be insane (755, cf. 765); Creon threatens and Haemon issues a counterthreat, which he says cannot be a threat to a man as devoid of understanding as Creon, i.e., one who does not know that Haemon's threat is a last effort to put some sense in Creon (750-3). If the lines are not rearranged, 757 must be read as a statement (cf. J. H. Kells, CR 1961, 191-2); but this still leaves Haemon's threat at the wrong point.

85 So I understand the difficult ṛāgya. Jebb's interpretation of it as "merits" could be supported by Pl. Chrm. 163b1-c4, where Critias says that Hesiod restricted ṛāgya to things nobly and beneficially done; cf. Ilid IX, 319-20; Xen. Mem. 1.2.56-7.

86 Cf. J. D. Denniston, CR 1936, 115-6.
favor of convicting Antigone of disobedience, regardless of whether that disobedience violated the city or his pride. His long silence on Polynices suggests that he has abandoned for good any political justification. But it is Creon, one should not forget, who interprets his question and hence Haemon's answer as being solely concerned with Antigone. Haemon's answer could still imply that Creon's enemies have now won over the whole city. The threat that Haemon's similes disguised in his speech would be all the more menacing if it involved a repudiation of the war that Creon "the general" had won. When the Chorus celebrated the Theban victory, they did not praise Eteocles or blame Polynices (cf. §§ 11.6-7). Precisely what Creon brought about but strove to prevent might now have happened: the politicization of burial (cf. § 13.2). Haemon's answers, in any case, up to his scornful, "You would be a fine ruler of an empty land," are as compatible with the city's approval of Polynices as with its approval of Antigone. Even his threat that Antigone's death will destroy someone could be a further warning of revolution (751). Creon now asks whether the city is to say what he should ordain. Haemon takes it as a foolish question, but Creon explains that to be a ruler means not to carry out the orders of another ruler: "Isn't the city customarily held (νόμιζεται) to belong to the ruler?" Haemon answers that there is no city if it belongs to one man. Creon as ruler must simply execute what the city says. If Haemon does not only mean that Creon must take his bearings by public opinion in order to survive, he implies that Creon must look up to (ευσεβεῖν) public opinion, for the people are never bad. Creon thought that the city was in itself good (cf. § 19.4), but he had not drawn the conclusion that its citizens must be good. He supposes that the city is something other than its people (cf. 666). 97 He turns to the Chorus to remark that Haemon seems to be Antigone's ally, for the Chorus are the proof that Haemon's δύνατος λεῖάς exaggerates the city's unanimity. The Chorus are composed of the rich (843), whom both Antigone and Tiresias address as the rulers of Thebes (940, 988). They are not the δήμοται, who fear, according to Haemon, to tell Creon to his face what they think (690-1). The Chorus intervene on Ismene's behalf, and Creon gratefully accepts their correction (770-1); and when they later hear Tiresias, they do not hesitate to advise Creon, and Creon again obeys (1099). The factionalism of the city, on which Creon relies as he denies it (cf. § 12.3), makes the citizens as such an impossible object of reverence. Haemon tries to dignify public opinion and ruins his case.

42.2. The weakest part of Haemon's defense of Antigone is Antigone; he has not dared up to now to defend her openly on the grounds she herself chose; and his respect for her seems to depend wholly on public opinion. Creon therefore tries to goad him into an admission of his

97 Cf. L. Strauss, Socrates and Aristophanes, 94.
subservience to her. All Haemon’s talk of respect and reverence conceals the real object of his care. Haemon proclaimed on his entrance that he was wholly Creon’s (635); and he now almost says that Creon is his only care. He does not say that he cares for the city. The reverence due its opinions does not entail any devotion to its interests. The way of Megareus is not Haemon’s. When Creon says that his speech is wholly on Antigone’s behalf, Haemon answers that it is also in the interest of Creon, himself, and the nether gods. He does not say “καί σοῦ γε κάμοι καὶ πόλεως τῆς συμπάσης (cf. § 36.2). The gods suddenly replace the city. Justice must be grounded in the gods, not in opinion, however does, his care for Creon from his respect for his father. Haemon’s answer is that Creon is unjust. He at last reveals that he never accepted the correctness of Creon’s speech, one of whose points was that the ruler (father) must be obeyed regardless of his injustice. Creon now wants to know how he can be unjust if he merely cultivates the respect his office is due. Haemon replies that he cannot do so if he tramples on the honors of the gods. It is not true that the ruler democratically executes the people’s wishes; the gods tell him what he should ordain. The ruler, then, does rule under the guidance of others; but they are the gods, not the city. Justice must be grounded in the gods, not in opinion, however unanimous (cf. 369). What Haemon has done his best to avoid has finally happened: he has been forced to adopt Antigone’s position. Creon is triumphant: “Defiled nature (ἡθος)! Lower than a woman!” Creon seems to identify piety with womanishness.98 His greatest abuse of Haemon, at any rate, coincides with Haemon’s appeal to the gods. One wonders whether his harping on Antigone the woman has not been his way of replying to Antigone’s argument about the divine law. Male and female would reflect in his simple understanding the distinction between Olympian and chthonic gods (cf. §§ 37.2, 39.2).

42.3. The coincidence of the city’s opinion with what the nether gods demand as their due raises the question of whether the city and Hades have something in common. A passage in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon points the way to an answer. The herald from the army opens his speech with an invocation of the “paternal ground of the Argive land”; and he goes on to say that out of all his shattered hopes he has obtained but one, “to have a share on my death in the dearest grave” (503-7). The herald, whose special protector is Hermes (514-5), “greatest herald of those above and below” (Ch. 164), never says that he longed to return to his parents, wife, or children; the longing for what is his is not a private longing like Menelaus’ (cf. 414-9), nor does he look forward to any comfort except the future glory of the army (567-81). When the Chorus greet him, he reiterates his joy on his return by saying that he does not now refuse to be dead (539).99 The love for

98 Ibid., 233-4.
99 The exact wording is not recoverable; cf. Fraenkel, ad loc.
his fatherland manifests itself solely in the willingness to die there. That the Chorus interpret him to mean, through their personalizing of his love of country (540-5), that the present circumstances are so intolerable that they too welcome death (550), does not affect his original declaration. The way in which patriotism reaches the same level of intensity as private desires does not consist in the desire to die for one's country but in the desire to be buried there. Haemon, then, might not so much replace the city with the nether gods as unwittingly point to Hades as the core of the city. Even if Thebes still regards Polynices as unjust and has not repudiated Eteocles, as the drift of Haemon's remarks has made us doubt, yet Antigone's love of death, from which all attachment to the family as generated has been drained, suggests that Antigone in herself represents the link between the city and Hades. Antigone had to reconstitute her family in Hades in order to cleanse it of its incestuous character (cf. § 27.5). But the family without eros is the city, for fraternity, which in itself has nothing to do with eros, is the highest degree of attachment that citizens can possibly have to one another.100 The "fraternal" bond that Creon mistakenly saw between his soul's laws and his decree (192), between patriotism and the denial of burial to a brother, should in fact be the bond among citizens, of whom Creon never speaks (cf. § 30.2). Antigone's silence about the war, Polynices' crime, and the mutual fratricide of her brothers thus take on a deeper significance. Her exclusion of every other concern than that her brother lies unburied—the city believes it merits golden honor—combined with the impartiality of her natural love for both her brothers despite their own enmity (523), makes her the representative of the city as the city itself would wish to be. But, as Antigone shows and Creon confirms (cf. § 31.1), that for which the city longs is only possible in Hades, where the fraternal bond in its purity, apart from its source and the nature of the bonded, can be established. Creon's κάτω μνὲν ἐλθοῦσα, εἰ φιλητέον φίλει κεῖνος (524-5) buries the city's hopes along with Antigone (cf. § 46.8).

42.4. Haemon does more than admit that he is also arguing on Antigone's behalf; his threat to Creon proves that his deepest care is for Antigone. If that is what Creon wanted him to say, he indirectly confesses to it; for his threat cannot be understood merely as a final effort to bring Creon to his senses. Although Creon is merely spiteful and cruel in wanting Haemon to see Antigone die, Haemon threatens suicide out of more than spite. He loves his father and thinks that Creon loves him; so for Creon no longer to see his head with his

100 Cf. Pl. Menex. 237b6-3: αὐτόγεφυρος καὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐν πατρῷ, οἰκοῦντας καὶ ἔτοιμας καὶ τρεφομένους οὐχ ὑπὸ μητριώτης ὡς οἱ ἄλλοι, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ μητρὸς τῆς χώρας ἐν ἡ ἤκοιν, καὶ νῦν κέιτο οἰκεῖον τελευτησάντας ἐν οἰκείως τόπους τῆς τεκνοῦσης καὶ θεραπήσῃς καὶ ὕποθελαμένης; 239al: μᾶς μητρὸς πάντες ἄδελφοι φίλητες.
own eyes would pain him (cf. § 1.1). One might therefore suppose that Haemon, in the absence of divine sanctions (cf. § 40.4), and unsure of whether the city will act on its opinion, takes upon himself the duty to punish Creon. But would he have done so if Ismene had buried Polynices? His silence about the innocent Ismene, which the city's silence does not altogether justify, tells against him. And if the nether gods were so much his concern, he could have threatened to duplicate Antigone's holy crime. But the truth is that he can no more live without Antigone than Ismene says she can. Ismene's protestations when set next to Haemon's silence only underline the difference between φιλα and ἐρωτά. Haemon, then, begins as the city's spokesman, becomes the gods', and ends by cherishing Antigone unto death.

43 (766-80). 43.1. The Chorus warn Creon that a mind as young as Haemon's is, in pain, oppressive to its owner. Creon dismisses the warning; the contemplation of suicide, let alone suicide itself, is beyond the human. He forgets Jocasta (cf. § 8.3). To risk death for the sake of monetary gain Creon can understand (221-2); but to die because of pain is unintelligible to him (cf. § 27.2). As Haemon could never bring himself to carry out his threat, any more than Antigone and Ismene could face death unflinchingly (580-1), Creon's resolve to kill both girls is unchanged. The Chorus, however, easily save Ismene (cf. § 34.1), and Creon decides to forgo Antigone's public execution (cf. § 30.2). Haemon seems to have convinced him that the people would not stone Antigone to death; but he suspects that the people would not interfere if he kills her in a remote part of the country, and in such a way that no one's hand has to be raised against her. Just as he frees Ismene because she did not touch Polynices' corpse, so he frees the city from touching Antigone. The whole city will remain innocent if he meticulously prevents the city from being polluted (cf. § 13.2). We do not know whether the formal purity of Antigone's execution would appease the city. Would the city forget its injustice, of which only Haemon on his own has spoken (728, 743), if Creon exactly complies with the demands of piety? The Chorus, at any rate, do not object. Perhaps they understand it as an example of ἀστυνόμου ὀφαλή, which though morally neutral are one of the glories of man's δεινότης (cf. § 22.10).

43.2. Creon presents Antigone's suit of Hades for life as incapable of being fulfilled, for Hades is not a god like other gods who can grant or withhold a favor. If Hades is at work, he cannot produce his opposite. To worship him and what belongs to him is useless labor. It does not pay. The lesson Antigone's punishment will teach her is that her punishment is what she worships. The killing of Antigone is the education of Antigone (cf. § 30.1). But precisely what offends Creon, who holds to the view of the marketplace that all χάρις is reciprocal (cf. § 4.7), reveals Antigone as the perfect worshipper. Her reverence must be disinterested,
for she worships the one god who cannot reward her. It is this very purity that, according to Creon, will prove to be too heavy a burden for her (cf. § 29.2). And if she herself believes that her piety will be rewarded, that only confirms for Creon her madness and the ease with which she can be broken.

44 (781-801). 44.1. The Chorus of old men sing of Eros. For the first time in lyrics they use the second person pronoun. In the parodos they addressed the eye of the golden day (103) and in the second stasimon Zeus (609), but in neither case did they go beyond the vocative and a verb in the second person. In the parodos, however, they exhorted themselves and the rest of Thebes to visit all the temples of the gods with night-long dances (150-4); in the first stasimon they wished that the culprit not be of their own hearth (372); and in the second they spoke of the unceasing sorrows they had seen befall the Labdacids (594). But the song to Eros is, despite the repeated “you,” almost entirely impersonal. Were it not for the deictic τόδε (793), it could be read as an independent poem. It is somehow akin to the first stasimon, which sang of man’s δεινότης and in which man was a neuter “this” (cf. § 22.6). The old men remind one of the elders of Troy who, on seeing Helen, “like unto the terrible beauty of the goddesses,” do not begrudge the war, though they at once throw off her spell (I’ 156-60). The Chorus, however, do not sing of Eros while looking at Antigone; and when they do catch sight of her, they are silent about her beauty and speak of their own tears (cf. §§ 32.1, 45.1). In the song itself Eros is the cause of madness, injustice, and strife, but not of tenderness, harmony, or self-sacrifice. The Chorus do not think of Antigone as acting through Eros.

44.2. The song is composed of eleven statements about love, the central one of which says that he whom Eros possesses is mad. Around this center the two sets of five statements each are balanced. The pendant to Ἐρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν is that not even the just can resist him; to Eros’ swooping attack on what is one’s own (κτήματι, cf. 684, 702, 1050; fr. 210, 36P) is the pointing to the turbulent strife of kindred blood (ξόναμον) that he has caused; to Eros’ keeping watch on soft cheeks of a girl is the manifest evocation of triumphant desire in the eyes of a marriageable girl; to Eros’ restless motion over sea and land is desire’s office as the assessor of the great ordinances; and to the impossibility of either any immortal or human being escaping Eros is the goddess Aphrodite, who effortlessly wins every battle.

101 Cf. E. Norden, Agnostos Theos, 158.
102 For this very broad sense of κτήματι see pseudo-Arist. Oec. 1345a26-30; Pl. Grg. 461c5-6. This economic understanding of what is one’s own is indicative of how close the Chorus are to Creon; cf. §§ 29.3, 53.2. Note also that Sophocles uses κτήσιος as almost the equivalent of οἰκείος (Tr. 690).
It is not easy to say, as this summary reveals, how the Chorus understand Eros. The only other occurrence of eros is in the second stasimon, where the Chorus speak of hope and the "deceit of light-witted desires" (cf. § 27.4). The question to what degree the Chorus' animation of Eros reflects their belief in his divinity reminds one of the parodos, where the Chorus characterized eleven different beings in eleven different ways (cf. § 11.4). There too the center was occupied by madness, the Bacchic frenzy of Capaneus. But here, unlike the parodos, nothing as literally human as the miserable Polynices and Eteocles is found; nor do Eros and Aphrodite appear, like Dionysus and Zeus, as a god to whom one can pray or offer tribute. Eros far more resembles Hades, who when he is at work does what he is (cf. § 43.2). The Chorus seem to treat as equivalent Eros, desire (ιμυρος), and Aphrodite; but one cannot take even ιμυρος literally, for apart from its "poeticization" it is set in apposition to των μεγάλων πάνερος ἐν αρχαις θεαμῶν, which animates it at least as much as the "clatter of Ares" was galvanized into life in being juxtaposed to ἀντισάλον δυσχείρωμα δράκωντος (126-7). Perhaps one could say that the night-watch of Eros on the cheeks of a girl does not divinize him more than "piney Hephaestus" (123) divinizes fire; and that the fusion of Polynices and eagle (112-21) is as little literal as the swooping attack of Eros on one's own. But Aphrodite is a goddess, and her playfulness no more detracts from her divinity than Dionysus' leading of the dance, for which the Chorus once wished (153-4), detracts from his. The ubiquity of Eros, moreover, to whom wilderness or dividing sea is an obstacle, and his power, which overcomes the gods as easily as men who live for a day, seem to make him the highest god. His ubiquity resembles man's own δεινότης, which set aside the apparent limits imposed on him by sea and Earth, the highest of the gods (cf. § 22.7). Eros seems to supply the missing cause of man's δεινότης (cf. § 22.1; Eur. Med. 844-5). The Chorus, then, seem to replace Earth with Eros or Aphrodite, and now assert that, while Eros is the cause of human transgression, Eros limits Zeus, whose splendor and immutability apparently checked human transgression (cf. § 37.4). Does Eros lead astray the Zeus who justly punished Capaneus? The Chorus imply that there is no Eros for justice. They seem at first to understand the core of Eros as sexual, manifest in young girls, but they also say that desire holds sway over the great ordinances. If the text is sound,103 they suggest that the great ordinances too are a part of Eros' domain. The love of country, the love of parents for children, and that of children for parents will belong to Eros. His power shows itself in his being both the love of one's own and the love that destroys one's own. It is desire's indifference to the goodness of either that makes the Chorus speak of Aphrodite's

103 If my interpretation of πάνερος is correct, the issue would turn on the possibility of a proceleusmatic here; see Müller, 174-6.
playfulness. Antigone, however, has shown that the love of one's own, when carried to its extreme, entails the love of death; and the extreme of the love that destroys one's own is equally the love of death, for one's own in the strict sense is oneself, which even Antigone (however unwittingly) admitted (cf. § 2.2). The latter consequence would not follow if Creon was wrong and Hades could grant Antigone life: but Antigone is silent about the afterlife. Her soul has long been dead. Antigone would thus seem to embody Eros, the love of one's own that destroys one's own, and the Chorus' song to Eros an ode to death. But the Chorus understand Eros as primarily sexual, and Antigone's denial of sexual generation, which the Olympian gods share with men, sets her above Eros. Antigone seems to overstep the one limit that limits the gods. The question, then, which Eros' possible divinity poses, is this: does Antigone offend against someone or something divine that lends to the gods some of their splendor? Is her justice stricter than the gods', and her suicide a divine punishment?

45 (801-5). 45.1. When the Chorus beheld Antigone after they had sung of man's daring artfulness, they looked upon her as a monster, so different was she from the culprit they had envisioned (cf. § 23.1); and now after they have impersonally sung of Eros, they confess on seeing Antigone again that they too are carried outside the limits (θεσμόλ) and cannot restrain their tears. The limits that the Chorus transgress would seem at first to be the great ordinances over which Eros presides; but the Chorus do not acknowledge compassion to be an effect of love; and in so far as it is implicit in the great ordinances that command the love of one's own, they cannot be carried outside of them and yet be under their sway. They do not weep because they love Antigone and suddenly recognize her as one of their own (cf. § 11.1). They weep against their will, for her cause is unjust (853-5). Their tears are solely caused by her approaching death. They are unloving and impersonal tears (cf. 527) that well up from a source almost beyond the consciousness of the Chorus. Theirs are not the tears of pity. The Chorus never speak of pity; indeed, Antigone is the only extant play of Sophocles' in which no word for pity occurs, though no other play has less than six instances (Ajax) of ὀλκτος, ὀθηκῳς, ἐλευνός, and their several cognates.104 There is, however, one exception: a messenger later says that Polynices' dog-mangled body still lay unpitied (1197). The Chorus' tears, then, arise from the same

104 This tells against LA's reading ὀλκτον at 858. Antigone differs in two other related ways from the rest of Sophocles' extant plays: πρὸς θεῶν as a form of supplication or invocation occurs only once (838), whereas other plays (except Trachiniae with two) have no less than five (OC); and all the rest have persons other than the Chorus call on Zeus in the vocative; here only the Chorus do so once (604). Antigone's πρὸς θεῶν, moreover, is the only case in Sophocles where the phrase occurs in a request that the speaker does not wish to be true.
source as that which prompted Antigone to imply that her hopeless misery consists in man's mortality (cf. § 27.3). It is this θεσμός that the Chorus of old men on seeing Antigone find themselves carried beyond; and whatever pity they feel is mostly for themselves.  

45.2. The Chorus say that Antigone approaches the bridal chamber (θάλαμον) where all sleep. The forcible joining of Eros and Hades is strange, for the Chorus, though pitiless, do not so much scorn Antigone as to take the view of Creon that she should marry in Hades (654). Everyone dies in that bridal chamber. If love is primarily sexual and its end generation, the Chorus point to the acknowledgment in love itself of death. One unwittingly accepts one's own death in the generation of another self. The survival of one's own is the death of oneself. In granting a kind of immortality, Eros compels each man to see himself as living for a day (cf. 789-90). It is the sight of Antigone that brings out a truth about Eros that the Chorus had ignored in singing of Eros. But Antigone herself is antigeneration; she has so far acknowledged the death but not the life in Eros. Her painful recognition of it is the burden of the kommos.

46 (806-82). 46.1. The kommos consist of nine parts, of which five are sung by Antigone and four by the Chorus. The Chorus' parts are paired: the first pair concerns Antigone's glory, which is offered as a consolation for her mortality (817-22, 834-8); the second pair concerns her crime, which is linked with her inheritance (cf. § 37.1). Antigone's parts, on the other hand, fall metrically into three, two stanzas and an epode; but thematically they can be sorted differently. In the two strophes Antigone appeals to the Chorus, first, as fellow-citizens of a common fatherland, to see her imminent death and then, as the rich men of the city, to wait until her death before they mock her. In the two antistrophes she voices her reflections, first on what she has heard of Niobe, then on the incest of her parents. Each stanza, however, also hangs together: the first is Antigone's desperate attempt to normalize what she is and assimilate herself to things known, while in the second she accepts what she is and delineates her uniqueness. She thus begins with an address to her fellow citizens but ends with an address to her brother, who can as easily be Oedipus as Polynices. Only in the second antistrophe does she use ἐγώ (866, 868).

46.2. Antigone now speaks of marriage for the first time. She wants the Chorus to see her as one of their own, whose death will come before her wedding song. She therefore presents Hades, not Creon or the city, as her executioner (cf. 575, 847), and throughout the kommos remains

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105 Cf. IG Π972 (=48 Peek): 'Ἀντιλόχος ποιεῖ σῆμ' ἀγαθόν καὶ σώροιν ἰδόντως [δάνῳ] ἱκανοῖς, ἕπει καὶ σὲ μένει βασιλεὺς.
silent on her deed. Antigone is no longer certain, and her uncertainty is soon confirmed, that the Chorus, were they not afraid of Creon, would approve of her deed (504-9). But she cannot throw off her strangeness or do more than mouth the role of a girl deprived of her marriage. Not only does she fail to mention Haemon but she never speaks of the husband and (in the kommos) of the children she will never have (cf. El. 165, 187-8). The most she can bring herself to do in elicitng pity is to speak of marriage by itself and particularly of its ceremonies. She knows its rites but not its substance. She cannot bring to her loss of marriage the vividness she brought to Polynices’ lack of burial (cf. § 4.6). She understands marriage in the way that others understand burial, something one goes through for form’s sake (cf. § 22.10).

46.3. The Chorus disregard Antigone’s self-normalization and insist on her uniqueness. They seem to speak as if her fame is due, not to what she did, but solely to the manner of her death, as if, that is, no mortal but Antigone had ever killed himself. They too, like Creon, forget Jocasta (cf. § 43.1). The Chorus, moreover, do not speak exactly. Antigone will not descend to Hades alive; she is no Orpheus or Heracles. Creon intends to hide her in a man-made underground chamber where she will starve to death (774-5). The Chorus thus seem to confuse a hidden chamber with τόδ᾽...κείθος νεκδων, for the task of consoling Antigone so poorly suits them that they can only exaggerate her uniqueness to the point of nonsense. No “demythologization” of their language can rid it of its nonsense. They do not mean that Antigone will die alive: such a paradox does not fit the Chorus’ understanding of Antigone. It would not be surprising, however, if Antigone did hear their words as genuine praise. When they say that she is independent of any law but her own (αὐτόνομος), Antigone doubtless takes them to mean that she uniquely holds to or even embodies the divine law itself; and when they add that she alone of mortals will descend to Hades alive, she must think that she has at last found someone who understands her. The uniqueness of her living descent into Hades lies in nothing else but in her living of the law of burial (cf. § 34.3). It is this misunderstanding of the Chorus’ words that impels Antigone to explain herself through her likeness to Niobe.

46.4. Antigone seems to forget that she does not resemble Niobe in three ways: the reason for Niobe’s punishment (her boasting), the occasion of her boasting (her children), and the agents of her punishment (the gods). Antigone tries to make up for the last dissimilarity by saying that a daimon lays her to rest; but how can she ignore the vanity of Niobe the mother? In order to normalize herself, she is driven to liken herself to a mother, just as the guard could account for her actions only in terms of a mother bird (cf. § 25.3). But Antigone picks a comparison that is itself strange and needs a likeness—the only one Antigone ever
uses—to make it familiar. The gods rewarded Niobe in death; they recognized in her boasting that challenged the gods the extreme case of the love of one’s own; and to compensate for the loss of her own, they transformed her into a living growth of rock eternally weeping for the loss of her own. Nothing remains of Niobe but the signs of sorrow, the rain and snow that never leave her as she melts away. She is one with her grief. Antigone too is one with her grief, but her grief does not show itself in her own tears (cf. § 32.1) but in the eternally living law of burial (456-7). Nothing remains of Antigone but the law (αὐτόνομος). Her life is the law. She thus surpasses Niobe, for Niobe’s love of her own led to the death of her own, while Antigone’s love of her own is based on the death of her own. She is piously in accord with the divine. She is not a boaster. The love of her own never made her vain. In recalling Niobe’s fate, she does not think of her own future recompense, whether it be from the gods or from men. She does not even want very much the Chorus’ pity. There is, in a sense, nothing pitiable in the “most mournful perishing” of Niobe. Antigone, rather, wants the Chorus to see in her life the same kind of all-consuming devotion that the report of men attributes to Niobe. The truth about Eros is shown as much in her law-abiding self-sacrifice as in madness, injustice, and strife (cf. § 44.1). The Chorus, however, mistake her meaning and thus, instead of consoling, mock Antigone.107

46.5. The Chorus remind Antigone that Niobe was a god and born of gods, while she, like themselves, is mortal and born of mortals. They suppose that Antigone was boasting that she would divinely obtain in her death the fate of Niobe. Contrary to the literal meaning of their words, which they think Antigone has misinterpreted, Antigone will not descend to Hades alive. They do not understand that it is her life in death that most resembles Niobe’s tears. They therefore can only console her for her death but not praise her for her life: “It is a great thing when you have perished to have it said [τάχοιςαι Wecklein] of you that in your life and then in your death you did share in the lot of the godlike.”108 If the Chorus had said that it is a great thing to be like Niobe, there would have been no ridicule in their words, for they then would have agreed with Antigone that in the love of her own she rivals Niobe. But the two additions of φθιμένη

106 Antigone seems to speak in trimeters much less poetically than the others. She says nothing as contrived as Ismene’s καλχαίνουσθ (20) or as metaphoric as Ismene’s ξιμπλέων (541); Creon’s language is also not as plain (cf. 163, 190, 291-2, 474-8, 531-2, 1033, 1037-9), nor is Haemon’s (690, 700, 712-7). Antigone never indulges in so artificial an opposition as Ismene’s μη διεξαχθῇ διπλή χειρί (14, cf. 13, 55) or Creon’s ποδε διπλής μοίρας μίαν καθ’ ἡμέραν (170-1).

107 Cf. Müller, 186-7.

108 I understand ζώσαν καὶ ἑπιστα θαναόσαν as a corrective of ζώσα..."Λήθη καταβήσῃ but as still referring only to the manner of Antigone’s death.
and τὰξοῦσαι humble Antigone. After the Chorus’ insistence on the
gulf that separates her from Niobe, ἄνωνσαι implies that she will resemble
Niobe in fame (ὁς φάτες ἀνθρώπων) but not in principle—the superficial
similarity of her death to Niobe’s will alone be remembered, and φθιμένη
denies at a stroke all her greatness—what she did can be of importance
only to herself.

46.6. Antigone now turns away from the Chorus. Their incompre-
hension makes her swear—the first and only time—by her father’s(s’)
gods. Those whom she took to belong to her fatherland have proved
to be merely the representatives of the present regime (cf. § 12.5). She
therefore must go beyond them and call on the unchanging elements of
her country to bear her witness: the springs of Dirce and the sacred ground
(ἄλσος) of Thebes. The sacred and the ancestral, which first come to
sight as places and things, replace the old men of the Chorus, whose
wealth Antigone mentions in order perhaps to remind them of the
reason why the city, as it now stands, satisfies them. They would never
do anything that could possibly lead to the confiscation of their estates.
Their replacement reminds one of the shift Creon was forced to make in
defining Polynices’ crime (cf. § 19.2). Creon had first presented Polynices’
crime as his desire to destroy his fatherland and native gods, commit
fratricide, and enslave the Thebans (199-202); but later the Chorus’ dread
that the gods might have buried Polynices compelled Creon to restate
his crime: Polynices had come to destroy the temples, dedications, land,
and laws of the gods (285-7). Creon thus transformed Polynices’ crime
into sacrilege at the price of suppressing his crime against living beings.
The sacredness of divine things replaced the life of Polynices’ own gods,
brother, and people. So Antigone, in despairing of the Chorus, tries
to find support for herself in the hoped-for indignation of sacred places.
But Antigone invests Dirce and Thebes with a kind of life. They can
make up for the absence of friends to weep for her and thus imitate
the living growth of rock that is Niobe. And yet (ὁμέτας) Antigone
knows that the eternally weeping Niobe is just a story she has heard;
the primary truth is what the Chorus see: Antigone is now seeing the
sun for the last time. To live is to see the sun (cf. § 3.4); it is not to
be a rain-drenched brow and neck of rock, let alone a spring and piece
of land, however sacred. Antigone begins to admit that the loss of
life weighs heavily upon her, for she will not say that there is life in
Hades (cf. § 9.6). She thus prepares the way for her qualified defense
of her deed (cf. § 48).

46.7. The Chorus reject Antigone’s denial of the justice of the
laws under which she will suffer; but they try to soften their assertion
of her injustice. They address her affectionately for the first time
(ὁ τέκνον, cf. 987), and they adopt the same (and similar) measures
as those that Antigone had just employed. They are the first to accuse
Antigone to her face of injustice, for she has just spurned them and
invoked sacred places to witness her so-called lawful (οἶοις νόμοις) punishment. The Chorus resent the double implication: they are Theban patriots, not Creon’s partisans; and her punishment, being strictly according to the law, is just (cf. § 43.1). And not to be outdone by Antigone’s appeal to the sacred, the Chorus endow Creon’s decree with all the majesty of a god. Antigone has struck against the lofty foundation of Justice. They too must animate the inanimate; but whether they are as aware as is the desperate Antigone that indignation alone does not fully make for life remains doubtful. The juxtaposition, in any case, of ὑπηλόν with βάθρον reminds one of the first stasimon, where Earth was described as the highest of the gods (cf. § 22.7). The Chorus there were compelled, in the absence of any other god than Hades acting as a limit to human daring, to assign to Earth the prerogatives of the Olympian gods. Here Justice is that limit; and she seems to reach as high as the Olympian gods and as low as the nether gods, among whom, according to Antigone, Justice dwells (451). The Chorus themselves indicate how this could be, for they suggest that Antigone is paying for the ordeal of her father. She is paying for the dead as well as for herself. But her own rashness is not unconnected with her paternal inheritance. The Chorus had discerned in her savagery the savagery of Oedipus (cf. § 28.1). Her father’s nature has thus made her pay for her father’s crime.

46.8. That the same words or sounds in the second antistrophe occupy the metrical position they had in the strophe (ἐπίφαντον—πρόσπαντος, ἰδὶ Διώκαιαν—ἰδὶ ματρώαι, οἰα—οἰων, πρὸς—πρὸς, ἰδὶ δόκτανος—ἰδὶ δυσφότομον) serves only to bring out the differences between them. The strophe began with Antigone’s outcry at the Chorus’ mockery and humiliation of herself; the antistrophe begins with her confession that the Chorus have now touched on her most painful care (cf. § 34.3). The strophe turned away from Antigone’s fellow-citizens (the Chorus) to the sacred places of her country; the antistrophe dwells on the unholy marriage of her mother and father. The strophe appealed to the sacred places to witness the suffering the laws have dealt her; the antistrophe presents her misery as the very nature she received from her incestuous parents (cf. § 6.1). The strophe spoke of her going, unwept by friends, to a strange kind of tomb; the antistrophe speaks of her going, unmarried, to dwell with her parents. The strophe ended with her dwelling with neither the living nor the dead; the antistrophe ends with an address to her brother, through whose ill-fated marriage she is slain. Antigone thus accepts the Chorus’ second charge that she is paying for her father’s ordeal, while denying their first charge, which they had somehow connected with the second, that she suffers justly. One is due to her nature by birth, the other is due to unjust

109 Müller rightly reads προσέπαιας and rejects Lesky’s defense of προσέπειας.
laws. The unholiness of her origins does not stand in the way of her invoking the sacred; rather, it promotes such an invocation, for the sacredness of Thebes partly rests on the incestuous relation among her earth-born people. The bond forbidden within the family is the indispensable bond for the city—it is what guarantees that its citizens be brothers (cf. § 42.3). But Antigone cannot imagine herself as anything but accursed when she thinks of her parents (cf. § 27.5). Her unmarried state means that she does not belong to any other family than her own; and that which she has longed for, to lie with her own (cf. § 9.6), entails that she confront in her parents that which accounts for her love of her own. As their incest is the love of one's own writ large, Antigone cannot maintain her piety unless she condones their impiety (cf. OC 1698). This tension within Antigone parallels the tension within the city between the neutrality and the impiety of art (cf. §§ 22.12-3). Out of art's impiety its moral neutrality arises; out of her parents' impiety arises Antigone's neutralization of her family. Both impieties and neutralizations converge in the fourfold makeup of the city. The city rests on art's violation of Earth as it aspires to the incest of Oedipus; and the city rests on the neutrality of art as it aspires to the antigeneration of Antigone (cf. § 34.2). But what constitutes the holiness of the city in one respect (Oedipus) condemns it to unholiness in the other (art); and what constitutes the fraternity of the city in one respect (Antigone) condemns it to disunity in the other (art). It is not accidental therefore that Oedipus should "solve" the riddle of man and violate the sacred, any more than that the artful man should be a neuter "this" and turn out to be Antigone (cf. § 22.6).

46.9. Antigone herself perhaps could not tell us whether her exclamation at her brother's ill-fated marriage refers to Oedipus' or Polynices'. No matter for whose we opt, Antigone despairs of finding any rest in Hades. If she means Polynices' marriage, Antigone somehow connects it with the marriage of her parents and her own unmarried state. Polynices settled in another city in order to destroy his own city. He overcame his incestuous origin only to commit fratricide. He thus compelled Antigone to give up any hope she might have had of re-normalizing her family through marriage. Polynices has made her die accursed in her own eyes. If, on the other hand, Antigone means Oedipus' marriage, she recognizes in her father another brother, whose incest, while being the source of her suicidal devotion to Polynices, makes it impossible for her to embrace her death without shame. In these circumstances life becomes very precious to her.

46.10. The Chorus in answering Antigone seem to rephrase, re-arrange, and reinterpret the elements of their original accusation. Antigone's extreme rashness becomes her self-willed temper; the high foundation of Justice becomes Creon's authority; and Antigone's paying for her father's ordeal (των ἄδηλων) becomes a certain kind of piety.
The Chorus had causally connected Antigone's rashness with her offense against justice, but they had not explained how that involved her paternal inheritance; and now they causally link her qualified piety with her offense against authority, but they do not explain how that involves her temper; indeed, just as σὲ δ' αὐτόγνωτος ὁλεθ' ὑγιά suggests that her willfulness alone, regardless of any lack in her piety, sufficed to destroy her, so ματρῷον δ' ἑκτίνεις τῷ ἄθλον suggested that her own injustice had little or nothing to do with her punishment. Oedipus is the source of both Antigone's temper and Antigone's piety. Her inborn temper made her offend against divine justice; her reverence for the divine made her offend against authority. The second offense, however, looks less serious than the first. Authority is not divine; whoever has it in his care cannot allow it to be transgressed. Antigone would thus seem to have offended merely against Creon's own self-willed temper. But the Chorus do not admit that Antigone's piety is pious; she has not fully practiced reverence for the divine. Some divinity therefore must cling to authority as such: κράτος must be an indispensable ingredient of Δίκη. A goddess cleanses Creon's authority of its willfulness. He is the selfless caretaker of a divine principle. Intransigent piety, on the other hand, is self-contradictory. Since piety does not demand self-sacrifice in the defense of piety, piety by itself could not so incandesce Antigone as to consume her self. Piety cannot be a goddess, for the gods stand apart from whatever beings or relations they establish as holy. The gods themselves are not holy. They cannot be loved. Antigone's devotion to her brother, therefore, cannot be grounded solely in her devotion to the gods. The incivility of her temper has no warrant from the gods. The love of her own contaminates her piety (cf. § 52.3).

46.11. Antigone repeats in the epode several elements of her former songs: ἀκλαύτος ἀφίλος picks up φίλον ἀκλαύτος of the second strophe; ἀνυμέναιος compresses into one the conjunction οὔθ' ὁμελαίων...οὔτ... ἄμησεν of the first strophe; ταλαίφρων already occurred in the second antistrophe; ἄγομαι τὰν ἐτοίμαν ὁδόν rephrases two expressions of the first strophe, even as οὔκέτι μοι...ὁρᾶν seems to do; τὸν ἐμὸν πότμον recalls ἄμετέρων πότμον of the second antistrophe, and ἀδάσχοντον...στενάζει the first two words of the epode. But Antigone does not exactly repeat herself. She has said that she now sees the light of the sun for the

110 Neither ἰερὸς nor ὅσος is applied to the gods, and ἁγνὸς only in the restricted sense of "pure."

111 In Plato's Euthyphro, neither Euthyphro nor Socrates ever suggests that the holy, which the gods love, is the gods themselves. This is partly due to polytheism.

112 Antigone calls herself τάλανα only here: Ajax (838), Oedipus (OT 1363), and Deianeira (705) also use τάλας of themselves only once. Antigone has seven instances of τάλας, of which three are in the mouth of Creon (1211, 1295, 1298); OT has four; no other play has less than eleven (Ajax); see note 75.
last time; but she here presents that fact in a peculiar way: "I am no longer sanctioned to see the sacred eye of the torch" (λαμπτάς). Antigone seems to speak of sacred law (θέμυς) "for form's sake" (cf. § 22.10), for she surely does not mean that Creon's decree, which condemns her to death, is a sacred law that prohibits her from seeing the sun. The decay of οὖντι μοι θέμυς into an empty phrase, no stronger than οὖντι μοι ἔξεστι, not only in itself seems strange on the lips of Antigone, who has resisted this kind of decay in the case of burial, but its conjunction with the sacred forces one to restore to it (or at least think of) its original meaning. Or is "this sacred eye of the torch" also an empty phrase? That Antigone should animate the sun to indicate her recognition of what the loss of life primarily means is not surprising; but that she should sanctify the sun while calling it an artifact is surprising. Antigone seems to deanimate the sun while animating it, and to sanctify the sun while robbing θέμυς of its holiness. If, however, her own accursedness in light of her most painful care still grips Antigone, she might mean that the holy eye of the sun abhors her presence. She might regard herself as defiled as her father, whom Creon once begged to hide his taint in shame from the earth, the sacred rain, and the all-feeding light of Lord Helios (OT 1425-8). Antigone, then, might not call her fate tearless to express her isolation—could she forget Haemon as well as Ismene?—but to deny the possibility that any friend could weep in the face of the horror she and her family must inspire. But why does she call the sun a torch? According to Prometheus, the blind hopes he gave to man deprived man of his ever seeing death except within the horizon of fire and the arts (cf. § 23.1). But Antigone is pre-Promethean, without hope and without art. As the death she always longed for presses upon her, Antigone speaks of the sun as an artificial fire, from whose holiness she is excommunicated (cf. § 52.4). The artless and hopeless Antigone has no right to look upon the divine source of art and hope. Her piety is the obstacle to perfect piety (cf. § 25.4).114

113 I know of no similar expression in classical poetry, for elsewhere there always seems to be a defining genitive, such as ἡλιον or the like (cf. 104, Eur. IT 194, IA 1506, Ar. Αχ. 1184-5 (=Trag. adesp. 45 N). For the night lamp endowed with sight see fr. 789P; L. Strauss, Aristophanes and Socrates, 263.

114 This interpretation restores to θέμυς its full meaning as sacred family right; cf. E. Benveniste, Le vocabulaire des institutions i-e, vol. 2, 99-105.
Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was one of the foremost political philosophers of modernity, and quite possibly the first major thinker to elaborate and make more accessible the principles of the revolution in political philosophy that had been initiated by Machiavelli. The peculiar rhetoric of his magnum opus, the Essays, has, however, prevented most scholars from recognizing the truth of this claim. The influence of the Essays on the educational thought of Locke and Rousseau is well documented. The works of Rousseau and Descartes are filled with allusions to the Essays. Montaigne has been called "the common master of Locke and of Rousseau," and was said by a nineteenth-century scholar to have aimed "before the great Bacon, to reform human understanding" and to have been, along with Bacon and Descartes, "the restorer or the founder of philosophy in Europe." Yet while Locke and Rousseau, if not Bacon and Descartes, are widely recognized as ranking among the greatest political philosophers, studies of the relation of their political thought to Montaigne's are lacking, and a search of contemporary histories of political philosophy will reveal an almost complete absence of references to Montaigne. The study of the Essays in the twentieth century has been relegated almost entirely to literary scholars, whose own analyses, when they are not entirely apolitical, fail to take adequate account of the complexities and ramifications of the fundamental political issues with which the book deals.

This neglect of the Essays as a political book is most unfortunate.

3 Cf. the references in Etienne Gilson's edition of Descartes' Discours de la méthode (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1930) and under the heading "Rousseau's debt to Montaigne" in the index to Donald Frame's Montaigne in France, 1812-52 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).
6 Among such histories written in English, the only significant mention of Montaigne I have found is a two-page discussion in J. P. Mayer, Political Thought: The European Tradition (New York: Viking, 1939), pp. 116-17.
There is much that the student of political philosophy can learn from Montaigne—not only about the possible historical roots of later thinkers’ teachings, but, more important, about the nature of political life, the principles of modern liberalism, and the institutions that derive from those principles. Of especial relevance to contemporary political science is an understanding of the relation between Montaigne’s “skepticism” and his substantive political teaching, for the following reason. Contemporary political science is dominated by relativistic or positivistic epistemological theories which deny that any “values” can be known by reason to be objectively correct. Thus, the “natural right” teaching on which the United States was founded is now widely regarded as a “myth” or “ideology.” Montaigne’s critique of the powers of human reason is, it can be shown, at least as far-reaching as any that has been undertaken by contemporary relativists. Yet the awareness of the limits of reason and of the relativity of much of what men believe about the good and the just did not prevent Montaigne from coming to a thoroughly reasoned set of conclusions about the nature of the best political order. Thus it is incumbent on those who are dissatisfied with the political consequences toward which contemporary relativism points—the triumph of irrationalism—to reconsider Montaigne’s position seriously. It remains possible that we may find in the Essays an understanding that takes account of the apparent truths that are perceived by contemporary relativism, and yet which does not lead to the conclusion that reason is irrelevant to the fundamental questions of how men should live and how they should arrange their political institutions.

The present essay is meant as a preliminary step towards the endeavor that I have just described. I aim to assist the reader in considering the Essays as a work of political philosophy by clarifying the nature of Montaigne’s rhetoric and by suggesting the presence in the book of a political intention that the author both conveys and conceals through that rhetoric. It is my hope to elaborate in future publications the nature of Montaigne’s substantive political teaching and the reasoning upon which it is grounded.

I. Montaigne’s Irony

It would seem reasonable, in seeking to grasp the intention underlying the Essays, to begin by considering the author’s foreword, entitled “To the Reader.” But the reader hoping to find a political teaching in the book will find no evident ground for such hope in this foreword. In the first sentence Montaigne avows that “[t]his book was written in good faith.” He proceeds to disclaim not only the intention of presenting

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7 I have attempted to sketch the outlines of this political teaching in ch. 4 of my doctoral dissertation, “Liberty, Skepticism, and Political Change: The Political Philosophy of Montaigne” (University of Chicago, 1971).
a political philosophy, but also the plan of presenting anything that could reasonably be of interest to the public. Montaigne presents us with the strange specter of an author who tries at the outset to discourage people from reading his book! He claims to have set himself only a "domestic and private goal," aiming to provide his "relatives and friends" with a record through which, after his death, "they may recover . . . some features of my habits and temperament, and by this means keep the knowledge they have had of me more complete and alive." Disclaiming any thought either of serving the reader or of advancing his own glory, to which his "powers are inadequate," Montaigne proposes to make himself the "matter" of the book, presenting himself in his "simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice." There is no reason, he advises the reader, "to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject." 8

To judge from the popularity of the Essays ever since it was first published, not many readers who once opened the book accepted Montaigne's preliminary advice. Those readers who paused to think about such matters apparently did not take the author's foreword at full face value as a statement of his intention. In other words, they were led to doubt Montaigne's asserted "good faith" from the outset.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, we may note that the foreword alone provides good ground for such distrust. If Montaigne truly wished only to leave a record for a few friends and relatives, it would not seem necessary for him to have had it published and sold to the public. Moreover, if the author were at all concerned that his friends and relatives keep his memory alive, as he states, then one must doubt the sincerity of his disclaiming any concern for glory (small as such glory might be). If this disclaimer is suspect, must we not also question Montaigne's asserted "good faith" in denying that his book is meant to serve others as well? Any author who is not exclusively concerned with his own profit and reputation must think, in publishing a book, that it will be of some benefit to at least a few readers. In any event, he would increase neither his earnings nor his fame by discouraging potential readers at the outset.

Thus we are driven, as many other readers have been, to suspect that Montaigne's preface is in some sense "ironic." This inference may be supported by citing a couple of the numerous passages in the Essays in which the author attests to the utility and importance of his

8 Michel de Montaigne, Essais, in Montaigne, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Bruges: Gallimard, 1962), p. 9. All references to Montaigne's writings will be to this edition. However, I have usually followed the generally excellent translation of Donald Frame, in his edition of The Complete Works of Montaigne (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), deviating from Frame's reading on occasion only for the sake of greater literalness.
work. By imparting what he has learned from studying himself, Montaigne claims to contribute to a knowledge which is "incomparably" more "useful" than other sciences. Few other writers, he asserts, offer more substance. As for the goal of being remembered by his friends after his death, which he had professed in the foreword, Montaigne later dismisses it as of no real benefit to himself.

Contrary to the implication of his prefatory remarks, Montaigne thus seems to intend the Essays to be of value to readers other than his "relatives and friends." But even if this be the case, it would be wrong to dismiss the foreword as merely a humorous expression of mock-modesty. "To the Reader" rather encapsulates the fundamental rhetorical problem of the Essays. In these brief remarks, Montaigne compels the thinking reader to choose between two alternatives: either the book is not simply one of "good faith," in that Montaigne dissimulates from the outset, or else—if Montaigne is wholly honest—the book can have no serious value. The reader who fails to take the foreword as seriously as it deserves will be unable to appreciate the seriousness of the Essays as a whole. Let us, then, bear Montaigne's foreword in mind as we examine the text of the Essays itself, trying to understand why Montaigne wrote the particular kind of book he did, whom it is intended to benefit, and what the nature of that benefit may be. This investigation should ultimately assist us, in turn, to gain a better understanding of the foreword.

Surveyed as a whole, the Essays presents a strange picture. Its 107 chapters, divided into three books, treat a seemingly infinite variety of subjects in no apparent order. Three successive chapter titles (I, 55-57), for instance, refer respectively to "smells," "prayers," and "age." Montaigne admits, moreover, that "the titles of my chapters do not always embrace their matter, often they denote it only by some sign." It is frequently difficult indeed to discover the relation between the title of the chapter and its contents. Even when such a relation seems evident, the argument of practically every chapter seems to jump abruptly from one topic to another. To further confuse matters, Montaigne made voluminous additions to and alterations in the original text of the Essays, which was first published in 1580. The bulk of these modifications fall into two groups: those included in the fourth edition (in which Book III appeared for the first time), in 1588, and those made by Montaigne between 1588 and the time of his death in 1592, which were incorporated in posthumous editions of the Essays. These alterations raise the

9 II, 6, 358.
10 II, 40, 245.
11 II, 16, 610.
12 III, 9, 973.
13 A much smaller and less significant group of additions was inserted in the edition of 1582.
problem of whether the "early" and the "late" Montaigne are consistent; moreover, the new material is sometimes inserted in such a way as to apparently disrupt or render incoherent the train of thought of the original passage.

The content as well as the form of the Essays has a puzzling character. Considerable portions of the book consist of extensive quotations and paraphrases of other authors, most commonly ancient ones. More often than not, Montaigne gives no explicit indication of their "borrowed" character, let alone a citation of the original author (fortunately for present-day readers, modern scholars have diligently unearthed and recorded the sources for most of Montaigne's borrowings). While the publication of compendia of wise men's sayings, or the silent insertion of secondhand materials into a new book, was not an uncommon practice in Montaigne's time, we need to know Montaigne's own purpose in adopting this practice. Less striking to a twentieth-century audience, but perhaps unique in literature up to Montaigne's time, is another aspect of the Essays: Montaigne's extensive description of himself, as promised in the foreword, including the relation of many apparently trivial feelings and experiences, and explicit details of his bodily states and functions. Contemporary authors of "stream-of-consciousness" literature may take it for granted that the public will be interested in reading about such things. But the value of gaining this kind of knowledge is not self-evident, and was severely questioned by critics at the time the book was published. To Montaigne, his practice of describing his common experiences and dispositions in apparently random fashion helped make the Essays "the only book in the world of its kind."  

In order to appreciate the purpose underlying the peculiar structure and content of the Essays, we must seek to avoid looking at it from a perspective derived from post-sixteenth-century conceptions of literary form and function. The literature of free "self-expression" or self-description (as distinguished from the recording by great men of the great events in which they took part) may owe its development to Montaigne, to a considerable extent. But it is not clearly evident that Montaigne intended to found a literary tradition, or that his motives in adopting the form he did were the same as those of the imitators of that form. We need to regain the capacity to be surprised, as readers of Montaigne's time were, by the rambling style and personal content of the Essays. Having done this, we must look searchingly at the explanation or justification Montaigne gives of his choice of themes and his mode of writing.

16 II, 8, 364.
Just as the style and content of the Essays ought not to lead us to identify it with the contemporary literature of free "self-expression," so the title and overall structure of the book should not cause us to place it automatically among other books of "essays." Montaigne originated the term "essays" as the title of a literary work. The essay is now a standard genre; a book of essays is understood to contain a number of short prose compositions, each treating a particular subject without any necessary continuity among them. The themes of Montaigne's chapters, however, are not so neatly distinguishable. On the one hand, a single chapter may treat a number of topics the relation of which is at best obscure; on the other hand, there is an obvious continuity among some chapters (for instance, between chapters 9 and 10 of Book I) and, even more frequently, a repetition of similar or identical themes in different chapters. The title "essays" seems to refer not to the chapters as entities but to the much more numerous succession of particular thoughts or inquiries within the book as a whole. It also remains possible that Montaigne's book has an underlying unity and order which are not typical of the usual book of "essays." Thus, rather than accepting the Essays as one more example of a well-known genre, it is best to seek to follow whatever indications Montaigne himself gives, recondite as they may be, of his method and purpose.

The term "essai," as used in Montaigne's time, roughly signified a tentative investigation or a trial or test of something. Montaigne's

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18 Montaigne's frequent avowals of his consistency, which will be discussed at length, and his contention that his book follows a concealed "plan" lead one to suspect that the Essays, the exterior form of which resembles Machiavelli's Discourses, may in fact follow a precise, albeit recondite, numerical order such as Leo Strauss, in his Thoughts on Machiavelli, demonstrated to exist in the Prince and the Discourses. If there is such an order in the Essays, it has not yet been discovered, to my knowledge. Useful contributions to the quest to find such an order have been made, however, by Michel Butor in his Essais sur les "Essais" (Gallimard, 1968), pt. 1, chs. 16-17, and by Richard Sayce, "L'Ordre des Essais de Montaigne," Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance, XVIII (1956), pp. 7-22.

As evidence of an order in the Essays, it may be noted, for instance, that the first two chapters with "children" in the title are equidistant from the last chapters of the respective books in which they appear (the third such chapter is the last one in Book II). Also, the two chapters that refer to the Socratic understanding of philosophy as "learning how to die" (I, 20, and III, 12) are equidistant from II, 6, which embodies the anti-Socratic "turning point" in Montaigne's own professed attitude toward death.

19 Montaigne's use of the term seems to support both of these interpretations, as well as that of "experience," as in III. 13, 1056. For reference to disagreement
choice of a title thus suggests a series of tentative, uncertain investigations rather than a rigorous or dogmatic argument. Montaigne describes his book as an "essay" of his "natural faculties," and especially of his judgment. "Undertaking to speak indiscriminately of everything that comes to my fancy without employing any but my own natural resources," professing to choose his subjects at random, Montaigne seeks to determine how much his judgment is capable of understanding in each matter set before it.20

Montaigne explains the apparently rambling and disorganized character of his book as the consequence of his "essaying" method. Because "judgment is a tool to use on all subjects," he employs his everywhere, even on subjects it does not understand, testing their depth. Unable to "see the whole of anything," he chooses only one of "a hundred members and faces that each thing has," giving it "a stab, not as widely, but as deeply as I know how," preferably "from some unusual point of view." 21

Given the random character of Montaigne's method, the reader of the Essays cannot expect the book to be orderly. Montaigne speaks "in disconnected parts," without any rule: 22

Sowing one word here, there another, samples separated from the piece to which they belong, scattered, without a design and without a promise, I am not bound to make something good of them or to hold to them myself without varying when it pleases me; and giving myself up to doubt and uncertainty, and to my ruling quality, which is ignorance.23

On the surface, Montaigne's method (or lack of it) seems to be the product of humility, laziness, or both. Lacking the capacity to understand some subject as a whole and come to coherent conclusions, and/or unwilling to submit to the discipline such an endeavor would require, the essayist reminds the reader not to expect much from his book. Elsewhere, he describes it as a place for setting down the "chimeras and fantastic monsters" that his mind produces "without order or purpose," in the hope of making it "ashamed of itself." 24 Such a work may have a therapeutic value for Montaigne, and it may even hold some interest for his relatives, but other readers would seem well advised to heed the author's prefatory counsel not to waste their time reading it.


20 I, 26, 145; I, 50, 289.
21 I, 50, 289.
22 III, 13, 1054.
23 I, 50, 289.
24 I, 8, 34.
Montaigne gives ample evidence in other passages, however, that the open display of his uncertainty and ignorance has a more serious purpose, one which he believes could make his book of great benefit to others. He decries men’s tendency to follow received opinions on faith rather than exercising their own judgment. The “learning” on which they pride themselves is a collection of other men’s thoughts, with which they fill their “memory” while leaving “the understanding and the conscience empty.” Learning makes men “conceited and arrogant” without improving their judgment or their character. In consequence, those who are regarded as “learned” are really inferior to the common people, “the peasant and the shoemaker,” who “go their way simply and naturally talking about what they know.” By being trained to memorize opinions the truth of which they have never tested for themselves, leaning “on the arms of others,” men “annihilate [their] own powers.” 26 Against this practice, Montaigne proposes a system of education in which the pupil would be trained to exercise his own judgment. Presented with the variety of wise men’s opinions, without being constrained to adopt any “by mere authority and on credit,” the student “will choose if he can; if not, he will remain in doubt. Only fools are certain and resolute.” 26 The essayist attributes “all the abuses in the world” to “our being taught to fear professing our ignorance and our being bound to accept all that we cannot refute.” 27

In this light, Montaigne’s extensive cataloguing of the variation of things and of human opinions about them, his testing of his own judgment, and his public admission of ignorance all seem intended to effectuate the kind of education he proposes, for his readers as well as himself. Rather than imposing a body of doctrine on others, he provides a model of how one may go about freely investigating things for oneself. The very disorder of Montaigne’s style seems to be motivated, as Nietzsche’s aphoristic style was, by the desire to give an honest, faithful account of the author’s process of thought, rather than pretending to have arrived at an understanding of the whole of things by a process of cold, orderly reasoning. 28 By relying on his own resources and admitting his ignorance, Montaigne wishes to encourage his readers to do likewise. By publicly examining himself, the essayist seems to aim at the same result that Socrates sought to achieve in his examination of men who thought themselves wiser than they were: to lead men to recognize their own ignorance. Like Socrates, who denied that he was wiser than other men except by virtue of his awareness of his ignorance, Montaigne

25 I, 25, 135-38. As to “the peasant and the shoe-maker,” however, contrast Plato Apology of Socrates 22e, concerning the presumption of the “artisans,” which seems also to contradict Socrates’ own praise of the common people at 22a.
26 I, 26, 150.
27 III, 11, 1007.
28 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pt. 1, aph. 5.
describes himself as belonging to the common run of men, except that he is aware of this status, and therefore does not suffer from the common tendency to overvalue oneself.29

The purpose of Montaigne's extensive examination of his character and dispositions, as well as his intellectual capacities, also appears to resemble Socrates' endeavor to know himself, and to persuade others to examine their own lives. Like Socrates, he stresses the greater importance to man of knowing himself than of other studies.30 Montaigne wishes to lead men to turn their gaze inward, to study themselves, and to recognize their own imperfections rather than hypocritically instructing other in their duties.31 He seems to set about this more prudently than Socrates by describing his own imperfections, rather than examining others about their defects.

The difference between Montaigne's procedure and that of Socrates is not merely a difference concerning the best means to an identical end, however. More so than Socrates, Montaigne links the need to examine oneself with the need to reveal oneself openly to others, to present oneself before them, as the essayist professes to do in his foreword, naturally and without "artifice." Montaigne describes himself as "an enemy of subtle and dissimulated actions" and a hater of the "servitude of unnecessary ceremony."32 He explains the importance of "confessing" oneself openly to others, as follows:

I have ordered myself to dare to say all that I dare to do, and even thoughts that are unpublishable displease me. The worst of my actions and conditions does not seem so ugly to me as I find it ugly and cowardly not to dare to avow it. Everyone is discreet in confession; they ought to be so in action; boldness in sinning is somewhat compensated and bridled by the boldness of confessing it. Whoever would oblige himself to say all, would oblige himself not to do anything about which one is constrained to keep silent. God grant that this excess of my license should lead our men to liberty, rising above these cowardly and affected virtues born of our imperfections; that at the expense of my immoderation I may lead them to the point of reason! It is necessary to see one's vice and study it in order to tell about it. Those who hide it from others ordinarily hide it from themselves. And they do not consider it covered up enough if they see it; they withdraw and disguise it from their own conscience.33

In accordance with this advice, Montaigne appears to bare himself and his defects freely before the public. He admits to laziness, irresolution, uselessness, forgetfulness, and a lack of fortitude, as well as ignorance of even the most commonplace things.34 His book, "the record of the

29 11, 17, 618; Plato, Apology of Socrates 21c-d.
30 II, 6, 358; III, 9, 929; Plato, Phaedrus 229e-30a.
31 I, 23, 114; I, 53, 224; II, 8, 375; II, 31, 693-94.
32 I, 21, 99; I, 13, 48.
33 III, 5, 822-23.
34 II, 17, 626-27, 632-36.
essays of my life,” is exemplary for the health of the soul only if its
lesson is taken in reverse, so he confesses.\textsuperscript{35} Apparently undeterred by
the thought of any harm that such “lessons” might cause if taken in a
positive sense, he urges that all men be permitted to portray themselves
freely as he does, not limiting this privilege to the great.\textsuperscript{36}

Whatever one may think of the value of sincerity, one is still hard put
to understand why an author should impose such an extensive account
of his random foibles, fancies, and failings on the public as Montaigne
seems to do. The essayist himself describes his writing as the “excrements
of an aged mind,” and suggests the desirability of a law restraining
“inept and useless writers,” which would lead to the censorship of his
book.\textsuperscript{37} He further confronts us with the question of whether he, who
is most private in his habits, should reasonably wish to give the public
such knowledge of himself as he pretends to provide.\textsuperscript{38} “Amusing fancy:
many things that I would not want to tell anyone, I tell the public; and
for my most secret knowledge and thoughts I send my most faithful
friends to the bookseller’s shop.”\textsuperscript{39}

Montaigne thus explicitly forces us to wonder whether his book does
honestly represent his personal character and habits of thought. In
other passages he in fact denies that he wishes to reveal himself to the
public at large. Although his book is available to anyone who wishes
to read it, Montaigne aims at the approval only of “men of understanding,
whose praise alone has any weight.” He scorns “the ignorant approbation
of the vulgar,” whose voice is “the mother of ignorance, injustice, and
inconstancy.”\textsuperscript{40} Montaigne states that he would have preferred to write
letters, rather than a book, if he had known some friend whom he could
address.\textsuperscript{41} It is in this sense that we may understand Montaigne’s remark
in the foreword that his book is meant for his “friends.”\textsuperscript{42} He seeks the
friendship of able men of understanding, “the rarest type”; such friend-
ship has as its object the sharing of thoughts.\textsuperscript{43} But by virtue of the very
rarity of such men, it is a fortunate occurrence for a true friendship to
arise even “once in three centuries.”\textsuperscript{44} In the absence of such friendship,

\textsuperscript{35} III, 13, 1056.
\textsuperscript{36} II, 17, 637.
\textsuperscript{37} III, 9, 923.
\textsuperscript{38} III, 2, 783.
\textsuperscript{39} III, 9, 959.
\textsuperscript{40} I, 26, 146; II, 16, 607; III, 2, 783; cf. also III, 9, 961.
\textsuperscript{41} I, 40, 246.
\textsuperscript{42} Cf. Montaigne’s citation of Seneca’s remark that others would acquire the
“glory of true friends” by preserving his memory (II, 35, 726) with II, 18, 648,
where Montaigne indicates his expectation that his portrait will “endure.”
\textsuperscript{43} III, 3, 625. For a similar account of the essence of friendship, see Aristotle,
Nicomachean Ethics IX, 9, 1170 al4-bl4; on its rarity, III. 3, 1156b6-27.
\textsuperscript{44} I, 28, 182.
“association with books” offers a more reliable, if less delightful, companionship for the mind. In the study of books, one is really associating with the minds of their authors. For Montaigne, writing a book may be the sole available means of finding and communicating with (perhaps only posthumously) the rare kind of companions that he seeks.

Writing books is more difficult than writing letters, according to Montaigne, because it presents an author with the task of considering the variety of his audience and accommodating their different humor. The essayist claims that his style is ill adapted for dealing with the public: success in such dealings commonly requires ceremony, dishonesty, and flattery, all of which go counter to his open and natural manner. In public, one is compelled to cover up rulers’ vices; to accommodate popular opinions and religious beliefs, as the ancient writers did; to discuss frivolous subjects and stories in which one entirely disbelieves; and generally to “stoop to the level of those you are with, and sometimes affect ignorance.”

Judging from the shamelessness with which he describes his private habits and vices, and the apparent carelessness with which he has set down his thoughts, Montaigne seems not to have been daunted by these considerations. He seems, that is, to have presented himself as openly and “naturally” in his book as he would in a letter to an intimate friend. But in describing his practice in speaking and negotiating, Montaigne gives us ground to suspect such apparent openness. His “plan” in speaking, he writes, is “to display a thorough carelessness and casual and unpremeditated gestures, as if they arose from the immediate occasion.” He seeks earnestly not to “show I have come prepared to speak well, an unbecoming thing, above all for men of my profession, and too binding for one who cannot live up to much.” In the “little negotiating” he has carried on among princes, Montaigne reports having gained their trust to a singular extent by “carefully avoiding letting them be mistaken about me,” presenting himself as a “tender and inexperienced negotiator.” By his “open” manner, he has freed himself from “any suspicion of dissimulation.” These remarks hardly show Montaigne

45 III, 3, 805.
47 Cf. Plato, Phaedrus 275e, 277 b-c.
48 I, 40, 246. But compare III, 5, 867: “I wish to satisfy everyone.”
50 III, 9, 940 (emphasis added).
51 III, 1, 768-69 (emphasis added).
to be a genuinely "careless" speaker or "inexperienced" negotiator. A planned or studied carelessness is not truly careless. One may well mistrust this admittedly successful negotiator's profession of inexperience, just as the admission of his success belies his claim that his style is "inert for public negotiations." What Montaigne in fact emphasizes in these passages is the need to appear casual to others in order to win their trust. It is quite imprudent, he observes, to let it be known that one speaks prudently.

These considerations may apply with even greater force to Montaigne's writing than to his speech, given the greater permanence of the written word and the potentially unlimited character of the audience for a book. Thus it is not surprising that Montaigne confesses to being less open in writing than in conversation. Although his primary aim is to appeal to a few "men of understanding," as an author he must take account of the humors and prejudices of the rulers and the general public so as not to suffer the consequences of their displeasure. Needless to say, those consequences were much more severe, and the range of tolerance much more limited, in the France of Montaigne's time than in the liberal regimes of the twentieth century.


53 I, 9, 37; cf. Aristotle Rhetoric III.2.1404b.

54 Cf. Plato Phaedrus 275 d-e.

55 III, 9, 961.

56 The Essays were placed on the Church's Index of prohibited books in 1676. Montaigne's entry in his Travel Journal for March 20, 1581, lists several points for which the Essays were criticized by Church authorities during his visit to Rome (Œuvres, pp. 1228-29). A measure of the spirit of the time may be gleaned from the fact that one of the points deemed contrary to the Church's teaching was Montaigne's condemnation of torture. Montaigne reports that he managed to make satisfactory excuses for his "errors," no doubt assisted by the fact that the official before whom he defended himself could not read French and had to rely on the report of "some French friar." Another, more acute, reader, Antoine de Laval, the royal geographer of Henry III of France, described parts of the Essays as "heretical" and said that he "would not be surprised" if Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond" were "prohibited on pain of anathema" (Jacob Zeitlin, ed. and trans., The Essays of Michel de Montaigne, 3 vols; [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935], II, p. 514, n. 2). Montaigne was even criticized shortly after his death for his "heretical" unbelief in witchcraft and for his doubt about the power of spells to cause impotence (Boase, Fortunes, pp. 23, 39-43). Cf. also Armaingaud, "Etude," pp. 187, 191, 194, 196-203.

In his study Montaigne Fidéiste (Nijmegen-Utrecht: N. V. Dekker and J. W. Van
Montaigne is thus presented with the problem of speaking differently to different audiences 57—of communicating his thought to sympathetic "men of understanding," present and future, most of whom he does not know, while saying as little as possible that will openly offend the sensibilities of the public and particularly of the authorities, both secular and religious. His book, he predicts, would not much please either of two classes of readers who constitute good "believers"—the simple minds, who would not understand it enough, and the penetrating ones, who would understand it only too well. He hopes it might get by among the "middle" range of men, such as himself—men who question the old ways, without having been led thereby to a deeper confirmation of the Christian faith.58

The Essays is not a book that is meant to be understood by "common and vulgar" readers. Montaigne asserts that his "disposition is not suited, any more in speaking than in writing, for beginners." He disdains "to go and preach to the first passerby and play schoolmaster to the ignorance or ineptitude of the first man we have met." 59 The means by which he prevents the bulk of readers from understanding the "most secret thoughts" he has embodied in his book is to cloak those thoughts in an appearance of disorder and aimlessness. Despite the frustratingly diffuse surface aspect of the Essays, Montaigne remarks that "it is the undiligent reader who loses my subject, not I; there will always be found in a corner some word about it, which will not fail to be sufficient, although it may be concise." 60 While admitting to being more reserved in writing than in speech, he advises the reader that "if one looks, one will find that I have said everything or pointed out everything. . . . I leave nothing about me to be desired or guessed." What he "cannot express," Montaigne says, he has pointed to; but he quotes Lucretius to the effect that these hints will suffice to reveal the rest to a keen mind.61 Less shrewd or

Leeuwen, 1930), p. 137, Herman Jansen lists several books of Montaigne's time that were condemned by the Church for intimations of "rationalism."

Armaingaud ("Etude," pp. 196-97) hypothesizes that the Church refrained from condemning the Essays for its many heresies at the time of the book's publication only because of Montaigne's apparent opposition to Protestantism and because of the author's influential friends.

For an illuminating discussion of the problems of writing under non-liberal regimes, and the techniques employed by philosophic authors beset with those problems, see Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), ch. 2.

57 Cf. III, 5, 867.
59 III, 8, 916-17.
60 III, 9, 973.
61 III, 9, 961.
diligent readers will lose the track; but Montaigne remarks, "who is there who would not rather be read than be read sleepily or fleetingly?" 62 The very "essayistic," apparently rambling, form of the Essays serves as a device to weed out careless, vulgar readers, who will miss Montaigne's deeper meaning because they will read in snatches and merely be amused, or else will put the book down disgusted with its pointlessness. 63

Of course, it remains possible that some "men of understanding" who grasp Montaigne's meaning will be unsympathetic to the author's purpose. It is even more likely that the authorities will recognize particular parts of Montaigne's argument as contrary to the officially ordained doctrine. In such instances, Montaigne's "essayistic" mode of expression, with its appearance of innocent frankness, may still serve to blunt criticism and protect him from punishment, just as his studied "inexperience" helps him to gain the trust of princes when he conducts negotiations. Such a purpose is indicated in the remark quoted earlier in this article, to the effect that, by scattering his words, renouncing any design, and admitting his ignorance, Montaigne frees himself from being "bound" to what he has written, and from the obligation to "make something good" of it. 64 It is even more evident in the preface to a particularly bold discussion of "prayers":

I put forth formless and unresolved fancies, as do those who publish doubtful questions in the schools, not to establish the truth, but to seek it. And I submit them to the judgment of those whose concern it is to regulate not only my actions and writings, but even my thoughts. Condemnation will be equally as acceptable and useful to me as approval, since I hold it as execrable if anything is said by me, ignorantly or inadvertently, against the holy prescriptions of the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, in which I die and in which I was born. And therefore, always submitting to the authority of their censure, which has absolute power over me. I meddle rashly with every kind of discourse, as I do here. 65

Some scrutiny of this passage may be required before the reader realizes how Montaigne has managed to deduce the privilege of a practically unlimited license of speech from the pious profession of submission and humility. (It is worth noting that, contrary to this avowal, Montaigne did not remove from the later editions of the Essays any of the remarks which the papal censors found objectionable in the first edition; his only act of "deference" was to add the above profession of humility! 66)

62 III, 9, 974.
63 Cf. Guizot, Montaigne, 71-76.
65 I, 56, 302-3.
Montaigne's Intention and His Rhetoric

The rhetorical use of the posture of tentativeness, uncertainty, and ignorance which pervades the Essays is not limited to the negative function of protecting Montaigne from his critics. It also serves, like his posture in "negotiations," to help win the agreement of his audience to his positive assertions:

There is a certain kind of subtle humility born of presumption, like this one: that we acknowledge our ignorance in many things, and are so courteous as to aver that there are in the works of nature certain qualities and conditions that are imperceptible to us, and of which our capacity cannot discern the means and causes. By this honest and conscientious declaration, we hope to gain credence also about those things that we claim to understand.67

To recognize that Montaigne's posture of uncertainty and ignorance serves as a protective and subtly persuasive rhetorical device is not to deny that it has a serious meaning, which is elaborated most fully in chapter 12 of Book II, the "Apology for Raymond Sebond." But it is clear at any rate that in describing his "ignorance," Montaigne does not really mean that he is less competent than most men. Rather, he suggests that ignorance is a universal human condition, and that to recognize one's ignorance is a sign of superior wisdom. His self-deprecatory way of stating this is "ironic" in the original, Socratic, sense of that term.68

The irony of many of the self-deprecatory remarks which Montaigne makes is evident to any reader of the Essays. Much less obvious, however, is the ironic character of the book as a whole. Montaigne describes his method of meeting "accusations" as a policy of enhancing his accusers' charges by an "ironic and mocking confession." 69 This suggests that his many admissions of personal defects such as idleness, softness, and uselessness, as well as ignorance, are ironic and are part of a calculated policy, rather than the result of genuine openness (recall his practice in "negotiations"). But the same may also be true of the deprecatory remarks Montaigne makes about his book, and of the generally "careless" appearance of the Essays. Montaigne says that he likes "to promise a little less than I can do and what I hope to attain." 70 Thus he may really "do" and "hope to attain" much more in the Essays than he seems to promise in the foreword. His hints about the underlying order and consistency of the Essays suggest that the book as a whole is "ironic," in that it conceals a body of deep and serious thought under a surface of playfulness, aimlessness, and disorder.


69 III, 12, 1021; cf. III, 9, 958, and the quotation from Martial, II, 17, 637.

70 III, 10, 1002.
By pretending to be playful and inconsistent, Montaigne is enabled to speak his mind boldly in a way that an obviously serious and calculating author in his time could not have dared. One must read the Essays in the light of the approbation Montaigne expresses of mixing serious opinions in with "games" and of his quotation of Horace's query, "what prevents you from saying the truth while laughing?" He admits to emulating the "useful" practice of the "wisest" authors in scattering "around one good argument" several which are "flimsy" and indeed, to one who scrutinizes them closely, "bodiless." By his pretense of disorder and casualness, Montaigne lulls the inattentive reader into dismissing his boldest remarks as the harmless sallies of a frivolous mind.

The essence of Montaigne's irony is to draw his readers' ire toward the personal defects he "confesses," as well as the apparent triviality of his book, and away from the serious teaching embodied in the Essays, which might cause far more wrath if it were widely understood. As Montaigne observes, mere "uselessness" (unlike heterodoxy) is unlikely to be punished. The scholar Pierre Villey has noted that Montaigne apologizes for his self-description rather than for his philosophy. This fact hardly supports Villey's inference, however, that Montaigne thought his self-portraiture, rather than his ideas, to constitute the truly dangerous "novelty" of the Essays. By apologizing profusely for the "defects" of his character and his literary style, Montaigne was effectively directing his readers' attention to them, and away from his substantive arguments. His "ironic and mocking confession" was apparently quite successful, despite a few criticisms of his remarks about religion. According to Villey, the main criticisms of the Essays during the period immediately following its publication concerned Montaigne's colloquial language; his attack on ceremony; the disorderliness, triviality, and uselessness of his book; his practice of publicly avowing his errors and faults; his tiresome pretense of naturalness; and the endless lamentation of his forgetfulness and similar personal problems. Not until well into the seventeenth century, after the Essays had been frequently republished and widely circulated, was Montaigne's essential Catholicism (as distinguished from his orthodoxy on particular theological issues).

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71 III, 5, 855.
72 III, 12, 1016.
73 III, 9, 923; cf. the story of Alcibiades recounted by Montaigne at III, 4, 814.
74 Montaigne devant la postérité, pp. 10-16.
75 With some justification Rousseau complained that the only "faults" to which Montaigne admits are "amiable" ones (Fragments autobiographiques, in Rousseau, Œuvres complètes, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. 4 vols. [Paris: Gallimard, 1959-69], I, p. 1150).
76 Villey, Montaigne devant la postérité, ch. 4. Interestingly enough, each of these supposed defects is pointed out to the reader by Montaigne himself.
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openly challenged, culminating in the proscription of his book by the Church in 1676.\textsuperscript{77}

The supreme beauty of Montaigne’s irony is that it is double-edged. On the one hand, to the degree that his profession of honesty and ignorance is persuasive to his readers, he gains their confidence; they are not likely to suspect him of concealing any dangerous intentions. On the other hand, to the extent that these self-deprecatory remarks are recognized to be humorous, Montaigne’s readers are encouraged not to take anything he says seriously. Thus, even the essayist’s quite open assertions of the seriousness and care with which he writes are dismissed as the idle boasts of a frivolous and joking author. The success with which Montaigne scattered bold remarks about his purposes and his tactics throughout the \textit{Essays} without their being comprehended by most readers amply justifies his assertion that “you can more easily dare what no one thinks you will dare.”\textsuperscript{78} This very assertion exemplifies Montaigne’s rhetorical technique: it occurs in a passage ostensibly devoted to the shameless description of his practices in love. Who could suspect this boldly frank discussion to harbor a more subtle, but more dangerous, theme?—who, except someone who had meditated on Montaigne’s remark that his “stories . . . often bear, outside of my discourse, the seed of a richer and bolder material, and sound obliquely a subtler note, both for me, who do not wish to express anything more, and for those who light upon my manner.”\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{III}, 5, 868; cf. also \textit{I}, 26, 172, regarding the habit of “most readers.” The principle underlying Montaigne’s rhetorical technique is not novel with him; it was explained succinctly by the medieval Islamic philosopher Alfarabi, in his introduction to Plato’s \textit{Laws}:

… all men are naturally disposed to pass a universal judgment after observing only a few particular instances of a thing . . . . For instance, when someone has spoken the truth on one, two, or a number of occasions, men are naturally disposed to judge that he is simply truthful, and similarly when someone lies . . . . Whereas the wise men know this aspect of men’s natural disposition, sometimes they have repeatedly shown themselves as possessing a certain character until men judged that this is how they always are. Then afterwards, they acted in a different manner, which went unnoticed by men, who supposed that they were acting as they had done.


\textsuperscript{79} \textit{I}, 40, 245. I have translated the last three words, which Frame renders as “get my drift,” by a less idiomatic but more literal expression in order to preserve the resemblance to the passage in the foreword where Montaigne says that his book is meant to enable his friends and relatives to “recover some traits of my conditions and humors.” The passage quoted here seems to support the interpretation of the “friends” for whom the book is meant as being the “men of understanding.”
II. The Problem of Montaigne's Consistency

Only when one is aware of the subtlety of Montaigne's rhetoric is it possible to make some sense out of the apparent contradictions with which the Essays abounds. Sometimes, for instance, Montaigne purports to adopt a "Stoical" posture towards pain and death; yet elsewhere he expresses his devotion to the pursuit of sensual pleasure and his wish to die "insensibly." At one point he claims to lack the capacity to conduct public affairs; but later, he admits to avoiding public life out of taste rather than incapacity. Montaigne openly indicates the unreasonableness of most existing customs and laws, yet disclaims any wish to see them changed.

The dominant mode of literary scholarship on Montaigne in the twentieth century has sought to explain such contradictions by reference to the author's personality and especially to the "evolution" of his thought as both are allegedly revealed in the Essays. Accepting the book as a reasonably honest and straightforward account of Montaigne's varying thoughts and moods, commentators are not surprised to discover changing or conflicting opinions and desires recorded in it. According to the most important figure in the "evolutionary" school of interpretation, Pierre Villey, Montaigne's thought underwent a development from a "Stoical" phase, exemplified in the "early" essays, through a "skeptical crisis," embodied especially in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," to a later state of "intellectual prudence," stress on the individual, and the working out of a "personal" morality. The style of the Essays evolved in accordance with the development of Montaigne's thought, Villey argues, from the "impersonal" character of the early chapters, in which Montaigne quotes ancient authorities extensively, says little of himself, and wavers most confusedly among conflicting opinions, to the more "personal" later essays, where Montaigne truly makes himself the "matter" of his book and is most original.

An overview of the Essays will lend some support to Villey's contention that a development takes place in both the style and the argument of the book. Montaigne himself seems to justify the "chronological" interpretation of his book by describing it as the record of his vacillating mind, and by sometimes referring expressly to contemporary events or dates which seem to indicate the different times at which different chapters were written.

I believe, however, that a careful reading of the Essays will not justify

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80 E.g., I, 14, passim; III, 13, 1083-97; I, 19, 79.
81 I, 17, 626; III, 9, 929-30, 966.
82 I, 23, 115-18.
Villey’s claim to have understood the “evolution” of Montaigne’s thought, and, indeed, that it decisively refutes that claim. Villey himself was forced to qualify his thesis endlessly to try to square it with evident facts. For instance, Villey’s claim that Montaigne decided only late in his work to make himself the essential “matter” of his book is contradicted by the foreword, as well as by a statement Montaigne made to the king in 1580 that the Essays “contain nothing else than a discourse on my life and on my actions.” Villey is compelled to assume that these remarks, as well as the foreword, were an “anachronism” in which Montaigne ignored the great change which had taken place (according to Villey) in his intentions. Montaigne, Villey hypothesizes, had only recently changed his conception of what he wanted to write, but nonetheless published the Essays in its original form in 1580 and republished it in 1582 without any progress in “personalness.”

The preceding is but a sample of the reasoning by which Villey attempts to support his account of Montaigne’s “evolution.” It is an account that continually compels Villey to present Montaigne as maintaining contradictory positions and attitudes at one and the same time without Montaigne’s being aware of those inconsistencies. This entire “evolution” from Stoic to skeptic to libertin is supposed to have taken place within a span of some fifteen years—beginning, as Jacob Zeitlin notes, at a time when Montaigne was already “a mature man, thirty-eight years old, with a considerable experience of life and books.”

Not only is Villey’s account of the radical change of mind of a reputedly great thinker implausible in itself, but the text of the Essays will not adequately support this interpretation. Thus, many of the chapters that Villey regards as Montaigne’s “earliest” will be found, on examination, to contain thoughts which he attributes to the “late” Montaigne. Chapter 37 of Book I, for instance, supposedly a sample of Montaigne’s “early” thoughts, begins with an emphasis on the radical differences among individuals, an idea which Villey associates with the “personal,” individual character of the latest chapters. Book I, chapter 47, which Villey also attributes to Montaigne’s early, “Stoical” period, concerns “The Uncertainty of Our Judgment”—a theme presumably connected with the skepticism which, however, Villey believes Montaigne did not adopt until later, leading to his rejection of Stoicism. On the other hand, the “Stoical” views which Villey attributes to the “early” Montaigne were also expressed by him in his last years, as in his additions to chapter 21 of Book II. Another problem in Villey’s interpretation

84 Villey, Les Sources, II. pp. 239-40.
85 Ibid., p. 242.
87 Zeitlin, Essays, I, p. li.
88 Cf. ibid., II, pp. 556-57; and Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne, pp. 165-66, 172.
arises when he distinguishes three concepts of "nature" in the *Essays*, which he attempts to relate to the "evolution" of Montaigne's thought, but then must admit that these concepts cannot be said to have succeeded one another chronologically in the book.\(^89\)

Many further questions may be raised about the soundness of the evidence on which Villey relies in his "dating" of the *Essays*.\(^90\) Yet it is undeniable that an *overall* shift in form, spirit, and argument *does* take place in the *Essays*—from the short, generally "impersonal," and often "Stoical" earlier chapters, through the "skepticism" of the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," to the extended, "personal," and freethinking chapters of Book III, which culminate in the message "eat, drink, and be merry." What is in doubt is not whether the *Essays* itself seems to evolve, but rather Villey's contention that this evolution reflects a vacillation on the part of *Montaigne*. Neither Villey nor his critics seem to have considered the possibility that the changes of style and emphasis that occur in the *Essays* were a *thoroughly planned rhetorical technique* adopted by Montaigne so as to have a maximal influence on his readers at minimal danger to himself. Villey's interpretation rests on a naive faith in Montaigne's "sincerity" that contravenes Montaigne's own account of the character of his book and of his method of writing.

All of the evidence that Villey marshals in order to demonstrate Montaigne's vacillation is given a quite different (and, when it is adequately considered, wholly sufficient) explanation by the essayist himself. Thus, while Villey attributes the heavy use of quotation and impersonal example in the early chapters to the "influence" on Montaigne of the literary "compilations" current in his time, an influence from which, he argues, Montaigne only gradually "freed" himself,\(^91\) Montaigne expressly denies that his purpose is comparable to that of the "compilers." Unlike "the undiscerning writers of our century, who amid their obscure works scatter whole passages of the ancient authors to do themselves honor," Montaigne explains, "I do not speak the minds of others, except further to speak my own mind."\(^92\) Whereas Villey's mode of "dating" Montaigne's chapters rests on an analysis of the supposed chronology of the essayist's reading of the authors he quotes, and the consequent "influence" they exerted on the evolution of his thought, Montaigne states that in writing he uses other authors "not at all to form my opinions; but to assist those I formed long ago, to second and support

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82 I, 26, 145-46. Guizot (*Montaigne*, pp. 165-66) notes how Montaigne distorts the thought of those he quotes in order to support the essayist's own argument, a practice to which Montaigne admits (III, 12, 1034).
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them." 93 His quotations are a concession to "public opinion." 94 Montaigne explains the increasing boldness and "personalness" of Book III as the result not of a change in his intentions but rather of the confidence with which the early public reception of the Essays inspired him, and of his taking advantage of the greater license of speech that is customarily allowed to older men. 95 He has added to his earlier work, but he has not changed it; rather than altering an already published work, Montaigne says, an author should think carefully before publishing. 96 His judgment and his general opinions have remained constant; his book "is always one." 97 The additions Montaigne made to the Essays after 1588, one scholar has noted, do not represent a significant change in his thought, but simply exemplify an increasing boldness, especially in five areas: "self-revelation, obscenity, his book and his plan, the evils of religion in his time, and his own independent morality." 98 It is possible, then, that Montaigne's thought had remained constant since at least 1580 as well, but that he masked his thought most cautiously in the early editions with the appearance of conventionality that Villey finds strongest in the first chapters. Villey himself observes that the "Stoical" aspects of the first two books of the Essays won the work an acceptance much warmer than that which was forthcoming after the bolder and less conventional Book III was published. 99 Even the first chapters, however, if read carefully, make it doubtful that Montaigne ever adhered to "Stoicism."

To seek for hidden purposes in a book is no doubt an enterprise in which one can easily go astray. It is at least equally dangerous, however, to assume that one has understood the "evolution" of a learned writer's thought, or to explain away difficulties by casual reference to the writer's apparently conflicting moods, such as "moral optimism coupled with an intellectual pessimism," 100 without having given the most serious con-

93 II, 18, 648-49. Montaigne does not deny that his readings may have influenced the formation of his opinions before he began to write, but only that his thought has changed in the process of writing.
95 III, 2, 783; III, 9, 942.
96 III, 9, 941. Guizot (Montaigne, ch. 6) points out the evident care that Montaigne put into his style and choice of language. Considering the essayist's denial that he wishes his fame to rest on his style (I, 40, 243-44), how much more reason there is to expect that he composed his thoughts with care. Of course, Montaigne did change particular words and phrases in later editions; but the remark quoted in the text constitutes a denial that these stylistic changes altered the book's meaning.
97 III, 2, 790; III, 9, 941.
98 Frame, Montaigne, p. 290.
sideration to the author's claim that his thought remained consistent. There are few authors, if any, who hint more frequently than Montaigne that their work does conceal a deeper thought and purpose. Only such a rhetoric of concealment could explain the multitude of contradictions in the Essays without leading to the conclusion that Montaigne was either confused or fickle,101 if not both. Given the ever-present danger of censorship and persecution in Montaigne's day, there was certainly good reason for an author with heterodox beliefs to conceal them from the public. "In this time," Montaigne writes, "it is not possible to speak of the world, except dangerously or falsely." 102 A writer must have "discretion" as well as "novelty" in order to be effective.103

A number of commentators have been aware of the "prudence" which Montaigne exercised in his writing, particularly in religious matters. Yet even such perspicuous critics as Guizot and Armaingaud, while recognizing the disingenuousness of Montaigne's professions of piety ("I know of no other quality so easy to counterfeit," he wrote104), have preferred to believe in the overall sincerity and honesty of the Essays in matters other than religion.105 Not only is this belief rendered questionable, however, by the remarks which have already been quoted here from the Essays; its grounds are explicitly challenged by Montaigne's own discussion of "honesty."

In a chapter entitled "Of Liars," Montaigne asserts that the remarkable weakness of his memory forces him to renounce any ambition for public life because it makes him unable to dissemble consistently and convincingly.106 We have already observed, however, that Montaigne did take part in public "negotiations," succeeding (according to his testimony) by virtue of the studied impression he gave of frankness and casualness. In the same chapter in which he denies his ability to speak "prudently," Montaigne counsels that "if the reputation [for prudence] is there, the effect [of prudence] cannot be." 107 Though Montaigne denounces lying as an "accursed vice" in the next sentence, the denunciation is rendered suspect by what follows as well as what preceded it. The succeeding examples, upon examination, do not demonstrate that lying is vicious, but that clumsy lying is dangerous.108 The lesson Montaigne draws from

102 III, 3, 798-99.
104 I, 12, 791.
105 Cf. Guizot, Montaigne, pp. 42-53. Armaingaud ("Etude") frequently relies on Montaigne's self-description as a literal record of his life—e.g., at pp. 5, 8, 11, and 22-23—in spite of his recognition of the essayist's "prudence."
106 I, 9, 34-45.
107 I, 9, 37.
these examples is expressed at the beginning of the following chapter: some men have the gift of "facility and promptness" in speech (and hence can lie successfully, on the spot) while others do not, and get caught if they try to lie.\(^{109}\) Montaigne professes to be one of those who must speak without premeditation, i.e., *promptly*, which leads him, as he admits later, to lie at least occasionally.\(^{110}\) Elsewhere, we have seen, Montaigne gives us reason to doubt his lack of premeditation in the *Essays*, but he amply confirms in several other passages his tendency to dissimulate. He admits to not having done everything he says; to lying by exaggerating the good qualities of others; to exaggerating his subject in other respects; to feigning credence in stories which he entirely disbelieves; and to "erring" on purpose.\(^{111}\) As for the lack of memory which purportedly prevents Montaigne from lying, one must consider his statement elsewhere that he prefers to write "without the company of books."\(^{112}\) Observing the voluminous number of quotations from other books with which Montaigne fills the *Essays*, one infers that either this last claim or his asserted lack of memory (if not both) must be another lie. Montaigne further admits that his avoidance of public life is the result of his choice, not of any deficiency (such as forgetfulness).\(^{113}\)

Montaigne warns the attentive reader in even more specific terms that the *Essays* cannot be relied upon to give a frank and honest portrait of its author. He observes that one cannot really see into another person; "others do not see you at all, they guess at you by uncertain conjectures; they see not so much your nature as your art."\(^{114}\) Even in the foreword, Montaigne admits that he has revealed his "natural form" only so far as "respect for the public" has allowed; he has covered himself more than he would have if he "had been placed among those nations that are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws."\(^{115}\) Much as he might wish to portray himself "entire and totally naked," "even so, one must dress up, even so, one must order and arrange oneself to go out in public." Consequently, "I am constantly adorning myself, for I am constantly describing myself."\(^{116}\) In an age of "dissimulation," one must be especially cautious about believing anyone when he "speaks of himself"; men

\(^{109}\) I, 10, 40.

\(^{110}\) II, 17, 631.

\(^{111}\) I, 14, 65; II, 17, 637, 642; III, 11, 1004-5.

\(^{112}\) III, 5, 852. Cf. also I, 26, 173, and I, 48, the first sentence, with Butor, *Essais*, pp. 45-46, regarding Montaigne's "memory."

\(^{113}\) III, 9, 966. Cf. also II, 17, 623, where some subtle reasoning leads to the implicit conclusion that Montaigne's shortness of stature does not unfit him for political office either.

\(^{114}\) III, 2, 785.

\(^{115}\) "Au Lecteur," p. 9.

\(^{116}\) *Ibid. ;* II, 6, 358.
customarily "form" and "fashion" themselves to lie. But the age also requires that one dissimulate in speaking of others and uncovering their pretensions, for modern men are particularly sensitive about being contradicted and "given the lie." Montaigne has been saved from suffering harm for his "indiscreet liberty" of speech only by his "favorable visage," in which people can easily "read...the simplicity of my intentions." But "the face is a weak guarantee"; "anyone can put on a good face outside," and especially someone with Montaigne's admitted ability at adapting his "visage," his "voice," and his "gesture" to "the roles I undertook"; thus men "do not see my heart, they see only my countenance." By similarly putting on a "favorable mien," Caesar deceived and defeated his enemies.

Montaigne has in effect warned us that his own "favorable visage," his pretense of innocent frankness, may be no more trustworthy than Caesar's was. Therefore, no particular statement the author makes should be accepted uncritically either as necessarily representing his true thought or as honestly descriptive of his life and character. This implies, moreover, that the apparent contradictions which abound in the Essays do not necessarily indicate that Montaigne's opinions vacillated as he wrote. Montaigne suggests ample reason why he might wish to moderate the public impression created by his boldest remarks by other assertions which appear more conventional in spirit. Recalling the author's reference to the technique of surrounding a solid argument with others that, if scrutinized, prove to be insubstantial, the serious reader of the Essays must seek to determine whether a particular remark is actually supported by the body of Montaigne's argument. After reading the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," with its far-reaching critique of the evidence for human beliefs, for instance, one must be sensitive to the irony of Montaigne's apparently uncritical recounting of a series of more or less fantastic stories in another chapter entitled, appropriately, "Of the Power of the Imagination." Incautious indeed was the critic who assumed that Montaigne swallowed these stories whole, and attributed his "credulity" to "the ignorance of his age." Rather than patronizing Montaigne in this way, one would do well to bear in mind his bold statement that "I am not obliged not to say

117 II, 18, 649-50.
118 III, 12, 1040.
119 I, 26, 176; III, 12, 1037; II, 16, 609.
120 II, 34, 714.
121 Cf. III, 8, 915, on the need to scrutinize an author's reasoning in order to understand what he is really saying; and the advice of Armaingaud ("Etude," pp. 32-33) on how carefully the Essays must be read.
stupid things at all, provided that I do not fool myself in recognizing them. And to err knowingly is so ordinary for me that I hardly ever err in any other way; I never slip up fortuitously.”

This claim of Montaigne’s may seem to be invalidated by the numerous seemingly trivial “errors” scholars have discovered in the *Essays*: the confusion of two different men having the same name; errors in chronology and arithmetic; attribution of a quotation to the wrong author; and so on. But further examination reveals that at least some of these apparent slips are almost certainly intentional ones. Montaigne “confuses” two different Scipios, for instance, after having mocked the pedants who make a great deal out of an author’s having “taken one of the Scipios for the other.” He refers expressly to the occasional “transposition[s] of chronology” that occur in the *Essays* immediately after emphasizing the care with which one ought to prepare a book for publication and describing his “plan” of displaying “extreme carelessness.” Surely, too, it is difficult to believe that a writer of Montaigne’s erudition, who continually worked over and revised his book, could have committed and left standing a simple error in subtraction without being conscious of it.

Whatever else these probably intentional “errors” may demonstrate, as a whole they suggest even further how unreliable the *Essays* is as a literal record of Montaigne’s life. These errors are matched by a great number of contradictions or near-contradictions in the essayist’s account of his own tastes, habits, upbringing, and temperament. For example, Montaigne’s claim that he inherited a violent hatred and contempt for the teachings of doctors from his father, who (he says) spent his whole life without ever tasting any medicine, is certainly rendered suspect by a later reference to his customarily following a prescription of his father’s doctor for drinking wine. Nor can one easily square Montaigne’s contiguous statements about his adaptability and his subordination to habit without further inquiry into his meaning.

Given the likelihood that Montaigne’s “errors” and contradictions in his self-portrayal are intentional, it is also naive to assume, as commentators have done, that one can confidently discern indications of his true “personality” in the discrepancies between what he says about himself and the facts of his life as they are known from other sources. The critics have been amused, for instance, to note Montaigne’s “vanity” in exaggerating the nobility of his ancestry while mocking
others who do so; in underestimating the trouble to which he went (according to his Travel Journal) to obtain an honorary certificate of Roman citizenship; and in entailing his estate after criticizing the concern men evince by that practice to obtain a "ridiculous eternity" for their names.\textsuperscript{129} The irony that the first two instances of "vanity" occur in a chapter entitled "Of Vanity" has not been sufficiently considered. Their placement certainly suggests that Montaigne was conscious of the "vanity," real or apparent, of his remarks. It is even likely that he expected this "vanity" to be discovered; he could not have expected to keep secret the recent origin of his family title. In any case, it is unwise to assume that Montaigne inserted these "vain" remarks simply because he was concerned with enhancing his personal reputation.

If Montaigne did not really seek to provide the reader with an accurate record of his life, what then is the purpose of his self-description? It is the fundamental vehicle that Montaigne employs to convey a teaching about how one ought to live. In several early chapters of Book I, for instance, Montaigne appears to adopt a "Stoical" posture towards death, upholding as models of human virtue men who have steeled themselves in advance, through firm resolution, to face death fearlessly. One of the early chapters is entitled "To Philosophize Is To Learn How to Die." Even here, Montaigne's "Stoicism" is questionable: the chapter preceding the one just cited ends with Montaigne's expressing the wish to die "insensibly."\textsuperscript{130} As the book proceeds, the "Stoical" view is more openly questioned. A sort of turning point seems to be reached in chapter 6 of Book II, entitled "Of Practice." There, reporting the "personal" experience of having lost consciousness after falling from a horse, Montaigne argues that this experience is probably analogous to the feeling of those who are dying. Having felt "free from distress" and even finding the experience pleasurable, the essayist concludes: "we pity [the dying] without cause, supposing that they are agitated by grievous pains or have their soul oppressed by painful thoughts."\textsuperscript{131} This "experience" paves the way for Montaigne's conclusion, quite opposite to that of the Stoics, in the penultimate chapter:

It is certain that to most people preparation for death has given more torment than the dying. . . . If you don't know how to die, don't worry; Nature will tell you on

\textsuperscript{129} I, 46, 267-68; II, 8, 378; III, 9, 948, 978; and Frame, Works, notes on pp. 289, 741, 765. Armaingaud ("Etude," p. 6) indicates that Montaigne dissimulated even in his private family records. One may not, therefore, assume the truthfulness of the Travel Journal either.

\textsuperscript{130} I, 19, 79.

\textsuperscript{131} II, 6, 354. On II, 6 as "turning point," cf. Sayce, The Essays of Montaigne, p. 134.
the spot, fully and adequately. She will do this job perfectly for you; don't bother your head about it.\textsuperscript{132}

The example of Montaigne's treatment of death typifies the overall movement of the \textit{Essays}. The author first seeks to win his readers' confidence by appealing to a prejudice they are likely to share: the admiration both of classical wisdom, especially its Stoical aspect, and of the classical model of the morally virtuous man, exemplified by Cato the Younger. The classical models are questioned even in the early chapters; but the questioning here is largely in the form of a subtle irony.\textsuperscript{133} The very "impersonality" of these chapters serves, however, to indicate (as Villey perceived) that they do not truly represent the beliefs of the "self" that emerges more clearly later in the \textit{Essays}. Before that "self" is likely to be accepted as a model by Montaigne's readers, the grounds of the philosophical, religious, and moral beliefs that would prevent such acceptance must be undermined. This undermining is a gradual process that reaches a peak in the "skepticism" of the "Apology for Raymond Sebond." The argument of the "Apology" is conducted on at least two levels. Its more obvious level is a kind of popularized relativism aimed at shaking the faith of the generality of Montaigne's readers in Christianity and in the traditional morality. At a deeper level, Montaigne sets forth a carefully reasoned argument explaining the grounds of his disagreement with classical political philosophy, which opposed such an attempt to revolutionize the popular moral and religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{134} Finally, in Book III, the new "morality" that is to replace the old one emerges in its charm and its brazenness. The liberation of the "self" found here by Villey and other scholars is the rhetorical tool by which Montaigne aims to inspire a liberation of human selfishness, and a turning away of men's concerns from God and country to the peaceful pursuit of earthly pleasures. Only a thorough analysis of Montaigne's political teaching in the \textit{Essays}, toward which I hope to contribute in future publications, could explain why Montaigne aimed to inspire this change of attitude in humanity. Suffice it to say here, however, that Guizot grasped the point of Montaigne's rhetoric well when he called the essayist "a putter-to-sleep of consciences."\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{132} III, 12, 1028.

\textsuperscript{133} For instance, after having stated it to be the duty of good men to pursue virtue as being as beautiful as possible (I, 37, 227), Montaigne presents Cato the Younger as the supreme example of virtue (as opposed to "goodness") "in his proudest posture... all bloody, tearing out his bowels" (II, 13, 594). We are not surprised to learn of Montaigne's concurrence in the judgment that "so beautiful an action[!] would have been unbecomingly located in any other life than Cato's" (II, 11, 404).

\textsuperscript{134} I have set forth a detailed analysis of this argument in ch. 3 of my doctoral dissertation.

\textsuperscript{135} Guizot, \textit{Montaigne}, pp. 52, 254.
If this account of the didactic function of Montaigne's "self-portrayal" is correct, it is evident that the Essays can no more be taken as a historically accurate picture of their author than the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon can be assumed to constitute a simple, faithful, historical record of the life of Socrates. Rather, the "Montaigne" described in the Essays is a literary persona who must be distinguished from the "historical" Montaigne, of whom we have practically no independent knowledge and whom it may be unnecessary to know in order to understand his book.

To some critics it has seemed that questioning the avowed "good faith" and simple honesty of the Essays, as has just been done, is tantamount to convicting its author of moral turpitude. But by elevating Montaigne's "moral" stature, his apologists lower his intellectual rank: he becomes the author of an amusing but essentially aimless book, full of "errors" and superstitions which scholars attribute to his "carelessness" or to "the ignorance of his age." For all Villey's adulation of Montaigne, he finds in the Essays no particular originality or unusual depth of thought, but only an especially felicitous expression of the "collective thought" of his century. Villey goes so far as to explain the apparent disorder of the Essays by saying that "the men of the sixteenth century do not know how to compose," as if Montaigne lacked the intelligence to rise above the level of the "compilers" he mocked. There is much that Villey and other literary critics of recent times have found entertaining and stylistically deft in the Essays; but, as one can readily judge from the content of the studies usually made of Montaigne, little has been found in this thought, and particularly his political thought, that is still worthy of serious contemplation. The implicitly patronizing analyses of the "evolution" of Montaigne's beliefs make it appear doubtful that the reader of our "enlightened" age might learn important things from the Essays which he does not already know.

To save Montaigne's reputation for honesty by this mode of interpretation is hardly to do him honor. The simplistic moral horizon of the critics, moreover, fails to take account, as Montaigne's thought does, of the possibility that dissimulation may be justifiable as a means to some goals, such as the public good or one's own preservation.

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137 Villey, Montaigne devant la postérité, p. 3. Villey's studies of Montaigne's influence show that others took Montaigne's thought seriously, but Villey himself does not consider his thought in a serious manner.


139 Cf. Essais, III, 12, 1033.
from unjust persecution.\textsuperscript{140} Distinguishing between "the useful and the honorable" (or "honest"), Montaigne declares that "the public good requires that one betray and lie."\textsuperscript{141} Private men may seek to remain pure and righteous, but "affairs of state have bolder precepts."\textsuperscript{142} Thus the conduct of public affairs is properly a matter for men with stronger, less delicate consciences.\textsuperscript{143} Montaigne's advice to princes, if read carefully, hardly evinces an overriding concern for honesty. While warning against the "folly" of "saying everything," he merely cautions them not "to make a profession of covering up." One may successfully "deceive men once or twice"; indeed, by a single breach of his word, a prince might secure his affairs permanently. Princes commonly lack the prudence, however, to avoid lying so frequently that they are no longer believed.\textsuperscript{144} Although he expresses himself more reservedly, the "honest" Montaigne says nothing here about the value of honesty that contradicts the advice given by that infamous counselor of princes Machiavelli (to whom Montaigne explicitly refers in the same essay), in chapter 18 of \textit{The Prince}.

If Montaigne's proclaimed honesty and frankness are a deceptive rhetorical tool, however, they are also something more. Montaigne's substantive \textit{purpose} in the \textit{Essays} is to undermine those moral and religious conventions which obstruct men's freedom of thought and expression, as well as their freedom to indulge themselves in earthly pleasures. Butor is correct in attributing to Montaigne the vision "of a state of the world where it would finally be possible to be sincere."\textsuperscript{145} But Montaigne recognized clearly, as most of his twentieth-century interpreters (who take these things for granted) do not, the political and moral \textit{preconditions} and ramifications of the triumph of "sincerity" and toleration. The final task of this study will be to indicate that Montaigne's intention \textit{was} a fundamentally political one.

\textsuperscript{140} The apolitical character from which the merely "literary" analysis of the \textit{Essays} suffers is exemplified by Zeitlin's complaint of Montaigne's lack of "moral courage" in not stating his thinly concealed views on witchcraft more forthrightly (Zeitlin, \textit{Essays}, III, p. 414). Zeitlin has not adequately considered the lesson Montaigne conveys in chs. 5, 6, and 15 of Book I (and elsewhere) that the most direct and open mode of attack is likely to be unsuccessful as well as dangerous when one confronts a more powerful "enemy." Cf. \textit{Essais}, II, 8, 375; Armaingaud, "Etude," pp. 198-203; and Machiavelli, \textit{Discourses}, III, 2.

\textsuperscript{141} III, 1, 768. (The word "honnette" can mean either "honest" or "honorable." ) At III, 1, 774, Montaigne even questions whether any "useful" things may be called "deshonnêtes."

\textsuperscript{142} III, 9, 969-70.

\textsuperscript{143} III, 1, 768.

\textsuperscript{144} II, 17, 631-32 (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{145} Butor, \textit{Essais}, p. 214.
III. Montaigne’s Political Intention

Montaigne’s proclamation of his own honesty, we have seen, is closely linked throughout the *Essays* to a profession of incapacity for public life which, upon examination, proves to be ironic. Toward the end of the book, that pretense of inability to “benefit others” is replaced by an admission that he has avoided public life out of choice rather than incompetence. Montaigne is “disgusted with mastery, both active and passive.”146 In public, a man must live as others tell him to, rather than as he pleases.147 Montaigne finds it “bad and unnatural” to abandon healthy and gay living in order to serve others.”148

As his argument proceeds further, however, Montaigne indicates the possibility of a political role which is not incompatible with the pleasures of a private life. He reports “taking part in public office without departing from myself by the width of a fingernail, and giving myself to others without taking myself from myself.”149 Nor is such an attitude on the part of a governor necessarily contrary to the interests of the governed: Montaigne’s administration as mayor of Bordeaux was one of “order” and “sweet and mute tranquility,” which he suggests was no mean accomplishment, especially given the strife-torn condition of France at that time. Montaigne’s very lack of ambition saved him from the “iniquitous and quite common disposition” of seeking to “exalt and honor” an administration by “the trouble and sickness of affairs.”150 Montaigne’s account of himself as one who demands less than he deserves conforms to Aristotle’s description of the equitable man and to Plato’s portrayal of the “true” ruler as one who does not seek to “get the better” of other men.151

Montaigne gradually suggests that he is in fact eminently qualified to be of great benefit to the public, and is prevented from demonstrating his qualification only by “fortune.” “Fortune” has placed his position in life too low for his actions to be worthy of record.152 Fortune, rather than merit, largely determines the distribution of “dignities and offices”; consequently “the chief places are commonly seized by the least capable men, and greatness of fortune is hardly ever found in combination with ability.”153 Seeing governments “seized by incapable men,” some wise

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146 III, 7, 896.
147 III, 9, 970.
148 III, 10, 984.
149 III, 10, 985.
150 III, 10, 998-99, 1002.
152 III, 9, 922; note the similarity to the epistle dedicatory of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*; and cf. Butor, *Essais*, pp. 36-37.
individuals, competent in action as in knowledge, have withdrawn from politics.\textsuperscript{154} This seems to exemplify a more general problem: by chance, men who could be of great benefit to others are not known to those whom they would benefit and who could support them in return; consequently, "rare and remarkable persons," as well as those they could benefit, are left in "extreme need." \textsuperscript{155} Although Montaigne himself does not suffer from poverty, his talents too have been overlooked: no one thought to use him, at the right age, in the office of which he was capable, as an adviser to kings.\textsuperscript{156}

The charge of which Montaigne professes himself capable is a most important one. The publicity of a king's actions ought to operate as "a singular incitement to virtue" for the monarch. However, this motive is rendered ineffectual because the conduct of kings is badly judged, both by the people, whose understanding is weak, and who are prohibited in any case from expressing a critical judgment of their ruler during his lifetime, and by most royal advisers, who fear to speak against their master's wishes.\textsuperscript{157} Kings need to be safeguarded by "good education and good advice" against the poisonous effect of flattering speech.\textsuperscript{158} As things are, whatever "good qualities" monarchs possess are "dead and wasted," while their "defects and vices" are "authorized" by the flattery of their servants and subjects. Both the king and those below him are prevented from giving a "sincere judgment" on most matters by their relations of "superiority and inferiority," which force men into a "natural envy and contention." \textsuperscript{159} Montaigne, however, places himself considerably outside these relations, as one who has no wish to be master over others, and does not even demand as much as he deserves. His judgment is not "infected" by partisanship, nor is he blind to the defects of those to whom he is loyal.\textsuperscript{160} He further conforms to the requirement that a royal adviser be possessed of a middling fortune with which he is "content," giving him the advantage of ready "communication with all sorts of people" without being dependent on the king's favor for his maintenance.\textsuperscript{161} Montaigne's best qualities, which he has found "useless in this age," his fidelity and conscience, frankness and independence, would serve him well, he suggests, in the office he describes.\textsuperscript{162} While having the courage to speak frankly

\textsuperscript{154} I, 25, 134.
\textsuperscript{157} III, 7, 896; I, 3, 18-19; III, 13, 1054-56.
\textsuperscript{158} I, 51, 293. Cf. The Prince, ch. 23.
\textsuperscript{159} III, 7, 896-98.
\textsuperscript{160} III, 10, 989.
\textsuperscript{161} III, 13, 1055; II, 17, 626.
\textsuperscript{162} II, 17, 629; III, 13, 1055-56.
to the monarch, he would know how to give his advice prudently and hence most effectively (as one may judge from his many remarks about the art of speaking and writing).\textsuperscript{163}

The point of Montaigne's recommendation of himself as an adviser to kings in the last chapter of the \textit{Essays} can be grasped only if the reader recognizes its subtle relation to the discussion that immediately follows it. From the subject of the need of monarchs for guidance and good counsel, Montaigne turns quite abruptly to a review of the purpose of his book, which he calls "a register of the essays of my life." But the words with which this new discussion begins, "\textit{en fin}"—"in sum" or "in conclusion"—may also imply that it is linked with, or follows from, the preceding argument. There follows a lengthy "account" by Montaigne of "the practice that has guided me thus far." No longer pretending that his book is of no concern to others, he invites them to imitate his example. "For bodily health," he asserts, "no one can furnish more useful experience than I."\textsuperscript{164} Montaigne has previously indicated the need for reliable records of "experience" as a foundation for the science of "medicine."\textsuperscript{165} Although he appears to deny at this point the utility of his book as a guide to the health of the soul, he has already suggested that his remarks about "medicine" are meant to be applied to the soul as well as the body, to which the soul is so intimately linked.\textsuperscript{166} In fact, the discussion which follows from here to the end of the book culminates in a treatment not merely of the preservation of life but of life's goal. Montaigne openly holds up his own way of life at the end as an example for other men, contrasting it with the erroneous views of "the people" concerning the best life.\textsuperscript{167}

The link between Montaigne's discussion of the precepts of his life and the preceding theme of advice to kings now begins to emerge. Perhaps it is not necessary for Montaigne to be officially appointed a royal "adviser" in order to succeed in guiding the conduct of kings and governments. He may have a far greater and longer lasting influence by means of his \textit{book}.\textsuperscript{168} Further evidence of this intention may be found in his discussion of "historians."

Montaigne distinguishes three classes of historians. The "simple" ones, lacking the ability to "mix in anything of their own," merely "register in good faith everything" that "comes to their notice,"

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{163} III, 13, 1056.
\item \textsuperscript{164} III, 13, 1056-57.
\item \textsuperscript{165} II, 37, 763.
\item \textsuperscript{166} III, 4, 808; III, 13, 1057; I, 21, 103; II, 12, 547. Montaigne defines medicine broadly, as comprising "everything that is found to be salubrious for our life" (II, 37, 745).
\item \textsuperscript{167} III, 13, 1090.
\item \textsuperscript{168} Cf. the epistle dedicatory of \textit{The Prince}, where Machiavelli, despite his "lowly" status as a private citizen, undertakes "to regulate the government of princes."
\end{enumerate}
“without choice or selection.” By presenting the reader with “the material of history, naked and unformed,” they “leave our judgment intact to discern the truth.” At the other extreme are the few most excellent writers of history, who “have the capacity to choose what is worth knowing” and rightfully “assume the authority to regulate our belief by their own.” But the third, middle class of historians “spoil everything for us” by wrongfully giving themselves “the right to judge.” By omitting as “incredible” whatever they do not understand, they prevent us from learning the truth.169

In claiming to represent his “experience” uncorrupted by “art” or “opinion,” Montaigne appears to place himself among the “simple” historians.170 He is at pains throughout the Essays to emphasize the variability of things and events, in opposition to narrow and particular human interpretations of the world. He appears to bend over backward to avoid obscuring the phenomena by interpretation, repeating uncritically stories derived from authors who themselves expressed doubts about their credibility.171 Further consideration of this practice, however, would suggest that it cannot properly be called “historical fidelity” in the usual sense. Montaigne in fact indicates, at the conclusion of a chapter filled with stories illustrating “the power of the imagination,” that his aim is “to speak of what can happen” rather than merely what has happened. He selects from the histories; he reads those stories which are “most rare and memorable.” While denying that he falsifies his reports out of “conscience,” he leaves open the possibility that he may do so out of “knowledge”; elsewhere, we have seen, he admits to “errring” knowingly. He suggests one reason for his filling the Essays with stories of events long past: there is no danger in “an old report” being “this way or that.”172

Montaigne’s remarks about his “historical fidelity” square with what we have learned from his admissions about the deceptiveness of his “frankness” in portraying himself. Contrary to the surface impression conveyed by his rhetoric, Montaigne’s “history” is selected and contrived to convey a particular understanding of things. Rather than writing merely as a “simple” historian, Montaigne has taken upon himself the authority he allows to very few men to “regulate our belief.” Through the influence of his book, both directly and indirectly, he may guide the understanding other men have of the nature of things,

169 II, 10, 396-97. Montaigne’s designation of those who rightfully claim “the authority to regulate our belief” places in an interesting light his supposed profession of obeisance to the Church, quoted earlier, in which he submits “to the judgment of those whose concern it is . . . to regulate my thought” (I. 56, 302). Society, he has already indicated, ought not to possess this authority (I. 23, 117).

170 III, 13, 1056.


172 I, 21, 104-5 (emphasis added).
including human nature. This guidance may have important effects on men’s conception of the proper way of life and, consequently, on the political arrangements they adopt to secure it.

Montaigne continually denies that he has any public ambitions and that he seeks to change the political order in any way. But he suggests that one who exercises his own judgment, as he does, will find much to question and challenge in existing customs and institutions. He warns us, moreover, that greater ambition may lurk in the very denial of ambition (shades of Caesar again!). In explaining that he has chosen to record his thoughts, rather than his actions, because fortune has placed the latter on too low a level to be worthy of note, he implies that his thoughts are noteworthy. Montaigne does not banish all glory from his book; he merely disdains praise of its style, for he denies “that the perfection of fine speaking could bring any glory suitable to a great personage.” In spite of the admitted strength of his self-love and his preference for a private life, he is also prone to devote himself to “the little people,” perhaps because “there is more glory in it.” He is not prevented from obtaining glory by the “lowness” of his actions because a man’s great thoughts, as conveyed through his writings, may secure him a glory rivaling that of Alexander and Caesar. The greatest men have “instructed” the world as well as “regulating” it by governments and laws; we have just seen evidence of Montaigne’s similarly undertaking to “regulate” our belief. He cites a remark of Plato to indicate that the “immortal children” of men like Lycurgus, Solon, and Minos—i.e., the laws given by these great legislators—“immortalize” and even “deify” their fathers.

We are led to suspect that, in recommending himself as a counselor to kings, Montaigne seeks an immortality surpassing even that won by the famous legislators, by acting as a teacher of legislators, or a legislator-founder in the deeper sense. He is not dependent for his success on a royal appointment; the means of his political activity is his book and the teaching it conveys to other “men of understanding,” who will in turn extend Montaigne’s influence still further. The Essays is a “private” project only in the sense that it is undertaken by a private citizen, one not charged officially with the conduct of public affairs; its implications are of the greatest consequence, however, for the public.

173 I, 23, 115-16.
175 III, 9, 922.
176 I, 40, 243-45.
177 III, 13, 1078.
178 II, 8, 380-83; II, 12, 481-82. Montaigne replaces Darius in Plato’s list of statesmen (Phaedrus 258b-c) with Minos, thus making it more strictly a list of legislator-founders. Montaigne is somewhat more emphatic than Plato’s Socrates in saying that these men are deified, not merely thought to be so. (Minos, of course, is a prime example of deification, since he was reputed to be the son of Zeus.)
TECHNOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND POLITICAL VIRTUE:
THE CASE OF BILLY BUDD, SAILOR *

THOMAS J. SCORZA

Billy Budd, Sailor is an emphatically political novel. Even a cursory reading of the “Inside Narrative” reveals such an array of political themes that one is tempted to conclude that Melville intended his last work to be a comprehensive poetic introduction to political science. In effect, the author presents characters and events which compel the reader to reflect upon a wide variety of the fundamental problems in political science and political philosophy; among the problems thus raised are the following: the contrasts between the natural and the conventional, and between the demands of justice and the limits of law; the conflicts between authority and egalitarianism, and between conservatism and revolution; the contest between religious politics and secular ideology; and the question of the prerogatives and limitations of statesmanship. In light of the variety of political themes in the novel, it is not surprising that much of the criticism of Billy Budd has also tended to concentrate on political questions. Indeed, the two most prominent camps of criticism divide along political lines and form on opposite sides of the issues raised by the novel’s political themes. One camp argues that Billy Budd is Melville’s final conservative “testament of acceptance” of convention, law, authority, and Christianity, while the other sees the novel as Melville’s final revolutionary “testament of resistance” to evil in the name of nature, justice, equality, and the Rights of Man.¹ In both camps, Billy Budd is a victim, but while one

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camp regards Billy's execution as sacrificial and redemptive, the other sees the execution as an indication of the horror of acquiescence to the status quo; correspondingly, Captain Vere is a hero in one camp, but a villain in the other. In all, the gulf between the two camps is so wide, and their interpretations of Billy Budd are so opposed, that some "neutral" critics have wondered whether the novel does have any real form or definite meaning; after all, a work which may be read to mean anything is a work without fixed significance.  

The two critical camps share the common assumption that Melville is to be understood finally as a proponent of a modern political ideology; in effect, one would have Melville be a follower of Burke, the other would have him a follower of Paine.  

This common assumption may be countered by observing that Billy Budd has an informing and underlying political theme which in fact calls all of modernity into question. This theme, which runs throughout the character sketches and events of the novel, points out the destructive effect upon political virtue of modern science, technology, and philosophy. At the very least, this theme reveals that Melville's supposed preferences for conservatism or revolution in the late eighteenth or nineteenth century were expressed within a frame which opposed the whole of modern times to the pre-modern past and celebrated the lost virtues of that


3 According to Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Seals, Jr., the editors of the definitive edition of Billy Budd, "the opposing positions" of Burke and Paine "concerning the doctrine of abstract natural rights lie behind the dialectic" of the novel (Herman Melville, Bill Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 138). This text will hereinafter be referred to as Billy Budd, followed by the chapter numbers of the "Reading Text" or the title of an editorial section, and page numbers.
past. In fact, a close reading of the novel will demonstrate Melville's understanding of the limitations of both Burke and Paine and will reveal that Melville's rejection of modernity was so comprehensive that he even dismissed Rousseau, a great critic of modernity, as yet another modern philosopher. In a sense, *Billy Budd* is Melville's "testament of rejection" and an indictment of the modern Enlightenment and its modern critics, Rousseau and Burke.

The very first words of the "Inside Narrative" point to the technologically backward past. "In the time before steamships, or then more frequently than now," there existed a phenomenal character, the "Handsome Sailor." This "Aldebaran" was found typically in the center of a company of his shipmates, accepting from them the "spontaneous homage" won by his unaffected "natural regality." Presumably, the "prosaic" present time of advanced technology and advanced science, which have produced the steamship, is inimical to this "natural regality," causing it to become extinct or, at least, rare. Moreover, a full understanding of the character of the "Handsome Sailor" reveals that the "Handsome Sailor" type is itself a representation of a universalized archetype of the far more distant and, in fact, pre-scientific past. This is indicated by the narrator's memory of the "remarkable instance" of a Black Handsome Sailor; "this black pagod of a fellow" was encountered some fifty years ago amid a group of mariners "of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anacharsis Cloots before the bar of the first French Assembly as Representatives of the Human Race." This "motley retinue" showed that "sort of pride" in the Black Handsome Sailor "which the Assyrian priests doubtless showed for their grand sculptured Bull when the faithful prostrated themselves." Hence, the "Handsome Sailor" type, initially and significantly compared to "Aldebaran," the star which is the eye of the constellation Taurus, the Bull, is meant to recall the time of the Assyrian Bull. The "Handsome Sailor" thus represents an archetype of the earliest historical past, and that archetype is mythological and pre-scientific.4

The primary characteristic of this universal and ancient archetype is an attunement to nature. Thus, the "Handsome Sailor" embodies unaffected "natural regality" without artificial vainglory. Moreover, the instance of the "unadulterate" and "barbaric" Black Handsome Sailor suggests that the "superior" stature of the archetype represented in

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the "Handsome Sailor" transcends the merely conventional national and ethnic distinctions which may otherwise divide his admirers. Since his superiority is according to nature, the Black Handsome Sailor evokes "spontaneous tribute" rather than conventionally enforced suspicion or prejudice. Finally, since this superiority is a natural endowment, the "Handsome Sailor" type represents a form of natural leadership which belies any artificial and purely conventional hierarchy which would assign a representative of the type, like the Black Handsome Sailor, to the rank of a mere "common sailor."

The natural superiority of the "Handsome Sailor" authorized his right to rule over his shipmates, who, as the instance of the Black Handsome Sailor shows, represent the whole Human Race. The archetypical "Handsome Sailor," the heavenly "Aldebaran" who embodies "natural regality," rules as god and king by natural and divine right. This claim to rule is in startling contrast to the egalitarianism of the first French Assembly to which Cloots brought his "Representatives of the Human Race" and by which both divinity and regality were abjured. While the Assembly denies any natural right to rule, the "Handsome Sailor" represents the ancient claim to temporal and spiritual rule as both king and god. This phenomenon of "the less prosaic time" thus embodies a natural hierarchy which distinguished a divinely authorized ruler from the ruled; this hierarchy is rejected by modern egalitarianism and atheism, and the character who most recently embodied it, however dimly, has been or is being destroyed by modern science and its technology, as here represented by the steamship.

The natural distinction of the "Handsome Sailor" type is based on his beauty, his strength, his professional proficiency, and a "moral nature" which orders or tones his physical attributes and which wins him "honest homage" from his shipmates. In all, the archetypical form of rule embodied by the "Handsome Sailor" is thus pre-scientific, mythological, natural, physical, and moral. It depends upon natural endowment rather than upon conventional distinction, and it was effectively and fully incarnate in the universalized, mythological, and distant past rather than in the immediate past or present. This natural form of rule is not only described without reference to modern intellectuality but in fact stems from a time prior to the differentiation of rational intellectuality as such, i.e., the time of Assyrian myths.


6 Ch. 1, p. 44. Compare the description of the "Handsome Sailor" with Aristotle Politics 1254b.27-39.
That is to say, the paradigm of naturally right rule is independent of wisdom and existed before philosophy.

The importance of this sketch of the "Handsome Sailor" is revealed by the fact that the narrator explicitly states that the title character, Billy Budd, is to be understood as he compares to and contrasts with the "Handsome Sailor." Billy Budd is a "Handsome Sailor," that is, "at least in aspect, and something such too in nature, though with important variations made apparent as the story proceeds." Now, Billy is unquestionably a "Handsome Sailor" in his "aspect," i.e., in his physical beauty. Also, Billy is a "Handsome Sailor" in that he is a "mighty boxer" and "a proficient in his perilous calling"; aboard the Rights-of-Man, Billy easily drubbed the annoying Red Whiskers, and aboard the Bellipotent, he is quickly "rated as an able seaman." Moreover, beyond these physical and professional similarities, Billy is like the "Handsome Sailor" in "nature": science or knowledge is also a missing ingredient in his character. Billy, like the "Handsome Sailor," is a character who is essentially pre-scientific and who exists independent of knowledge. As the narrator states it, "with little or no sharpness of faculty or any trace of the wisdom of the serpent, nor yet quite a dove, he possessed that kind and degree of intelligence going along with the unconventional rectitude of a sound human creature, one to whom not yet has been proffered the questionable apple of knowledge." Billy, like the "Handsome Sailor," is naturally "sound" because he is without wisdom or the love of wisdom.  

However, there are "important variations" between the natures of Billy Budd and the "Handsome Sailor." First, Billy certainly possesses none of the "Handsome Sailor"'s actual or residual political nature, and his natural habitat is thus not in the ruling center of a ship's society. In fact, Billy is pre-political: "Billy in many respects was little more than a sort of upright barbarian, much such perhaps as Adam presumably might have been ere the urbane Serpent wriggled himself into his company." And again, the case of Billy Budd leads to the narrator's observation that it is observable that where certain virtues pristine and unadulterate peculiarly characterize anybody in the external uniform of civilization, they will upon scrutiny seem not to be derived from custom or convention, but rather to be out of keeping with these, as if indeed exceptionally transmitted from a period prior to Cain's city and citified man.

Secondly, unlike the "Handsome Sailor," who is a "champion" and "a spokesman," Billy is "foremost" only as plunder for the impressing

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7 The quotations in this paragraph are from ch. 1, pp. 44, 47, and 49; ch. 2, p. 52. For a view of the thrashing of Red Whiskers as a prefiguration of the killing of Claggart, see Leonard Nathanson, "Melville's Billy Budd, Chapter 1," Explicator, XXII (1964), Item 75.
officer, and he is possessed of a defect in speech. Billy’s stutter, his impairment in logos, which is the foundation of political existence, is the symbol of his pre-political or apolitical nature.8

In his apparent physical robustness, his frequently mentioned similarity to the animals, his lack of knowledge and defect in speech, his apolitical character, and his natural barbarity, Billy Budd is an analogue of Rousseau’s savage man. Billy is, as Rousseau would have it, “strong and robust,” one of “the most advantageously organized” animals, and “committed to instinct alone.” A “foundling, a presumable by-blow” without known parents, Billy Budd is like a child of Rousseau’s savages, who “united fortuitously, depending upon encounter, occasion, and desire,” and who “left each other with the same ease.” Moreover, having witnessed a “formal gangway-punishment” for the first time, Billy reacts according to the “two principles anterior to reason” which characterize the soul of Rousseau’s savage man: he is “horrified” at another’s suffering, and he resolves to assure his own well-being by a special “punctiliousness in duty.” Billy is, in all, neither the product of a family bond nor a real member of a civilized society; he is an “upright barbarian” fresh from Rousseau’s state of nature.9

Insofar as Billy Budd’s nature is devoid of knowledge, he is similar to both Melville’s “Handsome Sailor” and Rousseau’s robust savage, but insofar as he is essentially pre-political, he is similar only to Rousseau’s model of natural man. The destruction of the “Handsome Sailor” by modern science and enlightened philosophy indicates Melville’s agreement with the anti-Enlightenment First Discourse, in which Rousseau detailed how “our souls have been corrupted in proportion to the advancement of our sciences and arts toward perfection.” On the other hand, the “Handsome Sailor”’s natural political superiority and his natural and divine right to rule indicate Melville’s disagreement with the Second Discourse, in which Rousseau portrayed natural men as apolitical, equal, and free.10 However, despite this latter disagreement

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8 Ch. 2, pp. 52-53; ch. 1, pp. 44-45; and ch. 2, p. 53. Billy’s speech defect is compared on p. 53 to the crimson blemish on Georgiana’s cheek in Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark.” Note that Georgiana is destroyed by her scientific husband, Aylmer.


10 Discourse on the Sciences and Arts, in First and Second Discourses, p. 39, and Discourse on Inequality, ibid., passim. Despite the strong internal evidence of Melville’s familiarity with the Discourses, there is no external evidence that he read or owned texts containing them. Melville did, however, buy and read a “much desired” copy of Rousseau’s Confessions. See Journal of a Visit to London and the
about the nature of natural man, Melville's original assignment of unenlightened Billy Budd to the Enlightenment's vessel, the *Rights-of-Man*, indicates the author's contention that Rousseau is truer to modern principles and more consistent in stripping his natural man of all the traits of artificial civilization, including Reason. Apparently, Billy Budd, as Rousseau's savage man, is to be seen as the real hero of modern "liberal" philosophy, and it is thus Billy Budd who will be tested in the real man-of-war world.\(^{11}\) The differences between the "Handsome Sailor" and Billy Budd, then, set the stage for Melville's demonstration of Rousseau's own errors; this demonstration takes place after Melville's total rejection of the dominant thought of the Enlightenment, a rejection which occurs at the very outset of the novel through the character sketches of the "Handsome Sailor" and Billy Budd.

Before relating the events of the narrative which will reveal the flaws of the modern "liberal" hero, Billy Budd, the narrator begins the introduction of the modern "conservative" hero, Captain Vere. Just as the description of the "Handsome Sailor" served as background for the sketch of Billy Budd, so now will the description of the Great Sailor, Lord Nelson, serve as background for the sketch of Captain Vere. Moreover, just as the "Handsome Sailor" initially called attention to a certain time, the technologically backward past, the Great Sailor initially calls attention to a certain time, the time of the political event of the modern age, the French Revolution. It is to be expected, thus, that the nature of Captain Vere will be revealed as it compares to and contrasts with the nature of the politically great Lord Nelson.

The time of the narrative is "the summer of 1797," a short time

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\(^{11}\) As an indication of Melville's understanding of Rousseau's differences from the "liberal philosophers," note that Rousseau is excluded from the list of philosophers used by Stephen Girard to name his vessels, despite the fact that the *Rousseau* was one of Girard's "finest ships* (Billy Budd, ch. 1, pp. 48, 138).
after the spring mutinies in the British fleet at Spithead and the Nore. The mutinies, although begun in response to "practical grievances," soon were "ignited into irrational combustion as by live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames." Whatever may have been said for the justice of the original discontent in the fleet (and in relation to the grievance over impressment, much could be said), the fact is that the mutinies came to threaten the very existence of Britain, "a Power then all but the sole free conservative one of the Old World." The narrator observes that the complexities of the time should militate against quick and easy judgment about right and wrong; as that time was lived, the "genius" of the era was not clearly revealed and thus presented "an eclipsing menace mysterious and prodigious." In any case, the spring mutinies were finally suppressed, and the mutineers went on "to win a coronet for Nelson at the Nile, and the naval crown of crowns for him at Trafalgar." The subject of Nelson is thus raised in reference to the "plenary absolution" of the British mutineers, and a quasi-soteriological relationship between the Great Sailor and the Empire is suggested from the outset.\(^{12}\)

The narrator's assertion that the material on Nelson will be "a bypath" is belied by the fact that his description of Nelson is obviously meant to parallel his description of the "Handsome Sailor." Thus, it is not surprising that he now returns to the novel's opening theme, the destructive influence of advanced technology upon a phenomenal human type. This return is concealed through considerable dissembling. While boldly asserting that the "nobler qualities" of naval heroes have not "become obsolete with their wooden walls," the narrator quietly admits that technological advances in sea warfare have caused "a certain kind of displayed gallantry [to] be fallen out of date." Moreover, he had recalled a prominent fact which runs counter to the thrust of his apparent defense of the continued existence of military valor; that is, he recalled that the first firearm had been "scouted by no few of the knights as a base implement, good enough peradventure for weavers too craven to stand up crossing steel with steel in frank fight." Any doubt about the narrator's real point is completely dispelled when he enters into his ostensibly unnecessary defense of Lord Nelson's gallant actions at Trafalgar and begins by saying, significantly, that Nelson's enshrined Victory is not only a monument to the man, but also "a poetic reproach...to the Monitors and yet mightier hulls of the European ironclads."\(^{13}\) It is clear, thus, that modern technological advances like "ironclads" and other "inventions of our time" have had the same destructive effect on Great Sailors as the steamship has had.

\(^{12}\) *Ibid.*, ch. 3, pp. 54-56; ch. 8, p. 66.

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, ch. 4, pp. 56-57. The dissembling of this "bypath" is noted by Stern, *Fine Hammered Steel*, p. 207.
on "Handsome Sailors." The actions of Nelson need to be defended precisely because modern technology has made courage otiose and "displayed gallantry" obsolete.

Further, the narrator reveals that the character of the Great Sailor, like the character of the "Handsome Sailor," runs counter to modern philosophical tenets. Thus, Nelson's "priestly" sacrifice at Trafalgar savors of "foolhardiness and vanity" to the modern tastes of "martial utilitarians" and "Benthamites of war." However, according to the narrator, these moderns are simply blind to the true nature of the Great Sailor. At Copenhagen, this same supposedly reckless Nelson was "pains-takingly circumspect" in the face of danger, and he thereby revealed that his actions are always directed and adjusted in terms of ends which are ignored by the "utilitarians": that is, the Great Sailor acts in terms of the ends of ultimate national victory and personal honor; he subordinates all considerations of means or method to these ends, and he is prepared both to make the greatest sacrifice for the greatest victory and to exercise the greatest care for lesser battles. The "utilitarians" actually presuppose that the highest good is self-preservation, while the Great Sailor is contemptuous of mere self-preservation. For Nelson, this dictate alone is binding: "Personal prudence, even when dictated by quite other than selfish considerations, surely is no special virtue in a military man; while an excessive love of glory, impassioning a less burning impulse, the honest sense of duty, is the first." 14

The homage won by the "Handsome Sailor" made him the personal foundation of a political community; the actions of the Great Sailor reveal that he is the preserver of the work of the founder; hence, in "the same year with this story," Nelson was assigned to the Theseus to restore order to that mutinous vessel.15 While the "Handsome Sailor" is an anomalous natural king, the Great Sailor is a conventionally distinguished natural nobleman, and while the "Handsome Sailor" is a universal phenomenon, the Great Sailor is a national phenomenon.16 In all, the Great Sailor complements the naturally prior character of the "Handsome Sailor" and completes Melville's picture of political virtue: a natural king, god, and founder is portrayed beside a national nobleman, priest, and savior; a character who ultimately points back to an ancient archetype drawn from a mythological and political natural

14 Ch. 4, pp. 57-58.
16 Hence all the "naval magnates" listed before the defense of Nelson are identified or easily identifiable with their countries (ch. 4, p. 56).
state is joined by a character who ultimately points back to an ancient archetypal drawn from an Aristotelian polis and an Aristotelian great-souled man. 17 Despite any distinctions between these two phenomenal types, however, they share a common fate: extinction at the hands of modern technology and philosophy.

Now, it is clear that Captain Vere has the aspect and something of the nature of a Great Sailor. At night, out of uniform and on the open deck, Captain Vere’s unadorned person nevertheless suggests to all “a virtue aristocratic in kind.” Vere is a naturally gallant “sailor of distinction even in a time prolific of renowned seamen.” He is “allied to the higher nobility”; he is always “mindful of the welfare of his men”; and he never tolerates “an infractions of discipline.” It is apparent that Vere’s discipline compares favorably to Nelson’s: Nelson was successfully sent to the Theseus “not indeed to terrorize the crew into base subjection, but to win them, by force of his mere presence and heroic personality,” back to loyalty, and Vere is also able to win conscientious attention to duty from the recently mutinous crew of the Bellipotent without resorting to despotism. While, on some vessels, the lieutenants felt compelled “to stand with drawn swords behind the men working the guns,” aboard the Bellipotent, “very little in the manner of the men and nothing obvious in the demeanor of the officers would have suggested to an ordinary observer that the Great Mutiny was a recent event.” The Bellipotent escaped both abrasive “precautionary” tactics by the officers and any resulting open hostility on the part of the crew, and the reason is attributable to Vere: “In their general bearing and conduct the commissioned officers of a warship naturally take their tone from the commander, that is if he have that ascendency of character that ought to be his.” 18 Vere’s aspect and natural qualifications are thus evidently those of a Great Sailor.

However, there is also an important variation between Vere and the Great Sailor. The narrator’s quotation of an “apt” remark about Vere reveals that his character, while in part like that of a Great Sailor, also differs from that of a Great Sailor: “Vere is a noble fellow, Starry Vere. ‘Spite the gazettes, Sir Horatio...is at bottom scarce a better seaman or fighter. But between you and me now, don’t you think there is a queer streak of the pedantic running through him? Yes, like the King’s yarn in a coil of navy rope?” This streak of the “King’s yarn,” not present in Nelson, is Vere’s “leaning toward everything intellectual.” In the eyes of his fellow-officers, Vere is “Starry” and a “dry and bookish” man because he reads non-technical and non-professional “books treating of actual men and events no matter of


18 Ch. 5, p. 59; ch. 6, pp. 59-60.
what era—history, biography, and unconventional writers like Montaigne, who . . . honestly and in the spirit of common sense philosophize upon realities.” Vere’s soul, that is, is laced by a love of prudential knowledge, and as his name suggests both vir and veritas, his is the soul of a man of practical or manly truth.

As a reader, Captain Vere does not have a purely philosophical interest in truth, for as a person of authority, he must act; in action, truth gives way to prudence. Not given to unrealistic philosophizing, Vere is an analogue of Burke’s statesman, whose thought and effort aim only at the concrete and particular good of his own regime, and not at the abstract good of the Rights of Man. Vere’s studies serve as the ground for the political principles upon which he acts, and he thus stands “as a dike against those invading waters of novel opinion social, political, and otherwise, which carried away as in a torrent no few minds in those days.” Vere, Burke’s statesman, “disinterestedly opposed” the innovators “not alone because they seemed to him insusceptible of embodiment in lasting institutions, but at war with the peace of the world and the true welfare of mankind.” Thus, Vere, Burke’s “philosopher in action” and captain or king of the Bellipotent, seems to have achieved that coincidence of philosophy and rule said by Socrates to promise an end to human or political ills.

Just as the nature of Billy Budd is a refracted image of the “Handsome Sailor” through the prism of Rousseau’s philosophy, so also is the character of Captain Vere a refracted image of the Great Sailor through the prism of Burke’s philosophy. As Billy is a particularly modern version of the ancient god-king, Vere is a particularly modern version of an ancient magnanimous man. Also, as the choice of the character of Billy Budd duplicates the critique of the Enlightenment contained in the very figure of the “Handsome Sailor,” so too does the choice of the character of Captain Vere duplicate the critique of the Enlightenment contained in the very figure of the Great Sailor. Hence, as the “Handsome Sailor”’s character questioned enlightened atheistic egalitarianism, and Billy Budd’s character questioned enlightened faith in

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19 Ch. 7, pp. 63, 62.


Reason, so does the Great Sailor's character question enlightened utilitarianism and Captain Vere's character question all enlightened "novel opinion." In all, Melville will test modern politics by testing the hero of Burke as well as the hero of Rousseau. Both Burke and Rousseau, though in different ways, attacked enlightened philosophy, and it is apparent thus that Melville agrees with Burke, as well as with Rousseau, insofar as he is an opponent of the Enlightenment; it will become apparent, however, that he disagrees with Burke's alternative to the Enlightenment just as he disagrees with Rousseau's.

It should be briefly noted that John Claggart, the character whose actions will reveal the flaws of Billy and Vere, is also sketched with reference to modern technology and modern thought. Claggart, who embodies a "natural depravity" which is seemingly impervious to the effects of historical change, nonetheless draws a certain benefit from modern technology and a certain protection from modern philosophy. In the first place, Claggart wins the position of "master-at-arms," an office which once involved "the instruction of the men in the use of arms, sword or cutlass," but which now, "owing to the advance in gunnery making hand-to-hand encounters less frequent," has become merely the office of a "chief of police charged among other matters with the duty of preserving order." An office which previously assigned an authoritative place to the courageous virtue needed in man-to-man fight thus has become, because of the technological advances of "niter and sulfur," an office for the preservation of mere discipline. It will be remembered that it was an *urbane* Serpent who wriggled his way into Adam's company with the "questionable apple of knowledge" and thus also with the basis of technology: as science and technology advance, civilization advances in complexity and therefore in its need for regimentation. Hence, the narrator observes, "Civilization, especially if of the austerer sort, is auspicious" to Claggart's depravity. Moreover, in the second place, modern thought, as represented by the jurisprudence of "Coke and Blackstone," has the effect of protecting vicious Claggart because it is unable to comprehend the full dimension of his evil. To understand Claggart as the embodiment of a "natural depravity," one must look to the "Hebrew prophets" or, if a non-biblical authority is demanded, to "the authentic translation of Plato." 21 In all, modern technology and philosophy not only destroy political virtue, but also promise success and concealment to political vice.

The action of the novel flows automatically from the juxtaposition of its three phenomenal characters. Claggart's immediate hatred for Billy Budd leads him to involve Billy in petty troubles and then to accuse him of mutinous intentions. This sets a series of events in motion which leads ultimately to the deaths of Claggart and Billy and to the

21 *Billy Budd*, ch. 8, p. 64, and ch. 11, p. 75.
shattering of Captain Vere. The primary purpose of these events is the demonstration of the limitations of the proposed modern heroes, Billy Budd and Captain Vere. Further, the events ultimately reveal what it is about modernity which is so destructive of political virtue.

First, it should be noted that Captain Vere’s actions and decisions are necessary ingredients in the “deplorable occurrence” which takes place in his cabin. Billy strikes and kills Claggart after the latter has accused him of mutinous intent, but it is Vere’s decision to have Claggart confront Billy with his charges which places Billy in the murderous situation in the first place. It is clear, on the one hand, that supposedly wise Vere is actually fundamentally mistaken about Billy’s character, and, on the other hand, that Vere’s reliance upon a rational and quasi-legal preliminary procedure to “practically test the accuser” is a major error. In the first place, Vere mistakenly expects Billy to respond to and refute Claggart’s charges, that is, Vere erroneously sees Billy as a real “Handsome Sailor,” who is a reliable “spokesman.” But Billy Budd is unable to speak and thus must necessarily resort to brute force; at his trial, Billy significantly says, “Could I have used my tongue I would not have struck him.” Moreover, in the second place, Vere’s reliance upon rationally and historically developed English procedure is ill-founded precisely because it makes no provision for Billy’s irrational action. Thus, on the one hand, Vere’s ignorance of Billy’s speech defect shows that the earlier suggestion that Vere was indeed both wise philosopher and king of the Bellipotent was erroneous, and on the other hand, Vere’s conventional procedure shows that Burke’s reasonable statesman, the “philosopher in action,” may actually contribute to political tragedy. Burke’s practical reason is not a reliable guide for action because it does not adequately provide against the irrational, and, in fact, it may provide the arena for the irrational’s tragic fruition. According to Melville, the celebration of even practical reason has engendered a blindness to the possibility of irrationality; Burke’s advocacy of practical reason over Enlightened “pure reason” does not save him from the dangerous error of ignoring the alogon. Thus, Burke’s conservatism has not disproven the Platonic contention that philosophic rule exists only “in speech.” In modern times, as well as in ancient, tragedy remains endemic to political life, at least where wisdom aspires to rule but cannot in fact rule. Perhaps politics without tragedy requires politics without philosophy.

Billy’s inability to respond to Claggart’s charges indicates the limitation of Rousseau’s savage. Faced with evil, Billy becomes an instrument of

22 Vere’s decision to test Claggart is explained in ch. 18, p. 96. Note that Vere is said (p. 95) to have “mistakenly” understood Billy’s adieu to the Rights-of-Man as a “satiric sally”; this is indicative of Vere’s misunderstanding of Billy, who is naturally incapable of satire, “sinister dexterity,” or “double meanings and insinuations of any sort” (ch. 1, p. 49). Billy’s trial remark is at ch. 21, p. 106.
evil: his arm shoots out at Claggart "quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night," and so Captain Graveling's "peacemaker" is turned into one of Lieutenant Ratcliffe's "fighting peacemakers," a cannon. Billy requires the peace of the world of the Rights of Man as much as he helped to create peace aboard the merchantman named in honor of Paine's tribute to those Rights. The real and natural existence of human evil and depravity causes the ultimate destruction of Rousseau's savage man and reveals the error in Rousseau's hero. Confronted with unavoidable evil, either in the comical form of Red Whiskers aboard the Rights or in the tragic forms of the afterguardsman and Claggart aboard the Bellipotent, Rousseau's natural man is forced into a state of war because he has no recourse to speech or conventional procedure. Thus, if the case of Captain Vere shows that practical reason is not a sufficient condition for peace, the case of Billy Budd shows that speech is a necessary condition for dealing with evil. In Melville's political state of nature, men speak but do not reason: the Typees, for instance, are sometimes eloquent, but they never dispute and thus would not "support a debating society for a single night." And while evil is natural and therefore always will exist, it is only in artificial, advanced civilization that evil can be cloathed and hidden by the "mantle" of "that manufacturable thing known as respectability," and it is therefore only in advanced civilization that evil is really efficacious.

It should be noted that the limitations or flaws revealed in Captain Vere and Billy Budd pertain to what Melville sees as their own modern elements. Burke's hero tragically attempts to use practical reason as a guide for action, and insofar as he attempts thereby to subordinate political life to the intellect, he commits essentially the same error as the "liberal philosophers" of the modern Enlightenment, who would have Reason purge politics of superstition, prejudice, and irrationality. Rousseau's hero is unable to speak, and this fatal flaw is merely Rousseau's radicalization of the notion he shared with the modern Enlightenment, namely, that men are by nature outside the polis. To be sure, both Burke and Rousseau in some sense rejected the Enlightenment by criticizing it, but Melville contends that neither Burke nor Rousseau transcended the Enlightenment. In tribute to their criticism, he entertains their heroes as the only possible modern heroes: indeed they are variants of the real, ancient heroes. (The ship's surgeon, who embodies modern science and is therefore closest to a true Enlightenment hero, is a mere caricature beside Billy and Captain Vere.) But Melville ultimately

24 Typee, ch. 27, p. 203; Billy Budd, ch. 2, p. 52, and ch. 11, p. 75. Compare Typee, ch. 18, p. 142, and Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts, p. 37, on the naked passions of savages.
25 On the surgeon, see Billy Budd, ch. 20, pp. 101-2, and ch. 26, pp. 124-25. According to Darrel Abel in " 'Laurel Twined with Thorn': The Theme of Melville's
rejects the proposed heroes of Burke and Rousseau, and his tribute to them thus falls far short of approbation.

Billy Budd is so largely a negative work that it is difficult to discern any proposal which Melville believes is a positive alternative to the Enlightenment. It may be that he merely wishes to show that no modern thinker has been able to solve the problems raised by modernity. Indeed, he even deprives the reader of whatever solace may be drawn from the fact that Captain Vere physically survives the tragedy aboard the Bellipotent; Vere dies at Gibraltar from a fatal wound received in a battle with the Athée, dechristened from the St. Louis, and it is thus apparent that the worst elements of modernity are triumphing over the best.26 One might conclude that Melville saw as the real tragedy of modern times the fact that there is no real answer to modernity. Paradise may be among the Typees, who live in “thoughtless happiness” amid natural plenty and merely comic evil, a life which can no longer be retrieved by modern men.27

This problem raises the question of the true nature of modernity’s destructive effect upon political virtue and human happiness. At the time of the “Inside Narrative,” this destruction has already taken effect, and its inner workings are hidden from the reader’s view: the “Handsome Sailor” and Great Sailor are already extinct or on the road to extinction. However, the reader does witness the ultimate destruction of the modern variants of these phenomenal types, and therein perhaps may be seen the true nature of destructive modernity. In fact, of course, this means that modernity might be revealed in Claggart’s hatred of Billy Budd because it is this hatred which leads to the tragic events of the novel, and it is the destruction of these two characters which is most directly viewed. Billy’s fate as Rousseau’s savage man exposed the errors of Rousseau, and Billy’s fate as a “Handsome Sailor” may expose the actual destruction of political virtue.

It will be recalled that Billy’s similarity in nature to the “Handsome Sailor” lay in his lack of knowledge and in his essentially pre-scientific character. This facet of Billy’s nature was revealed in terms of biblical

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Timoleon,” The Personalist, XLI (1960), Melville believed that “science and sophistry, if taken as ‘the whole truth,’ are both crass and stultifying approaches to reality” (p. 337).

26 Ch. 28, pp. 128-29.

27 See Typee, ch. 17, p. 128, where war takes the form of a “genteel comedy;” and ch. 27, p. 204, on the Typees “thoughtless happiness.” Note that the narrator of Billy Budd claims that his story is “no romance” (ch. 2, p. 53). Melville’s quasi-romantic celebration of the worlds of the Typees or the archetypical “Handsome Sailor” is the result not of a romantic, sentimental longing for an heroic past but rather of a sustained, intellectual critique of modernity. Thus, he places his last story a century before his contemporary romantic age, back into a time when the intellectual battle over the Enlightenment was still salient.
allusions to "the doctrine of man's Fall." Hence, Billy has no "trace of the wisdom of the serpent"; he had not yet been "proffered the question-able apple of knowledge"; and he was like Adam "ere the urbane Serpent wriggled himself into his company." 28 These biblical allusions occurred within a framework which actually related a secular version of the Fall of Man as a result of the "apple of knowledge," a variant of Rousseau's hypothesis that man evolves from a natural savage into a reflecting, reasoning, and therefore "depraved" animal. 29 Nevertheless, the biblical allusions are themselves important, for they point to the ultimate meaning of the novel. Thus, it is significant that John Claggart is explicitly given the role of the destructive Serpent in Billy Budd. Claggart's nature will "recoil upon itself" like Milton's Satan and "like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is responsible"; Claggart ascends "from his cavernous sphere" to accuse Billy of mutiny; his glance into stunned Billy's eyes is "one of serpent fascination"; and moving his corpse is "like handling a dead snake." 30 Thus, Claggart's antipathy toward Billy Budd actually results in the re-enactment of the original destruction of the unsophisticated "Handsome Sailor" by the purveyor of the apple of wisdom, knowledge, or science.

This Satanic Claggart has one trait which distinguishes him from Melville's earlier villains, Jackson in Redburn and Bland in White-Jacket: his intellectuality. His "brow was of the sort phrenologically associated with more than average intellect"; he was "dominated by intellectuality"; and he was "intellectually capable of adequately appreciating the moral phenomenon" of Billy Budd. In fact, Claggart's perceptive intellectuality and Billy's simplicity combine to account fully for Claggart's malice towards Billy: "If askance he eyed the good looks, cheery health, and frank enjoyment of young life in Billy Budd, it was because these went along with a nature that, as Claggart magnetically felt, had in its simplicity never willed malice or experienced the reactionary bite of that serpent." Unlike the god-like Dansker, whose knowledge of good, evil, and innocence leaves him yet aloof or transcendent, Claggart's similar knowl-ledge impels him to a "cynic disdain, disdain of innocence—to be nothing more than innocent!" 31 Billy Budd is thus destroyed by a person who embodies an uncontrollable hatred for innocence and an uncontrolled desire for the advance of wisdom. The destruction of the politically virtuous "Handsome Sailor" by modern science, technology, and philosophy thus points ultimately to the destructiveness of science or philosophy per se.

28 Ch. 2, p. 52.
29 Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, p. 110.
30 Ch. 12, p. 78; ch. 18, p. 91; ch. 19, pp. 98, 99.
Like his contemporary, Nietzsche, Melville saw the consequences of modernity—egalitarianism, utilitarianism, scientism, etc.—as epiphenomena which merely made obvious the moral and political tragedy which was contained in the birth of philosophy. The attack on modern science and philosophy does not lead Melville back to ancient science and philosophy but leads him rather to an attack on philosophy as such. Claggart’s intellectually grounded hatred for simple Billy Budd symbolizes the destruction of real human happiness, heroism, and virtue by the very spirit of knowledge. Moreover, it is impossible not to see Melville’s own tragedy in the revengefulness and helplessness made apparent in his description of Claggart’s murder by Billy Budd:

The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, [Billy’s] right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck. Whether intentionally or not owing to the young athlete’s superior height, the blow had taken effect full upon the forehead, so shapely and intellectual-looking a feature in the master-at-arms; so that the body fell over lengthwise, like a heavy plank tilted from erectness. A gasp or two, and he lay motionless.32

Thus one witnesses not only the destruction of John Claggart, who is as pale as the Socrates of the Clouds, and who, like the Socrates of the Symposium, “never allows wine to get within [his] guard,” and who, like the Socrates of the Meno, has a numbing effect on speech like a “torpedo fish,” 33 but also another “poetic reproach,” this time the reproach of the poet, Herman Melville, to philosophy.

32 Ch. 19, p. 99 (italics added).
33 Ch. 8, p. 64; ch. 11, p. 76; ch. 19, p. 98. See Plato Symposium 218a.2-8, where Alcibiades compares the “bite” of philosophy to the bite of a serpent. It is not unphilosophic, of course, to doubt the worth of philosophy. Thus, Socrates calls a city without philosophy “true” and “healthy” (Republic 372e.6-7). But Socrates goes on to construct the city of the philosopher-king, the city which is the standard of justice. For Socrates, tragedy is endemic to all actual regimes, and the untragic regime ruled by philosophy exists only “in speech” (Republic 472b.1-473b.3). For Melville, however, it is the acceptance of the rule of philosophy, ancient or modern, as the standard of justice which is the cause of political tragedy. Hence, Melville chooses not to transcend tragic politics via philosophy, but to seek to avoid tragedy by lowering the standard of justice. It is thus ironic that Melville, who saw through modern philosophy’s insistence on its own unproblematic nature, followed the moderns in rejecting the high and in embracing the low. But perhaps it would be truer to say that Melville’s rejection of philosophy is but the measure of his greatness as poet. On the moderns, see Leo Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), pp. 295-98.
INTERPRETATION

MICHAEL PLATT

I

"In interpretation we are guided by the assumption that the author knew what he was doing, that at least in regard to his text he knew what he was doing. And if we can't assume this then—I mean, if somewhere we have the statement by the author that he really did not know what he was doing, that he wrote about this thing but he did not know all about it or all that he should and that hence he put down many things of which he was very unsure, then we would be right to say that we can't interpret what you wrote."

"As you were speaking, it occurred to me that the difficulty comes up exactly with regard to the relation of the text to the things of which it speaks. In the case of the author who really does know all about what he speaks about and further indicates to us that he knows that he knows, then it is easy for us to proceed to interpret his writings or his speeches. But there must surely be many more of the cases in which, though the author knows a great deal, he does not know everything, and in these cases we can only interpret up to a point."

"What point?"

"Up to the point where we reach the end of his knowledge, where we begin to get into opinion, and then into guesses, and then into images which may or may not reflect accurately the things they represent."

"In other words, we cannot regard the text as 'autonomous.' So before when we spoke of an author knowing, at least in regard to his text, we were inaccurate. For how could he claim to know or to draw a line around his text when his text itself is not the thing to be known, but only meant to lead to knowledge. That is not well expressed. Let me try again. An author says that he knows something; that something is either wholly in his text, or it is something outside his text to which his text refers, yes?"

"Yes, but let us think with the aid of examples. Your distinction made me think that there are two kinds of authors and texts. There would be a text which is true and autonomous, which refers to nothing outside itself, and this text would have to be written by a God or by a being whose words were creative. His words would have to be things. They would have to be true simply by virtue of his saying them. But to that degree, since for the moment we are imagining this being as a God, they would not be a text at all. 'Let there be light'—and so we live within His sunny text."
"Do you mean to say that only what an author makes himself can be true and complete within itself?"

"I suppose so, or rather, I suppose you are pushing me in the direction of Vico, but I will take up the other possibility—namely, that we can know the truth only through mediation by words; that is, through texts, whether they be our own or others. For we seem to have moved from a question of interpretation to a question of the relation of signs or words to things. But this brings me back to my second example. What about the geometer? Aren't the things he says or describes true simply without need of reference outside themselves? For doesn't he say that 'Let this be the definition of a line or a sphere, etc.'? And then these things are simply true, true by definition."

"You seem to have found an example of a text by a human author which strongly resembles a divine text. For in some way the 'Let there be' of the geometer reminds one of the 'Let there be' of the God of which Genesis gives the account. But let me add a note on the history of our question. Both Spinoza and Hobbes seem to have been impressed (and as well Descartes) by the status of mathematical knowledge. Hence, there is the anecdote about Hobbes' affront when he opened Euclid and then proceeded back to the beginning and came to accept what he had thought impossible to prove. Then there is the manner of Spinoza's Ethics, the geometric manner. Or one could point to the picture by the poet Blake of God as a geometer. But the wider phenomena would be a common occurrence. Often during a discussion one hears it said that, well, we must define our terms in order to speak at all. What these people mean is that only what is defined is capable of showing truth. At any rate, they mean this if they do not simply confuse the true with the defined. For they appear not to consider that the definition may be very inaccurate—you know, it may be very narrow or impossibly vague. But I thought of another example with regard to geometry, an example which could not have occurred to those men of the 17th century I mentioned a minute ago, the example of a non-Euclidian geometry. It too proceeds from definitions, but these definitions, though contrary to the Euclidian, do not seem less false. I believe the question this raises is very much like the question which vexed men ever since they tried to harmonize Aristotle on the eternity of the world with the account of a genesis out of nothing in Genesis—you know, Maimonides, Aquinas, Scotus. The whole question of whether, when God freely created the world, did he create it according to reason? If so, he wasn't free, because he had to create it just as it was. Or did he create it any way he wished. The first is Aquinas; the second is Scotus."

"But in either case, the world as text would have the same status in regard to the interpreter. In both cases he would have before him, be it the world divinely created or the text divinely inspired (say, the Bible) . . ."

"Which one?"
“Well, say the Hebrew Bible. We will forget the Christian Testament for a moment. At any rate, he would have before him a text which was whole, which did not have something behind it to which it was referring.”

“Well, even this is not secure. For perhaps light and the world are themselves meant to refer to something more real. Maybe, despite our habit of thinking of things as things, maybe things are signs as well as ‘things.’”

“You are, or rather the motion of our minds is, making me a bit dizzy. Now we are in theology.”

“Yes, but that is where ‘interpretation’ first took place and where these questions were discussed.”

“You are right, but only partly. Because I think that these matters were under scrutiny in the philosophy of the ancients. Especially in Plato, in the divided line and in the Meno and elsewhere.”

“You lead me to make the following observation. That really there is no such text as we first imagined—I mean, a text which is utterly autonomous, which does not refer to anything outside itself. How could there be? Is a text a whole or a part? If it is a whole, then there could be no interpreter outside it, and if it is a part, then it must have some relation to the whole. One can illustrate this with the Bible, which we thought to be such a good example of the opposite a moment ago. With the Bible, with the words ‘let there be light,’ we imagine that there was light with no interval or distinction between the word and the thing. Well, even in the case of this ‘autonomous’ text, we have no autonomy. Indeed, it is especially true in this case. For the minute we look at this text we are led to something outside it; we are led to the being who creates the light. But this has often been said, by Augustine for one, that the creation leads to the creator. Or in our terms that this seemingly autonomous, altogether remarkable text does lead to its author.”

“Yes, but one could add to this that this would certainly mean that the interpreter in order to fully understand this text would, so to say, have to stand in the author’s shoes.”

“You mean that the interpreter of at least this text would have to be a god, or become a god?”

“Yes, I suppose that is the way the discussion is going. That to understand this text one would have to ascend toward divinity. But let us ask whether this would be true for some other texts.”

“Wait. Would this also be true if the creation or text was identical to its creator or author? I mean, in that case, there would be no room for a move from the text to the author; it really would be autonomous, self-contained.”

“I suspect not, but it is becoming difficult to think about all the questions which are beginning to swarm around our original question.”
"Then let me continue. Another text we mentioned was the geometric. But in this case too we do not have an autonomous text, for here too, as you or I showed by the example of the non-Euclidean geometry, we are led back to the author; we are led back to Euclid and to this non-Euclid. For we can no longer identify Euclid with truth-speaking, for this non-Euclid also speaks truth, or at least something equally true to his predecessor."

"Equally true is also 'equally false,' I suppose."

"I don't know. At any rate, the point is that we are led to say that here too the will of the geometer cannot be bracketed; from the geometry we are led back to the geometer. By geometer we mean the mind that decided to say 'let there be' this definition (any one) rather than that one."

"Do you suppose that what we mean by a complete interpretation is really a wish to get utterly beyond interpretation? This thought just occurred to me."

"Well, let's see. It would seem that truly there is no text of which we can give a complete interpretation. Perhaps God could give it, but then he would not need to anyway. Interpretation would appear to point utterly beyond itself. It would appear to point beyond texts themselves to the whole to which this text must refer."

"Yes, this would mean that the interpretation of words points beyond words themselves. We cannot even stop at the point of the 'author's intention'—though we can say that we should go through this point."

"But that is only provided that we think this author is leading us toward what we seek."

"And what is that?"

"I suppose that is the truth in the widest sense—the whole, but also the many parts."

"Then interpretation would be the servant of this thing which we seek."

"But this leads to some further consequences. That there can be no autonomous science of interpretation apart from a final science of the whole. In other words, this art or science of interpretation is but a part of philosophy where philosophy is understood as the quest for this truth."

"But do you know what else this means? It means that in order to interpret a text the interpreter must do so according to his knowledge of things to which the text refers. And hence his interpretation will be more or less adequate or inadequate according to his own knowledge. It will then be more or less adequate according to whether he knows more than the text or whether he knows less than the text."

"That would seem to be possible. But another thing would seem to follow—that the best interpretation of a particular text could be by a
person who was more than equal to the text in question. For example, let us take Shakespeare."

"Knowing you, I was expecting this 'example' sooner. Go ahead."

"Well, let us take Hamlet. It would seem that the interpreter who could really interpret this play must be a person who knows as much as Shakespeare or more than Shakespeare."

"But imagine what that means. It would mean that, if you are saying 'knows more than Shakespeare,' this person would have to know all about ghosts; he would have to know about the country from whose bourn no traveler returns. He would have to be such a traveler or have heard from informed and unimpeachable sources. But now we have come back to a point we reached from a different direction before—namely, that the interpreter would have to be a god, for surely it is a god who knows these things."

"You make me wonder if a more modern text would not be easier, but still I think the difficult example is the most fruitful. First of all, do we know how much Shakespeare knows? I submit that we can only know what his play knows, for who knows, perhaps he has not put all he knew into this work or into the whole of his works."

"You are right, but I thought that we meant by 'Shakespeare' only what was visible of him, so to say, in the text."

"Well, this might exclude what we mentioned a long while ago, that he might indicate the places where he thought he knew something and the places where he was guessing."

"It would seem that he does not indicate these places. At any rate, I can recall no statement in which he speaks of this. Perhaps we should look for such statements as he makes in the plays, but this would be a difficult matter, and we should devote another afternoon to it."

"I too would like that. You know it would be difficult, because I cannot recall that there is any character in his plays who is called Shakespeare. But perhaps we could find a way around that."

"Let us resume. It is probably not wholly possible to say how much Shakespeare knows. But this means that the provisional aim of our inquiry—call it interpretation—is very, very provisional. Interpretation which aims to give an account of the author's meaning, of what he writes, will quickly overstep the line between what the author knows and what is beyond his knowledge. Indeed, in some kinds of texts this line will be harder to see than others."

"I would say that both dialogues and poetry, as, for example, those of Shakespeare, would be good examples, and the opposite would tend to be treatises and all those books where the author speaks in his own person, while in the former examples we do not have the author speaking in anything like so obvious a way."
"What do you think? I think that a mid-point between these two would be the essay, for there the author speaks in his own person, but his thoughts have an admitted incompleteness; they are almost, come to think of it, but half of a dialogue. Indeed, they would be, shall we say, half of a friendship in which the text is really only half the speeches. At least in Montaigne one has this sense of admitted incompleteness and of 'a silent listener' who is a friend and who almost at every turn is invited to enter the inquiry."

"What you say is very interesting. For it corresponds to our own experience—yes, when we read together some of his essays aloud not so long ago. We would read aloud slowly. Almost immediately as we began the work of interpretation we would find that we had strayed into talking about the matter he had raised, for it is remarkable how many matters he manages to raise in but one page. At first we felt that we were, as I said, straying, that it was our laziness or our distraction which did not keep us at the business of interpretation. But gradually we began to see that this was not so—that Montaigne's essays were meant to lead us very quickly beyond his opinions to the matters themselves, and that when we most 'digressed,' we were most doing what he would have his readers do. In other words, in the case of Montaigne at least the interpreter is invited and encouraged very immediately and very often to forget interpreting Montaigne and follow out his own mind. But this itself reminds me that Montaigne himself says that he seldom read a text for more than a few hours, and with only one text does he say that he read it all the way through at a sitting (Tacitus, it was). But this immediate and frequent invitation to leave the text behind or leave off interpretation would not, I think, be present in all texts. For example, in Aristotle's Metaphysics or in Heidegger's Sein und Zeit there is not much invitation to 'digression,' as we have called it."

"Yes, there it would be fatigue if the interpreter left off interpreting."

"But what you said about the essay form—and neither Aristotle or Heidegger calls his work an essay—makes me think... This will be a digression..."

"After what we have said about digressions, I cannot oppose you..."

"Well, I was thinking about Montaigne and how he got to writing essays. The usual explanation seems... well, not wrong, but not sufficient. I was thinking of this when you spoke of the essay as half a friendship. Because the essay we were in fact reading aloud dealt with friendship and not only in the abstract, but about his friendship with a man he called his better self. It was Etienne de la Boétie. And this man who meant so much to him died very young—I believe it was in Montaigne's arms. At any rate, he says that his friend wrote beautifully, so that he would have equalled the ancients, and Montaigne says that he intends to include a specimen of his writing, and then you will see what a noble fellow he
was. Then he says prudence prevents me from putting it in. But I always suspected that really we did not need this piece of writing to know what that other fellow was like. Indeed, one could simply know that it was the man Montaigne liked to talk to more than anyone else, the man in whose presence he discovered the most. But we could see what this man was like because there in this essay we have an impression of this man. Because this essay, like most of the others, was addressed to Montaigne's best friend. With Etienne dead, Montaigne must have felt really deprived, especially of someone to talk with, but gradually he found that he could imitate this kind of talk with his friend by writing his essays. Indeed, his own speech with himself—was it not a kind of speech of one friend to another? In fact, is not a friend another self? So that one can say that the essay is a form conceived in friendship as well as solitude. It supposes as an ideal reader (and hence interpreter) a listener who is a friend, who is a kind of 'alter ego.' And on almost every page of these essays we feel this invitation but, to be sure, with layers of reserve which, so he tells us, he and Etienne went through very quickly."

"Yes, I think you can say that there is a relation between friendship and the dialogue, and that the essay, at least as Montaigne writes it, is a kind of half-friendship, or rather, that it is a full friendship where Montaigne finds his proper reader."

"Yes, one can say that a friend is he with whom I think best and that together we come up with more things than, say, when alone or with others."

"Yes, provided that we remember that there have been some men for whom this friendly talking took place right inside their mind. You know how when one is thinking one seems to be speaking in dialogue."

"And hence we say 'I thought to myself.' When we say this, we seem to mean that there are two, and that they think together in dialogue."

"But what would that make the dialogue—I mean, the literary ones—but the mimesis of this kind of thought?"

"Well, I think there would be this difference. In some literary dialogues there is speech between men who are not friends. Even when they are well disposed to each other, they may not be friends. And so one should distinguish between the speeches between friends and those between acquaintances and also speeches between unequals."

"Yes, one should. But that makes me wonder. If friends were really equal and drawn by the attraction of like to like, then they would be identical, and how could they have anything to offer to each other?"

"Well, perhaps we can say that equals are not identical."

"Yes, perhaps. Since we were comparing the speeches of friends to the speeches that a man seems to make inside his mind when he thinks, then I wonder: could there be a kind of thinking which was not between equals, but between a fool and a smarter man?"
"That is interesting. It raises the question of whether all men can be friends to themselves. I think not — that some men must be their own enemy, and one sees this sometimes in persons who mutter in the street and say nasty things, not so much to the passers-by as to themselves."

"Yes, but probably that would not be thought, as we were speaking of it."

"No, but that reminds me of the poem at the end of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil where he talks about dwelling among the coldest of highlands. Suddenly he says that one becomes two, friend Zarathustra came. I believe he is talking about the birth of a god. A god he gave birth to. But somehow this god was also his friend and also, in the way that a friend is, another self."

"Perhaps this friend was better at being Nietzsche than Nietzsche was. Perhaps Nietzsche felt that Zarathustra was better at being himself than he was."

"That would certainly be a possibility. At any rate, one certainly feels that here was a man who very much wanted a friend and that he never had one. Perhaps his writings are like Montaigne's in that they are addressed to potential friends."

"Well, or perhaps potential admirers."

"Yes, perhaps. He does speak of teaching a hundred men and thereby changing things."

"And he also claimed to be a 'destiny' and in a letter to Burckhardt he claims to be god."

"Well, that would make his texts comparable to the Bible we were speaking of before."

"Yes, with this difference: that he seems to have meant them to be taken as a provisional teaching or a provisional thinking. In other words, he expected someone to come after him and read him and listen to his better self or friend—namely, Zarathustra—and then to do better and to go much farther."

"Such a person would have to be Nietzsche's superior and also the superior of Zarathustra, would he not?"

"Yes."

"Then I know a person who seems to have claimed this, and it is Heidegger. Indeed, I believe it is he who has raised the question of whether, in order to understand a text, one does not have to be the superior of that text and the superior of its author."

"I wonder what he meant to imply about this question when he published an article about who Nietzsche's Zarathustra is."

"I do not know, but I think we have come back to our starting point."

"How so?"
"Well, just to raise the question of whether one must be the superior of the text one is to interpret means that there can, as we said, be no autonomous science of interpretation."

"But there is another indication of this."

"What is that?"

"That apparently it is important for the interpreter to reflect upon his own interpreting, and this is what we have been doing, but this suggests that interpretation is not its own lawgiver. It seems to suppose reflections which transcend mere interpreting."

"But there is another possibility suggested by the ground we have reached—namely, that there is, properly speaking, no such thing as interpretation. The minute one tries to give rules on how one could practice this art or method, one runs into questions beyond interpretation."

"And yet one sees persons doing this interpretation very often. Do you suppose that they know what it is they are doing?"

"This is quite possible; indeed, I have the feeling that until we talked I did not see what I was about."

"But still, I don't think that this 'interpreting' which these people do, even if they do not know its real nature, is harmful to these persons or to those who read their interpretations."

"I agree. And especially if the persons pick good texts, they are likely to receive very beneficial opinions from them."

"No more than beneficial opinions?"

"No more, at least not if they do not reflect about what it means to do interpretation. And sometimes they might even receive opinions which were not so beneficial. One cannot underestimate the mischief that reading good books can stir up. Consider what the reading of good books did to Don Quixote. What do you think?"

"I think that the man who knew which texts to interpret would be a long way toward doing interpretation in such a way that it pointed beyond itself."

"But would not this person be exactly the person not to do interpretation, but to do the something else which we said interpretation pointed to?"

"If such a person were to appear, other men would have to be his interpreters. Only he would be beyond interpretation."

"There is something political about your remark. I mean, there is something political about men who wish to attract interpreters, for there is something which resembles rulership in the relation of thinkers or teachers to their interpreters. Moreover, the question of what might lie beyond interpretation seems to partake of politics since it is concerned
with superior and inferior. Indeed, does not the whole question as it is often put: 'Can you understand someone better than he understands himself?' bespeak a political passion? Interpreters desire to be superior not only to all other interpreters but also to the text they interpret. There is much will to power in this seemingly gentle activity."

"Also there is much resentment, for the interpreter desires to be superior to a text which, after all, he is dependent upon."

"At least this is so where the emphasis in the question falls upon superiority and not upon understanding."

"If someone should listen to our conversation, they would have to interpret it."

"Can we suppose that, whether they are superior or inferior, they will interpret it as a friend?"

"Perhaps. I am unsure whether there could be more than two friends."

"I think we have reached a stopping place. We must make it our beginning another time."

"We will enjoy talking again."

"Yes, but next time we must see if we cannot go beyond politics."

"Perhaps we can do so by pointing to the difference between interpreters as friends and as superiors and inferiors."

II

"In speaking or thinking of interpretation, we found ourselves also speaking or thinking of friendship. The connection lies this way: both interpretation and friendship require the exercise of sympathetic intelligence."

"In interpretation it would seem to be the whole of the enterprise. In friendship good will is needed in addition, for it is possible for there to be a person who, though gifted with superior intelligence of this kind, uses his intelligence to do evil, say, the way the gifted and intelligent Iago does great evil to Othello."

"It is rather that he evilly arranges it that Othello does evil to his beloved Desdemona, and since she is his other self, his lover, his friend, when he finds out that he has misinterpreted her heart, he knows he has done himself evil. To misinterpret your friend is worse than many things you can do to yourself; it touches nearer than Othello's suicidal dagger. Indeed, his suicide testifies to this. He slays the 'self' who made the misinterpretation."

"Yes, despite the fact that in some sense the source of the misinterpretation of Desdemona is Iago; Othello never points to him as the cause. He regards himself as fully, perhaps wholly, responsible."
“He is fully responsible but not wholly responsible. It's a curious case. Even if you adopt what another sees, even if you come to interpret through his eyes, you are responsible. You can say you were guided. You can say you learned in conditions arranged by another. You cannot say, 'He taught me.'”

“I wonder if this relation of Iago the interpreter to Othello with regard to Desdemona has an analogue in the interpretation of texts. It would occur if a gifted interpreter convinced many readers that what they had always thought of as a good and wise book was just the opposite, and that they should straightaway burn the book.”

“Well, it would suffice if they merely ignored it or disdained it, dropped it from the curriculum, or read it in a way which blurred its clarity. I wonder, do you suppose this interpreter would know that his interpretation is false, the way Iago must when he interprets, or gets Othello to interpret, in a false light, or would he simply not know that he was misinterpreting?”

“Well, one must always allow for stupidity or lack of clarity. But we were speaking of an interpretation by a man of superior intellectual gifts. There I would say either case might be true. He might know he was saying the thing which is not, or he might not grasp how he was distorting what he claimed to interpret. Think of these cases: what about where Augustine interprets Virgil to be a stimulator of sinful passions, where Paul interprets Christ, where Christ interprets all the Hebrew Bible to point toward him in Luke 24:27, where Machiavelli silently makes his readers oblivious of the biblical teaching, or where Nietzsche interprets Socrates as a rationalist and as a sickness?”

“Each of these cases calls for investigation which goes beyond our discussion.”

“The difficulty which they raise, whether misinterpretation is willful or not, even granting that all these are cases of misinterpretation, remains and, hence, in the figure of Iago reminds us that to understand is not the same as to act as a friend. In his case sympathetic understanding of the weakness of Othello together with a powerful mind capable of making others see things as he sees them, and finally even to see themselves as he sees them, serves enmity.”

“Yes, and of a kind which only intelligence could render so effectively evil. It is, after all, a garden variety of malice to hurt someone. It is much more malicious to get that person to hurt himself. Most malicious of all is to get that person to hurt himself by hurting what is dearest to him. Here poor Othello isn't even able to say, 'He helped me.'”

“Iago's powers of interpretation are used to create powerful and vehement misinterpretations. In addition, they are doubly set against sympathetic insight; what he wishes to create is the most abysmal misunderstanding where there was every expectation of the most profound
understanding. What he aims to destroy is not simply Othello but the mutual sympathetic insight of Othello and Desdemona. His victim is Othello, but it is also sympathetic intelligence itself. It is as if he set himself a chess problem. Choose that human relation which promises the most profound sympathetic understanding, and show that it is not very profound at all. Iago chooses lovers, and by getting one lover to kill the other he shows, at least to his satisfaction, that the understanding of lovers is not deep enough. He shows that their mutual knowledge was but a kind of ignorance. He is the kind of man who might say, 'I hold there is no sin but ignorance.' ”

“Shakespeare has given to Iago some of his great powers of sympathetic insight. Iago is a remarkable dramatist; he plots and arranges like a master director; he imposes his script upon almost all of the others. And to do this he must know them very well.”

“Shakespeare has also withheld something of himself which is crucial and which, in addition, distinguishes him from Iago, for Iago is only a part of Shakespeare’s self-understanding. Iago has absolutely no power to make anything. He is all critic or all interpreter. He envies those like Othello and Desdemona whose mutual sympathetic insight, however defective, is likely to make something—in their case, a child. Iago couldn’t have made Othello or Desdemona or, for that matter, himself. Only Shakespeare could have done that. In the case of Iago interpretation and friendship are mortally opposed, but they need not always be. After all, Othello accepted the interpretation of Iago and he could have rejected it. It would, it is true, have taken superior sympathetic insight into Desdemona and it would also be in accord with the truth; Desdemona is not false to Othello. Iago gets to Othello with certain abstract doubts; all Iago’s circumstantial suspicions derive their power from one observation: that you can never entirely know another human being. Though true, this observation is debilitating to a man who is not prepared to recognize it. Really, it is a discovery which is allied with the discovery of love. It is coeval with mutual sympathetic insight. Love has a strange effect; it makes each lover aware of the solitude which is always with us. Other ways of being together in the world obscure this solitude, but love, precisely because it approaches union, makes us see our solitude. Witness the painting called the Jewish Bride, by Rembrandt. Upon this solitude experienced in this relation profound suspicions can grow. Since this solitude is likely to be utterly unexpected, it is likely to be misunderstood; through this misunderstanding Iago can force a secret entry. In it jealousy is planted. Still, a person of greater sympathetic insight than Othello, one better armed against absolute doubting, could surely have countered Iago’s interpretation.”

“We are not even considering the question of whether it is just to punish someone because one suffers from the pangs of despised love.
Interpretation

It is not clear to me that just because someone one loves stops loving one and loves another, as Othello is led to believe of his beloved, one is right to take revenge. If you punish someone for not giving a gift, you deny that it is a gift and make it a duty."

"Even Othello seems to feel the force of what you say, for he dresses up the killing as a judgment on behalf of other men: 'Kill her, lest she betray others.'"

"What you said about doubting that you can know and hence trust another person reminds me that part of what we are talking about is also talked about by others as the question of 'other minds.'"

"The scope of that question is very wide. It would seem to inhere in all attempts to understand the human things, human persons, human deeds, human speeches, either spoken or written, either witnessed by ourselves or reported to us by others."

"I have noticed something. That every discussion of the question of whether there can be a knowledge of other minds or of what it means to interpret is itself an appeal to other minds; it assumes unconsciously, though not unwisely, that other minds will read or hear what is being said about the question of 'other minds.'"

"It is a little like a remark I remember from Aristotle, that friends always find themselves saying, 'Friends, there are no friends.'"

"Or it is like the Lysis where the conversation about friendship ends with Socrates saying: 'Well, Lysis and Menexenus . . . our hearers here will carry away the report, that though we conceive ourselves to be friends with each other—you see I class myself with you—we have not as yet been able to discover what we mean by a friend.'"

"It's as true in the instance you bring up as in the one I mentioned that the discussion of friendship can only be undertaken by those who are friends or who regard each other as friends. Whenever I have heard this remark of Aristotle's repeated in conversation, I have observed the same effect: a startled look, quickly hidden in introspection. To each mind this remark brings the question, 'Who here is my friend? Are we here friends?'

"So it is in the midst of friends that this most personal question, this question which makes a solitude out of a company, is likely to come up. Isn't it likely that even your observation will do the same to us?"

"Yes, it has, at least for me. But I think that is no great worry for either of us. That is, it should not embarrass us to ask, silently, about each other: is he really my friend, does he really understand me? Interpretive sympathy can never be perfect, nor perfectly mutual. When you understand someone as yourself, or when you understand him as he understands himself, there is always an additional thing, namely, yourself, which is in addition to him. Take the example of
Shakespeare: did he have to interpret his own works? Say his aim in writing was to understand human things at large, including himself. Even if the interpreter is guided by this aim, he is also in addition interpreting Shakespeare. And this Shakespeare didn’t have to do. This incorrigible difference (and why should it be corrigeable?) could only be overcome in that absurd idea of Borges, writing about this fellow who, though never having read Don Quixote, wrote the whole thing absolutely as Cervantes had. Indeed, that interpreter became Cervantes. How nicely this story uncovers the envy in interpretation; he wishes to be the man he interprets. At the same time he is ashamed of interpreting, for it shows his dependence; hence he denies he ever read Cervantes."

"Yes. 'To understand him as he understands himself' would mean you would have to be him. Still, I wouldn't trust the interpretation of an interpreter who had never felt this desire. It's a bit like impersonation or ventriloquism, spooky when you consider that this means the interpreter is outside himself, trying to leave his self behind; it comes so close to the fellows who think they are Napoleon. Which reminds me of that remark of Nietzsche's to Burckhardt, a remark which twinkles with so much wit that it makes you wonder at its madness,...that really he would rather be a Basel professor than God, but on that account he has not failed to create the world. At once so gracious and so unhinged."

"Can an interpreter be the thing or person he interprets?"

"That's the same question as can a friend be his friend, except that friends have bodies while interpreters do not. A friend can't be his friend because they don't have the same body; they feel pleasure and pain differently; moreover, they die separately, and this separation or difference, taking rise from the body but, I think, also present in the mind, was what shook Montaigne so much when he saw his friend Etienne de la Boëtie pass in suffering before his eyes and disappear."

"But even in the case of interpretation, where the body is not pertinent, I suspect that the interpreter cannot be the thing he interprets: even if he succeeded in standing in the shoes of the maker or author, still that is not the same thing as being that author. In addition it does not mean that he ceases being himself, that is, someone different from the author."

"And this is true in even those cases where the author or friend wants very much to be understood, to say nothing of the cases where the author or 'friend' is secretive and does not want to be fully understood, or wants only to be understood by a few."

"I wonder if there was ever an author who wanted to be understood by no one."
"Yes, but he did not write any works at all. If someone writes, that would seem to mean that he writes at least for one person, even if he wishes to be misunderstood by all others."

"Couldn't it be the case that there is a person who writes solely for himself? He writes to remind himself of his thoughts, to record them."

"Well, then, the someone he writes for is himself. We are back to the doubleness in every person which we noted before; the thing which makes it possible to speak to yourself, to know yourself, to have a sympathetic insight into yourself, to interpret yourself, to be a friend to yourself."

"Then anyone who denied or doubted that one mind could know another and all the allied things, that it is possible to have a sympathetic insight into another, possible to interpret, etc., would also doubt or deny these things with reference to the self."

"Yes, with as much self-contradiction as in the former case."

"It would seem, from part of what we are saying, at least, that friendship best disposes us to learn or to seek the truth, and, in a like manner, that the interpretation of texts disposes one to learn. Here I think what we said is only partly true or rather that it is blind on one side to a great danger."

"What is that?"

"Well, I think we touched on it when we were observing that it is exactly the closest human relations which bring to sight solitude. In the same way, in interpretation the person who is most ardent to interpret is the one for whom the whole activity of interpretation becomes fraught with questions. Both states are conducive to melancholy."

"Just when I feel close to understanding a text, just then as I feel curtains parting, then I wonder if I am not really alone and on my own entirely. In the same way when talking with a friend there are silent moments, or reserved thoughts, which if audible would sound like this: do I really know him, does he really know me? I will give an example. I was talking with my daughter the other day. I have watched her grow these seven years, always thinking of who she will become, and sometimes thinking of that later time when she will be able to converse as an equal. I asked her: 'Is it possible for one person to know another person better than that person knows himself?' I added an example. 'For example, is it possible that I or your mother knows you better than yourself?' 'Well, do you know which drawer my socks are in?' No. I did not. Here was a criterion of knowledge which had escaped me and yet spoke aptly to the question. The very fact that I would never have expected a knowledge of where socks are kept to be pertinent showed that I did not know something that was pertinent in this person's self-understanding."
"I would guess that that moment was itself a progress in knowing."

"Well, yes. At least in the reminder that there was something beyond what I had known."

"But this illustrates what I was about to say, that solitude and the correlative suspicion that one is all alone with a text are not the opposite of friendship and understanding, respectively. Those who think so have not really tasted of either. And here is where the danger of both friendship and interpretation come in. We seem to desire friends in part for reasons which do not lead to the most precise thinking. How many times in a conversation one person misses what the other says, or hears it in accord with his thought? Friendship is accounted a pleasure; for this pleasure have not many thoughts been left unuttered—no, more—un-thought? In other words it is well that there is always a taste of solitude in friendship so that thinking itself is not utterly dependent upon this most human, if most rare, of relations."

"I suspect as well that friendship too would languish without this taste. It is for this reason I think the ancient maxim of 'a friend is another self' is finally inadequate. There must be some difference which forestalls unity or identity."

"Yes, that description seems to have been from the 'outside,' made by someone who, at least at that moment, did not know a friend. Moreover, that description seems to have been in accord with the high esteem in which the ancients held the friendship of members of the same sex, more especially of the male sex."

"Yes, there there was 'like and like' in the bodies. In this regard I must mention some observations I made about Montaigne. When you mentioned him before, I went to read his essay about his friendship with Etienne, and I received the distinct impression that he and Etienne were 'like and like' in the body as well as the mind. Their relation admits, he says, no equal, no comparison. It was not family loyalty; it was not paternal care; nor was it mixed with fraternal competition. The love of a woman stirs up divers and ondoyant motions in us. This love did not. It was constant and serene. We two were seamless, we flowed into each other, he adds. The revealing point comes when he is speaking of the incapacity of mind which excludes woman from such relations; his evidence is that there have been no examples; then Montaigne makes the general observation that a love which adds the union of the body to that of the mind is fuller, more complete, than one which is simply of the mind. Since he constantly says that his relation with Etienne lacked nothing, we are led to surmise that it lacked nothing, more specifically, that it did not lack the bodies as well. Almost as if he knows what thought had crossed his reader's mind, Montaigne immediately turns to the subject of 'Greek love.' He says it is justly abhorred by our morality. That 'justly abhorred' reminds one of Locke's 'justly decried' about Hobbes. Then he gives
his own opinion as distinct from 'our morality.' It is confined to a single point, that such love was between unequals, between an older man and a youth, between those who were not equal in mind or in body. His apparent concurrence with 'our morality' leaves open the possibility of a union of equal minds and equal bodies, of whatever sex.'

"So you think he is telling us that his relation with Etienne differs not at all from 'Greek love' in regard to the body but only in the equality of the partners?"

"Well, he was not blunt about this bodily side to it. And with reason. He wants to speak about the most important relation with another human being in his whole life. That requires modesty. His modesty as much as his superlative language is a mark of how significant that relation was; what is interesting is to see what most needs the protection of privacy. The thing which Montaigne covers with his modest speech is the body. In other words, he seems to cover with modesty the very thing which could never be fully shared, the body. Because even if lovers enjoy a union of bodies, still they die with their own bodies and no one else's. The latter we know he experienced."

"That suggests a fuller account of the origin of his writing of essays. Montaigne was present at the death of Etienne. He saw a friend disappear and a body turn into a cadaver. It is an experience which raises questions about the relation between a mind and a body. Something disappeared or became elusive; speech ceased. It was friendship which conducted Montaigne to the school of death. So, the origin of essaying lies in Etienne in two ways, in their conversation together and in the death. Neither one would suffice to start the essaying of Montaigne. And what is the theme of that essaying, if not a preparing for death, of a conquest of the fear of death? To philosophize, to learn to die, to compose his essays... with Montaigne these are the same things. Death gave him what the realization that you cannot perfectly understand another also gives."

"Except that for him it had to be by the death of Etienne. Because Montaigne never gives the slightest hint that he ever doubted that he understood Etienne perfectly and that he was perfectly understood in return. He says they were 'like and like.' I wonder. The more he insists on their seamlessness, the more he gives the impression that Etienne was his superior; which means that Etienne was both 'another self' and yet a better self. He appears to believe that Etienne is better at being himself than he, himself, is. This lets us know how curious is this relation where you hear someone who is 'you.' Where you go to meet yourself. Where someone is more like 'you' than you are. At least marriage has in the difference of the bodies a reminder that similarity is not identity."

"The moderns point away from seamless 'like and like' when they
make of marriage something to esteem as highly as friendship. There, in the bodies of the married ones, is the difference. It is a difference which makes for pleasure and for misunderstanding, but it may also be a fence against even greater misunderstanding. The lines 'the marriage of true minds' remind us that there is difference and solitude in the heart of our endeavor to understand another."

"The same is true in interpretation, for to wonder whether one is on one's own defends against merely thinking what another has thought. It reminds one that not all thinking is interpreting, though all interpreting points to thinking."

"Exactly the doubt which haunts the interpreter at times, that he is not really following his author's intention, that he is left with himself alone; this would be the source of both independent philosophizing and of a more scrupulous endeavor to discover what the text says. When someone is reading a text and he comes to a point of solitude, where he is reading and suddenly he feels he can't ever understand all that the author intended, then precisely at that point is it not natural to assume that the mind in that text is precisely in the same lonely position? On the other side of the text is the author; it is likely that he, as he wrote, thought 'really all understanding of what I am writing is only degrees of misunderstanding, some better, some worse, some wide, some near.' But this discovery on the part of the interpreter that facing him in the text is the equally unavailable solitude of the author could be the stimulus to a more scrupulous reading."

"A most interesting case of this is the case where an author has hidden his real thoughts far from the surface of his work, yet they are still present to he who will work hard."

"What would be the motive?"

"I can think of two. One is persecution. The other is education. An author may hide his genuine thoughts or his genuine teaching beneath the veil of more or less accepted opinions so that he will not be censored or persecuted by those in power."

"How will his true thoughts or his true teaching be available?"

"Well, only with extreme exertion expended by the best minds would his hints bear fruit. He might put his own views in the mouth of another whom he claimed to be interpreting and then in another place he might refer to this practice; perhaps these two places would be separated by a hundred pages, so it would take an alert reader to put two and two together. Or he might call the character who expresses his views something misleading, such as 'fool' or 'jester' or 'madman,' or he might give many telling remarks a hilarious turn, knowing that when most men laugh they do not also think. And this leads to the second motive, education. It is not good to allow students to receive everything easily. Merely inherited or received learning is seldom well used, or rather
it is seldom understood. The mind of the student has to be exercised if it is to understand even what it hears from a teacher. This is why lectures are the least beneficial way in which to learn; in them, for the most part, the vanity of the lecturer lives in deadly unison with the passivity and weakness of the student."

"They are like inherited wealth. At least with regard to learning, there is no such thing as inherited wealth; everything which is inherited must be also acquired. Hence, the wealth of learning left in books is really an available wealth, not an inherited one."

"It's exactly these considerations which might lead an author to adopt reserved manners with his reader, to leave his most daring or his most fundamental thoughts under the surface."

"I think what you are talking about is different from what we were talking about before. In this case, whether the motive of the author is protection from persecution or whether it is to educate the proper reader, still the author intends some readers, however few, to understand the things which he has hidden."

"Yes..."

"But in the other case it was a certain solitude or hidden place which the author knows in himself and which he suspects no one will ever find. For example, he might read over something he has written and sigh, 'It is not likely that all I mean there will be understood by another human being.'"

"Something like the same sigh might escape him in another form, a form less secretive and more directed to cognition. Reading over a passage, or even as he wrote it, he might come to a halt and think, 'Where that thought goes, I hardly know.'"

"Indeed, isn't this a description of what one encounters if one tries to interpret questions? To interpret such a text you have to see where the thought goes. You have to see where the question points and this might be in a direction unforeseen by the author/questioner."

"Or it might be in a direction he does see, in which case he may have elected either to make this clear or to keep silent."

"In any case such a text, one which abounds in or returns to questions, insures that the reader will not be spared thinking. But as we were saying, there would appear to be a difference between the thinking which goes along with trying to understand a text and that which does not. The one is guided by the incentive of learning something from trying to see what another mind has thought, and so it sets out to understand the text according to the author's intention and his understanding, and the other sets out on its own projects."

"Some thinkers who have considered what it means to interpret say that really it is all in the present; you can't really understand an author
as he understands himself. They tend to deprecate the criteria of understanding a text objectively; they seem to say that interpretation really belongs to the interpreter, not to the text. To them fidelity in seeking to understand what an author has written, first as he has intended and only later in another way, is baseless. They may even go so far as to say that it is a harmful illusion. Since they are certain it is baseless, they are also certain that it is good to be liberated from the bondage of such fidelity."

"The certainty which would release us from this bondage is not to be had. It is just their desire for certainty, or rather their insistence that they have certainty, which seems suspect. Only if you are certain that you can't have significant understanding of a text as it is intended by its author are you released from the apprenticeship of reading him as he understood himself. These thinkers you mention prefer certainty to a truth which is difficult yet sufficiently exact. When they say emphatically that all interpretations are equally wide of the text, they claim to know more than they do know."

"If you say something is wide of a text, doesn't that suppose that you know the text? Surely you would have to know where the target is to judge that all arrows had missed it."

"Yes, their view is not genuinely skeptical, it is not in doubt at all. Their need to make absolutely undoubtful statements, namely, that no interpreter can know what he reads as the author meant it, betrays them into presupposing the opposite of what they maintain. Herein, they appear to have fled a difficulty. The difficult and yet significant terrain lies in the 'more or less' where one interpretation is judged less inferior than another."

"If the interpreter is like man according to Kant, never making contact with something other, but only with himself... then we must ask them why do you interpret, why address a text? There is something suspicious in these interpreters who claim that really they are always doing original work. Moreover, when they write long books defending this view, they are not really serious in at least one respect... for they would not want their books mis-translated and they would even object if a reviewer misinterpreted or misunderstood them. Yet these views are based upon acceptance of the view which they deny in their book. There they hold a view according to which there can be no such thing as misinterpretation, or mis-translation or misunderstanding."

"We must hold to the view that there is a difference between someone who sets himself the task, even if he is never certain that he accomplishes it, of understanding an author as he understands himself or as he intends to be understood and someone who thinks by himself."

"The point which draws my attention is this: you can't prove that someone has not understood the text correctly... except by appealing
to a better, a more correct interpretation. How could you prove that the aim of interpretation is not achievable, indeed, that it has not already been achieved? Those who assert that it is not possible are too certain. At the same time those who say that it is achieved could also be too certain. Let us say that someone interprets a paragraph by Wittgenstein and at the end he says, "There, what I have said is certainly in accord with and utterly exhausts how Wittgenstein understands that paragraph. It is finished! τετελεστα!" We would have to object. Are you so sure it is finished? Wouldn't you have to have something somewhere else which revealed what the interpretation of the paragraph was, so that we could compare what you say is the final and only interpretation with it? But, you see, we don't have such a thing. Now what if this interpretation this person had offered was really good? It made so much more sense than others before it. Even this would not mean that a better one might not appear."

"In other words, it is a matter which appears to permit only judgments more or less close, more or less correct."

"And judgments like 'best so far.'"

"So then, even though interpretation aims at a goal which cannot be achieved (or if it is achieved, it can't be known for certain that it has been), still, you are saying it should not abandon this goal."

"Yes, because it is well guided by this goal. The progressive steps from worse to better are made by adherence to this goal. Indeed, as we were saying before, the discovery that the final goal may not be reached with certainty should not, rightly understood, lead to despair, nor to the view that 'anything goes.' The suspicion that something remains hidden in the text leads on the one hand to more scrupulous reading, but on the other it also leads to a diminution of anxieties engendered by belief in impossible goals."

"Yes, there appears to be an immoderate wish behind the assertion that the goal of interpretation can be reached. Instead of living with a portion of uncertainty, facing it with strength of soul and exercising what powers one has on the task of replacing worse by better, these persons wish to know beforehand that the promised end of certainty is possible."

"By the same token there is in each friend a solitude which no friendship can erase."

"To live with this knowledge requires strength of soul."

"It is also likely that by virtue of that knowledge and its strength he will be a better sort of friend."

"Both the solitude of the interpreter and the solitude of the friend, if not ignored, entail a further discovery. Because of the discovery of solitude, the interpreter now sees that what he had aimed at was to be the author of the text he devoted his labors to. He wished to be able
to say, 'I, Aristotle, say' or 'I, Shakespeare, indicate.' It is the same with the friend who hides his solitude, his difference. He regards the other as better at being himself than he is. He wants to be that other self.”

"The marriage of true minds, whether it is through texts or through what we have been calling friendship, requires a degree of similarity in the minds so that they may understand each other. It also requires a degree of difference so that it will be a marriage, not a mistaking of each for the other."

"Minds are very like faces. They are enough alike to be called 'faces' or 'minds'; they are enough different to be distinguished. This similarity modified by dissimilarity or this dissimilarity modified by similarity makes understanding both possible and necessary."
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