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— INSTITUTE —

The Great Conversation
How Should We Live?

Volume I: Origins and Empire

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In The Great Conversation, we ask perhaps the most urgent question of all: “How should we live?” “We” ask, first-person plural: within a community of conversation, from the standpoint of our shared humanity, in dialogue with some of the greatest spirits who have meditated on the question.

We begin this two-year adventure with the ancient world, with the classical cultures of Greece and Rome and their Near Eastern foundation. Western Civilization has its roots in the origins of civilization as such, in Sumer (southern Mesopotamia, in modern-day Iraq)—the world’s first urbanized region.

Global cooling conditioned much of humanity’s time on this planet. When the last Ice Age receded fitfully about 10,000 years ago, with humans having migrated north and east from the savannas of Africa, the neolithic revolution could occur: the invention, or at least institutionalization, of agriculture. Production of polished stone tools, domestication of animals, cultivation of cereal grasses, creation of rat-proof containers (eventually pottery), development of irrigation and other water-management techniques: human ingenuity was thus able to render the land between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers fruitful enough to trigger a ramifying urbanization. Characteristics of this Mesopotamian floodplain made it favorable for the entrenchment of agriculture, despite its aridity and harshness: a land of mud, lacking stone, could be seeded even with the wooden implements first available, and repeated flooding recharges the soil, remedying the inevitable exhaustion of nutrients by crops. Agriculture, though resulting in a diet nutritionally inferior to that afforded by the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, could support population density. So, Mesopotamia saw the first set of cities on earth develop, during the early Bronze Age—the late Uruk period (ca. 3500-3100 B.C.), named for the first great city, which perhaps had a population of 40,000 at this time. It is *civilis* (related to the Latin for city, *civitas*) that gives us the word “civilization,” and the process of human formation denoted by that term is a function of cities.

And yet urbanization involves barbarities. This reality is reflected in the Bible: Cain, the first to murder, builds the first city. Nevertheless, the New Testament culminates in a hyper-urban vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth.

The emergence of cities in Mesopotamia lights a fire in history that both devours and illuminates. On the one hand, sedentary life engenders significant levels of private property, with the attendant injustices and perplexities of social stratification. An “elite,” oligarchic class (including priests) has generally determined cultural production and the socio-political situation ever since. Monarchy somehow became plausible. The goods produced by cities, and rivalry over resources between cities, furnished motives for war, with perhaps the most profound motive being the very existence of the public stage erected by urbanization—tempting ambitious men to make their personalities felt. War propped up theocratic kingship and a warrior aristocracy. Slavery followed. On the other hand, population density unleashes cultural creativity and an accelerating process of technological innovation. Massed human effort was necessary to tame, somewhat, the Tigris and Euphrates to human ends; it raised grand civic structures, such as ziggurats, those artificial mountains crowned by temples inhabited by gods in the form of statues. Concerted action on such scale requires coordination, and property requires law courts—so government, law, politics arose. Surplus agricultural production led to the specialization of labor.

Urbanization generated demand for trade (to obtain metals, luxury items, aesthetic goods), and networks were established with the Indus Valley and Egyptian civilizations—and beyond. Contact with strangers and their ideas and skills fuels progress. All this stimulated the creation of writing, of which Sumerian cuneiform is the earliest known instance. Even our alphabet can be traced back to that breakthrough, the shift from prehistory to history (around 3300 B.C.) Originally used for record-keeping, writing has always reflected elite interests: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Walter Benjamin). Yet, across the centuries, writing has made possible the great conversation concerning existential questions and human purposes.

Perhaps the most momentous historical question before humanity is how to prepare conditions propitious for an order of liberty, creativity, responsibility, and gratitude that would transfigure cities of Cain into a cosmopolis of self-transcending charity—a shift from the titanic and imperialist falsification of unity symbolized by the Tower of Babel into a Pentecost festival of personality and communion.

Heirs of Western Civilization must continually choose civil coexistence, in conversation that tempers even deep disagreements within the bond of social friendship, because the history of civilization is shot through with the violence of domination.

The long parade of Mesopotamian empires began when Sargon created the Akkadian Empire around 2300 B.C. The world's first emperor subjugated the independent city-states of Sumer to his south: empire versus *polis*. The Akkadians, less civilized, adopted Sumerian culture and diffused it, like Rome vis-à-vis Greece. The pattern is repeated with the Old Babylonian Empire.

Empires would ebb and flow across the Near East, but one people would question the legitimating myths funding those empires, which stifled general liberty (promised by civilization) in favor of grandees.

Polytheistic religious myth was inextricable from hierarchical political power and social structure. The Israelites embarked on an exodus from that arrangement, impelled by the revelation of the only true God (“monotheism”), who transcends worldly cycles of power, who alone is to be worshipped—and who addresses each person as an ethical and religious agent, initiating the liberation of individuals from oligarchic collectivism and aiming the free personality towards global communion. This cosmopolitan individuation became even clearer in the emergence of philosophy.

The Persian Empire, whose story is intertwined with that of Israel, would come to preside over the Greek colonists of Ionia (on the western coast of modern-day Turkey) after philosophy's birth there, and Persia's failed attempts to subjugate the city-states of the Greek homeland provided the impetus for the democratic glories of Periclean Athens, glories containing the canker of imperialism and slavery. Alexander the Great spread Greek culture eastward all the way to India, something of a repayment on the debt the “West” owed the “East.” (No Jerusalem or Athens without Uruk.) When Rome gained hegemony over the Mediterranean world, it advanced material culture and urban networking in a way that would not be surpassed until the Industrial Revolution. The genius of Roman law would help

rationalize social order despite immense demographic disruptions.

Diocletian's imperial reorganization would live on in the Roman Catholic Church. The conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity provided the European social substance that would survive the collapse of the Empire in the West. Even beyond the Middle Ages, Augustinian Christianity, heir to the treasures of the ancient world that emerged with Sumer, drove the "Western" dynamism towards free personality and universal humanity.
Civilization is still our work.

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Gilgamesh

Once upon a time it was thought that Western Civilization had unprecedented literary fountainheads in Homer and the Hebrew Bible. Modern archaeological discoveries would re-contextualize what we knew. In particular, the unearthing of the “epic” of *Gilgamesh* changed everything. Its account of a slate-cleaning universal flood clearly provides a model for the story of Noah. And there are manifold echoes of *Gilgamesh* in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: a semi-divine hero pursuing glory and confronting mortality, whose loss of the dearest of friends overwhelms him; another embarking on a fabulous journey across and under the world to find undying wisdom, who returns home to take up again his political responsibilities. Beneath the Indo-European and Israelite, there were older, Semitic cultures—and finally the Sumerian: whose language is unrelated to any that we know. Sumerian and Mesopotamian oral and written storytelling suffused the world along trade routes, and the fragrance of the mythic experience from the dawn of civilization lingers within the humanistic enterprise.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, an English traveler excavated the royal library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (near Mosul) which was destroyed when the Medes and Babylonians defeated the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. The fragmented clay tablets inscribed with *Gilgamesh* were in the rubble, amid thousands of other cuneiform documents. Written in Akkadian (a Semitic language, thus related to Hebrew and Arabic), this was the standard version of the poem, fashioned by a Babylonian poet-sage, *Sîn-lēqi-unninnī* (“the moon god accepts my prayer”), around the time of the Late Bronze Age collapse (1200 B.C.) An Old Babylonian version had been composed maybe 500 years before. And from before that, around 2100 B.C., we have five separate poems in Sumerian about *Gilgamesh*. He appears to have been a Sumerian king who ruled Uruk perhaps around 2800 B.C. Uruk (biblical Erech, Genesis 10:10) had been the driver of Sumerian civilization, its urbanization and state formation involving military regularization, palace and temple bureaucratization, and social stratification. According to the poem, *Gilgamesh* was responsible for constructing the city’s walls. Not long after his death, he was considered a god, and became the ancient Near East’s legendary hero *par excellence*.

Though this selection looks like prose (a formatting choice to save space), it is a translation in verse, conveying something of the music of the original. (Fine writing in prose is generally a later development.) The marvelous poet Rainer Maria Rilke, reading the earliest modern translations of *Gilgamesh*, exclaimed, “I reckon it the greatest thing that can happen to you.” By transporting us to the primal city, *Gilgamesh* immerses us in the fundamental dynamisms of culture: becoming civilized, the role of eros in the process, friendship’s taming of the tyrannical impulse. *Gilgamesh* still orients us in becoming magnanimous enough for the venture of civil coexistence.

Prologue

He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions, from exaltation to despair, had been granted a vision into the great mystery, the secret places, the primeval days before the Flood. He had journeyed to the edge of the world and made his way back, exhausted but whole. He had carved his trials on stone tablets, had restored the holy Eanna Temple and the massive wall of Uruk, which no city on earth can equal. See how its ramparts gleam like copper in the sun. Climb the stone staircase, more ancient than the mind can imagine, approach the Eanna Temple, sacred to Ishtar, a temple that no king has equaled in size or beauty, walk on the wall of Uruk, follow its course around the city, inspect its mighty foundations, examine its brickwork, how masterfully it is built, observe the land it encloses: the palm trees, the gardens, the orchards, the glorious palaces and temples, the shops and marketplaces, the houses, the public squares. Find the cornerstone and under it the copper box that is marked with his name. Unlock it. Open the lid. Take out the tablet of lapis lazuli. Read how Gilgamesh suffered all and accomplished all.

Book I

Surpassing all kings, powerful and tall beyond all others, violent, splendid, a wild bull of a man, unvanquished leader, hero in the front lines, beloved by his soldiers—fortress they called him, protector of the people, raging flood that destroys all defenses—two-thirds divine and one-third human, son of King Lugalbanda, who became a god, and of the goddess Ninsun, he opened the mountain passes, dug wells on the slopes, crossed the vast ocean, sailed to the rising sun, journeyed to the edge of the world, in search of eternal life, and once he found Utnapishtim—the man who survived the Great Flood and was made immortal—he brought back the ancient, forgotten rites, restoring the temples that the Flood had destroyed, renewing the statutes and sacraments for the welfare of the people and the sacred land. Who is like Gilgamesh? What other king has inspired such awe? Who else can say, “I alone rule, supreme among mankind”? The goddess Aruru, mother of creation, had designed his body, had made him the strongest of men—huge, handsome, radiant, perfect.

The city is his possession, he struts through it, arrogant, his head raised high, trampling its citizens like a wild bull. He is king, he does whatever he wants, takes the son from his father and crushes him, takes the girl from her mother and uses her, the warrior’s daughter, the young man’s bride, he uses her, no one dares to oppose him. But

the people of Uruk cried out to heaven, and their lamentation was heard, the gods are not unfeeling, their hearts were touched, they went to Anu, father of them all, protector of the realm of sacred Uruk, and spoke to him on the people's behalf: "Heavenly Father, Gilgamesh—noble as he is, splendid as he is—has exceeded all bounds. The people suffer from his tyranny, the people cry out that he takes the son from his father and crushes him, takes the girl from her mother and uses her, the warrior's daughter, the young man's bride, he uses her, no one dares to oppose him. Is this how you want your king to rule? Should a shepherd savage his own flock? Father, do something, quickly, before the people overwhelm heaven with their heartrending cries."

Anu heard them, he nodded his head, then to the goddess, mother of creation, he called out: "Aruru, you are the one who created humans. Now go and create a double for Gilgamesh, his second self, a man who equals his strength and courage, a man who equals his stormy heart. Create a new hero, let them balance each other perfectly, so that Uruk has peace."

When Aruru heard this, she closed her eyes, and what Anu had commanded she formed in her mind. She moistened her hands, she pinched off some clay, she threw it into the wilderness, kneaded it, shaped it to her idea, and fashioned a man, a warrior, a hero: Enkidu the brave, as powerful and fierce as the war god Ninurta. Hair covered his body, hair grew thick on his head and hung down to his waist, like a woman's hair. He roamed all over the wilderness, naked, far from the cities of men, ate grass with gazelles, and when he was thirsty he drank clear water from the waterholes, kneeling beside the antelope and deer.

One day, a human—a trapper—saw him drinking with the animals at a waterhole. The trapper's heart pounded, his face went white, his legs shook, he was numb with terror. The same thing happened a second, a third day. Fear gripped his belly, he looked drained and haggard like someone who has been on a long, hard journey.

He went to his father. "Father, I have seen a savage man at the waterhole. He must be the strongest man in the world, with muscles like rock. I have seen him outrun the swiftest animals. He lives among them, eats grass with gazelles, and when he is thirsty he drinks clear water from the waterholes. I haven't approached him—I am too afraid. He fills in the pits I have dug, he tears out the traps I have set, he frees the animals, and I can catch nothing. My livelihood is gone."

"Son, in Uruk there lives a man named Gilgamesh. He is king of that city and the strongest man in the world, they say, with muscles like

rock. Go now to Uruk, go to Gilgamesh, tell him what happened, then follow his advice. He will know what to do.”

He made the journey, he stood before Gilgamesh in the center of Uruk, he told him about the savage man. The king said, “Go to the temple of Ishtar, ask them there for a woman named Shamhat, one of the priestesses who give their bodies to any man, in honor of the goddess. Take her into the wilderness. When the animals are drinking at the waterhole, tell her to strip off her robe and lie there naked, ready, with her legs apart. The wild man will approach. Let her use her love-arts. Nature will take its course, and then the animals who knew him in the wilderness will be bewildered, and will leave him forever.”

The trapper found Shamhat, Ishtar’s priestess, and they went off into the wilderness. For three days they walked. On the third day they reached the waterhole. There they waited. For two days they sat as the animals came to drink clear water. Early in the morning of the third day, Enkidu came and knelt down to drink clear water with the antelope and deer. They looked in amazement. The man was huge and beautiful. Deep in Shamhat’s loins desire stirred. Her breath quickened as she stared at this primordial being. “Look,” the trapper said, “there he is. Now use your love-arts. Strip off your robe and lie here naked, with your legs apart. Stir up his lust when he approaches, touch him, excite him, take his breath with your kisses, show him what a woman is. The animals who knew him in the wilderness will be bewildered, and will leave him forever.”

She stripped off her robe and lay there naked, with her legs apart, touching herself. Enkidu saw her and warily approached. He sniffed the air. He gazed at her body. He drew close. Shamhat touched him on the thigh, touched his penis, and put him inside her. She used her love-arts, she took his breath with her kisses, held nothing back, and showed him what a woman is. For seven days he stayed erect and made love with her, until he had had enough. At last he stood up and walked toward the waterhole to rejoin his animals. But the gazelles saw him and scattered, the antelope and deer bounded away. He tried to catch up, but his body was exhausted, his life-force was spent, his knees trembled, he could no longer run like an animal, as he had before. He turned back to Shamhat, and as he walked he knew that his mind had somehow grown larger, he knew things now that an animal can’t know.

Enkidu sat down at Shamhat’s feet. He looked at her, and he understood all the words she was speaking to him. “Now, Enkidu, you know what it is to be with a woman, to unite with her. You are beau-

tiful, you are like a god. Why should you roam the wilderness and live like an animal? Let me take you to great-walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar, to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king, who in his arrogance oppresses the people, trampling upon them like a wild bull.”

She finished, and Enkidu nodded his head. Deep in his heart he felt something stir, a longing he had never known before, the longing for a true friend. Enkidu said, “I will go, Shamhat. Take me with you to great-walled Uruk, to the temple of Ishtar, to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king. I will challenge him. I will shout to his face: ‘I am the mightiest! I am the man who can make the world tremble! I am supreme!’”

“Come,” said Shamhat, “let us go to Uruk, I will lead you to Gilgamesh the mighty king. You will see the great city with its massive wall, you will see the young men dressed in their splendor, in the finest linen and embroidered wool, brilliantly colored, with fringed shawls and wide belts. Every day is a festival in Uruk, with people singing and dancing in the streets, musicians playing their lyres and drums, the lovely priestesses standing before the temple of Ishtar, chatting and laughing, flushed with sexual joy, and ready to serve men’s pleasure, in honor of the goddess, so that even old men are aroused from their beds. You who are still so ignorant of life, I will show you Gilgamesh the mighty king, the hero destined for both joy and grief. You will stand before him and gaze with wonder, you will see how handsome, how virile he is, how his body pulses with erotic power. He is even taller and stronger than you—so full of life-force that he needs no sleep. Enkidu, put aside your aggression. Shamash, the sun god, loves him, and his mind has been made large by Anu, father of the gods, made large by Enlil, the god of earth, and by Ea, the god of water and wisdom. Even before you came down from the hills, you had come to Gilgamesh in a dream.” And she told Enkidu what she had heard. “He went to his mother, the goddess Ninsun, and asked her to interpret the dream. ‘I saw a bright star, it shot across the morning sky, it fell at my feet and lay before me like a huge boulder. I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy. I tried to move it, but it would not budge. A crowd of people gathered around me, the people of Uruk pressed in to see it, like a little baby they kissed its feet. This boulder, this star that had fallen to earth—I took it in my arms, I embraced and caressed it the way a man caresses his wife. Then I took it and laid it before you. You told me that it was my double, my second self.’ The mother of Gilgamesh, Lady Ninsun, the wise, the all-knowing, said to her son, ‘Dearest child, this bright star from heaven, this huge boulder that

you could not lift—it stands for a dear friend, a mighty hero. You will take him in your arms, embrace and caress him the way a man caresses his wife. He will be your double, your second self, a man who is loyal, who will stand at your side through the greatest dangers. Soon you will meet him, the companion of your heart. Your dream has said so.’ Gilgamesh said, ‘May the dream come true. May the true friend appear, the true companion, who through every danger will stand at my side.’”

When Shamhat had finished speaking, Enkidu turned to her, and again they made love.

Book II

Then Shamhat gave Enkidu one of her robes and he put it on. Taking his hand, she led him like a child to some shepherds’ huts.

Marveling, the shepherds crowded around him. “What an enormous man!” they whispered. “How much like Gilgamesh he is—tall and strong, with muscles like rock.” They led him to their table, they put bread and beer in front of him. Enkidu sat and stared. He had never seen human food, he didn’t know what to do. Then Shamhat said, “Go ahead, Enkidu. This is food, we humans eat and drink this.” Warily he tasted the bread. Then he ate a piece, he ate a whole loaf, then ate another, he ate until he was full, drank seven pitchers of the beer, his heart grew light, his face glowed, and he sang out with joy. He had his hair cut, he washed, he rubbed sweet oil into his skin, and became fully human. Shining, he looked handsome as a bridegroom. When the shepherds lay down, Enkidu went out with sword and spear. He chased off lions and wolves, all night he guarded the flocks, he stayed awake and guarded them while the shepherds slept.

One day, while he was making love, he looked up and saw a young man pass by. “Shamhat,” he said, “bring that man here. I want to talk to him. Where is he going?” She called out, then went to the man and said, “Where are you going in such a rush?” The man said to Enkidu, “I am on my way to a wedding banquet. I have piled the table with exquisite food for the ceremony. The priest will bless the young couple, the guests will rejoice, the bridegroom will step aside, and the virgin will wait in the marriage bed for Gilgamesh, king of great-walled Uruk. It is he who mates first with the lawful wife. After he is done, the bridegroom follows. This is the order that the gods have decreed. From the moment the king’s birth-cord was cut, every girl’s hymen has belonged to him.”

As he listened, Enkidu's face went pale with anger. "I will go to Uruk now, to the palace of Gilgamesh the mighty king. I will challenge him. I will shout to his face: I am the mightiest! I am the man who can make the world tremble! I am supreme!"

Together they went to great-walled Uruk, Enkidu in front, Shamhat behind him.

When he walked into the main street of Uruk, the people gathered around him, marveling, the crowds kept pressing closer to see him, like a little baby they kissed his feet. "What an enormous man!" they whispered. "How much like Gilgamesh—not quite so tall but stronger-boned. In the wilderness he grew up eating grass with gazelles, he was nursed on the milk of antelope and deer. Gilgamesh truly has met his match. This wild man can rival the mightiest of kings."

The wedding ritual had taken place, the musicians were playing their drums and lyres, the guests were eating, singing and laughing, the bride was ready for Gilgamesh as though for a god, she was waiting in her bed to open to him, in honor of Ishtar, to forget her husband and open to the king.

When Gilgamesh reached the marriage house, Enkidu was there. He stood like a boulder, blocking the door. Gilgamesh, raging, stepped up and seized him, huge arms gripped huge arms, foreheads crashed like wild bulls, the two men staggered, they pitched against houses, the doorposts trembled, the outer walls shook, they careened through the streets, they grappled each other, limbs intertwined, each huge body straining to break free from the other's embrace. Finally, Gilgamesh threw the wild man and with his right knee pinned him to the ground. His anger left him. He turned away. The contest was over. Enkidu said, "Gilgamesh, you are unique among humans. Your mother, the goddess Ninsun, made you stronger and braver than any mortal, and rightly has Enlil granted you the kingship, since you are destined to rule over men." They embraced and kissed. They held hands like brothers. They walked side by side. They became true friends.

Book III

Time passed quickly. Gilgamesh said, "Now we must travel to the Cedar Forest, where the fierce monster Humbaba lives. We must kill him and drive out evil from the world."

Enkidu sighed. His eyes filled with tears. Gilgamesh said, "Why are you sighing? Why, dear friend, do your eyes fill with tears?"

Enkidu answered, “Dear friend, a scream sticks in my throat, my arms are limp. I knew that country when I roamed the hills with the antelope and deer. The forest is endless, it spreads far and wide for a thousand miles. What man would dare to penetrate its depths?”

Gilgamesh said, “Listen, dear friend, even if the forest goes on forever, I have to enter it, climb its slopes, cut down a cedar that is tall enough to make a whirlwind as it falls to earth.”

Enkidu said, “But how can any man dare to enter the Cedar Forest? It is sacred to Enlil. Hasn’t he declared its entrance forbidden, hasn’t he put Humbaba there to terrify men? We must not go on this journey, we must not fight this creature. His breath spews fire, his voice booms like thunder, his jaws are death. He can hear all sounds in the forest, even the faintest rustling among the leaves, he will hear us a hundred miles away. Who among men or gods could defeat him? Humbaba is the forest’s guardian, Enlil put him there to terrify men. Whoever enters will be struck down by fear.”

Gilgamesh answered, “Why, dear friend, do you speak like a coward? What you just said is unworthy of you, it grieves my heart. We are not gods, we cannot ascend to heaven. No, we are mortal men. Only the gods live forever. Our days are few in number, and whatever we achieve is a puff of wind. Why be afraid then, since sooner or later death must come? Where is the courage you have always had? If I die in the forest on this great adventure, won’t you be ashamed when people say, ‘Gilgamesh met a hero’s death battling the monster Humbaba. And where was Enkidu? He was safe at home!’ You were raised in the mountains, with your own hands you have killed marauding lions and wolves, you are brave, your heart has been tested in combat. But whether you come along or not, I will cut down the tree, I will kill Humbaba, I will make a lasting name for myself, I will stamp my fame on men’s minds forever.”

Gilgamesh bolted the seven gates of great-walled Uruk, and the people gathered, crowds of them poured out into the streets. Gilgamesh sat on his throne. The crowds pressed in to hear him. Gilgamesh spoke: “Hear me, elders of great-walled Uruk. I must travel now to the Cedar Forest, where the fierce monster Humbaba lives. I will conquer him in the Cedar Forest, I will cut down the tree, I will kill Humbaba, the whole world will know how mighty I am. I will make a lasting name for myself, I will stamp my fame on men’s minds forever.”

Then Gilgamesh turned to the young men and spoke: “Hear me, young men of great-walled Uruk, warriors and comrades who have fought at my side. I will journey to meet the monster Humbaba, I will walk a

road that no man has traveled, I will face a combat that no man has known. Give me your blessing before I leave, so that I may come back from the Cedar Forest victorious, and see your faces again. Once again may I celebrate the New Year with you, in the streets of great-walled Uruk, to the lyre's sound and the beat of the drums."

Enkidu stood up. There were tears in his eyes. "Elders of Uruk, persuade the king not to go to the Cedar Forest, not to fight the fierce monster Humbaba, whose roar booms forth like a thunderclap, whose breath spews fire, whose jaws are death, who can hear all sounds in the forest, even the faintest rustling among the leaves. Who among men or gods could defeat him? Humbaba is the forest's guardian, Enlil put him there to terrify men."

The elders bowed to the king and said, "You are young, Sire, your heart beats high and runs away with you. Why do you wish to embark on this folly? We have heard of Humbaba, he is dangerous, he is horrible to look at, his breath spews fire, his jaws are death. How can any man, even you, dare to enter the Cedar Forest? Who among men or gods could defeat him? Humbaba is the forest's guardian, Enlil put him there to terrify men."

After he had listened to the elders' words, Gilgamesh laughed. He got up and said, "Dear friend, tell me, has your courage returned? Are you ready to leave? Or are you still afraid of dying a hero's death? Enkidu, let us go to the forge and order the smiths to make us weapons that only the mightiest heroes could use."

Enkidu listened gravely. He stood silent there for a long time. At last he nodded. Gilgamesh took his hand.

The smiths listened to their instructions. They cast huge weapons that ordinary men could never carry: axes that weighed two hundred pounds each, knives with cross guards and heavy mountings of solid gold. Each man carried weapons and armor weighing more than six hundred pounds.

Gilgamesh said, "Before we leave, let us pay a visit to my mother's temple, let us go and speak to the lady Ninsun, the wise, the all-knowing. Let us bow before her, let us ask for her blessing and her advice."

Hand in hand, the two friends walked to Ninsun's temple. Gilgamesh bowed to his mother, the goddess Ninsun, and said, "I must travel now to the Cedar Forest, I must journey to meet the fierce monster Humbaba, I must walk a road that no man has traveled, I must face a combat that no man has known. Dear mother, great goddess, help

me in this, give me your blessing before I leave, so that I may come back from the Cedar Forest victorious, and see your face again.”

Ninsun listened to his words with sorrow. With sorrow she entered her inner room, she bathed in water of tamarisk and soapwort, she put on her finest robe, a wide belt, a jeweled necklace, then put on her crown. She climbed the stairs and went up to the roof, she lit sweet incense in honor of Shamash, she lifted her arms in prayer and said, “Lord of heaven, you have granted my son beauty and strength and courage—why have you burdened him with a restless heart? Now you have stirred him up to attack the monster Humbaba, to make a long journey from which he may not return. Since he has resolved to go, protect him until he arrives at the Cedar Forest, until he kills the monster Humbaba and drives from the world the evil that you hate. Protect him each day as you cross the sky, and at twilight may Aya your bride entrust him to the valiant stars, the watchmen of the night. O Lord Shamash, glorious sun, delight of the gods, illuminator of the world, who rise and the light is born, it fills the heavens, the whole earth takes shape, the mountains form, the valleys grow bright, darkness vanishes, evil retreats, all creatures wake up and open their eyes, they see you, they are filled with joy—protect my son. On his dangerous journey let the days be long, let the nights be short, let his stride be vigorous and his legs sturdy. When he and his dear friend Enkidu arrive, stir up strong winds against Humbaba, the south wind, the north wind, the east and the west, storm wind, gale wind, hurricane, tornado, to pin Humbaba, to paralyze his steps and make it easy for my son to kill him. Then your swift mules will carry you onward to your stopping place and bed for the night, the gods will bring luscious food to delight you, Aya will dry your face with the fringe of her pure white robe. Hear me, O Lord, protect my son, in your great mercy lead him to the Forest, then bring him home.”

After she had prayed, the goddess Ninsun, the wise, the all-knowing, came down from the roof and summoned Enkidu. “Dear child,” she said, “you were not born from my womb, but now I adopt you as my son.” She hung a jeweled amulet around Enkidu’s neck. “As a priestess takes in an abandoned child, I have taken in Enkidu as my own son. May he be a brother for Gilgamesh. May he guide him to the Forest, and bring him home.”

Enkidu listened. Tears filled his eyes. He and Gilgamesh clasped hands like brothers.

They took their weapons: the massive axes, the massive knives, the quivers, the bows. The elders made way. The young men cheered.

The elders stood up and addressed the king: "Come back safely to great-walled Uruk. Do not rely on your strength alone, but be watchful, be wary, make each blow count. Remember what the ancient proverb says: 'If you walk in front, you protect your comrade; if you know the route, you safeguard your friend.' Let Enkidu go ahead as you walk, he knows the way to the Cedar Forest, he is tested in battle, he is brave and strong, he will guard you at every stage of the journey, through every danger he will stand at your side. May Shamash grant you your heart's desire, may the path to the Cedar Forest be straight, may the nights be safe, with no dangers lurking, may your father Lugalbanda protect you, may you conquer Humbaba, may the battle be quick, may you joyfully wash your feet in his river. Dig a well when you stop for the night, fill your waterskins with fresh water, each day make an offering to Shamash, and remember Lugalbanda your father, who journeyed to far-off mountains himself."

The elders turned to Enkidu and said, "We leave the king in your care. Protect him, guide him through all the treacherous passes, show him where to find food and where to dig for fresh water, lead him to the forest and fight at his side. May Shamash help you, may the gods grant your heart's desire and bring you back safe to great-walled Uruk."

Enkidu said to Gilgamesh, "Since you must do this, I must go with you. So let us leave. Let our hearts be fearless. I will go first, since I know the way to the Cedar Forest, where Humbaba lives."

Book IV

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp. They had traveled for just three days and nights, a six weeks' journey for ordinary men. When the sun was setting, they dug a well, they filled their waterskins with fresh water, Gilgamesh climbed to the mountaintop, he poured out flour as an offering and said, "Mountain, bring me a favorable dream." Enkidu did the ritual for dreams, praying for a sign. A gust of wind passed. He built a shelter for the night, placed Gilgamesh on the floor and spread a magic circle of flour around him, then sprawled like a net across the doorway. Gilgamesh sat there, with his chin on his knees, and sleep overcame him, as it does all men.

At midnight he awoke. He said to Enkidu, "What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by? What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold? Enkidu, dear friend, I have had a dream, a horrible dream. We were walking in a gorge, and when I looked up, a huge mountain

loomed, so huge that we were as small as flies. Then the mountain fell down on top of us. Dear friend, tell me, what does this mean?”

Enkidu said, “Don’t worry, my friend, the dream you had is a favorable one. The mountain stands for Humbaba. He will fall just like that mountain. Lord Shamash will grant us victory, we will kill the monster and leave his corpse on the battlefield.” Gilgamesh, happy with his good dream, smiled, and his face lit up with pleasure.

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp. They had traveled for just three days and nights, a six weeks’ journey for ordinary men. When the sun was setting, they dug a well, they filled their waterskins with fresh water, Gilgamesh climbed to the mountaintop, he poured out flour as an offering and said, “Mountain, bring me a favorable dream.” Enkidu did the ritual for dreams, praying for a sign. A gust of wind passed. He built a shelter for the night, placed Gilgamesh on the floor and spread a magic circle of flour around him, then sprawled like a net across the doorway. Gilgamesh sat there, with his chin on his knees, and sleep overcame him, as it does all men.

At midnight he awoke. He said to Enkidu, “What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by? What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold? Enkidu, dear friend, I have had a dream, a dream more horrible than the first. I looked up and a huge mountain loomed, it threw me down, it pinned me by the feet, a terrifying brightness hurt my eyes, suddenly a young man appeared, he was shining and handsome, he took me by the arm, he pulled me out from under the mountain, he gave me water, my heart grew calm. Dear friend, tell me, what does this mean?”

Enkidu said, “Don’t worry, my friend, the dream you had is a favorable one. Again, the mountain stands for Humbaba. He threw you down, but he could not kill you. As for the handsome young man who appeared, he stands for Lord Shamash, who will rescue you and grant you everything you desire.” Gilgamesh, happy with his good dream, smiled, and his face lit up with pleasure.

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp. They had traveled for just three days and nights, a six weeks’ journey for ordinary men. When the sun was setting, they dug a well, they filled their waterskins with fresh water, Gilgamesh climbed to the mountaintop, he poured out flour as an offering and said, “Mountain, bring me a favorable dream.” Enkidu did the ritual for dreams, praying for a sign. A gust of wind passed. He built a shelter for the night, placed Gilgamesh on the floor and spread a

magic circle of flour around him, then sprawled like a net across the doorway. Gilgamesh sat there, with his chin on his knees, and sleep overcame him, as it does all men.

At midnight he awoke. He said to Enkidu, "What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by? What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold? Enkidu, dear friend, I have had a dream, a dream more horrible than both the others. The heavens roared and the earth heaved, then darkness, silence. Lightning flashed, igniting the trees. By the time the flames died out, the ground was covered with ash. Dear friend, tell me, what does this mean?"

Enkidu said, "Don't worry, my friend, the dream you had is a favorable one. The fiery heavens stand for Humbaba, who tried to kill you with lightning and flames. But in spite of the fire, he could not harm you. We will kill Humbaba. Success is ours. However he attacks us, we will prevail." Gilgamesh, happy with his good dream, smiled, and his face lit up with pleasure.

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp. They had traveled for just three days and nights, a six weeks' journey for ordinary men. When the sun was setting, they dug a well, they filled their waterskins with fresh water, Gilgamesh climbed to the mountaintop, he poured out flour as an offering and said, "Mountain, bring me a favorable dream." Enkidu did the ritual for dreams, praying for a sign. A gust of wind passed. He built a shelter for the night, placed Gilgamesh on the floor and spread a magic circle of flour around him, then sprawled like a net across the doorway. Gilgamesh sat there, with his chin on his knees, and sleep overcame him, as it does all men.

At midnight he awoke. He said to Enkidu, "What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by? What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold? Enkidu, dear friend, I have had a fourth dream, a dream more horrible than the three others. I saw a fierce eagle with a lion's head, it floated down toward me like a huge cloud, it grimaced at me, terrifying flames shot from its mouth, then beside me I saw a young man with an unearthly glow, he seized the creature, he broke its wings, he wrung its neck and threw it to the ground. Dear friend, tell me, what does this mean?"

Enkidu said, "Don't worry, my friend, the dream you had is a favorable one. The eagle that you saw, with a lion's head, stands for Humbaba. Though it dived straight toward you and terrifying flames shot from its mouth, nothing could cause you harm. The young man who came to your rescue was our lord, Shamash. He will stand beside us when

the monster attacks. Whatever happens, we will prevail." Gilgamesh, happy with his good dream, smiled, and his face lit up with pleasure.

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp. They had traveled for just three days and nights, a six weeks' journey for ordinary men. When the sun was setting, they dug a well, they filled their waterskins with fresh water, Gilgamesh climbed to the mountaintop, he poured out flour as an offering and said, "Mountain, bring me a favorable dream." Enkidu did the ritual for dreams, praying for a sign. A gust of wind passed. He built a shelter for the night, placed Gilgamesh on the floor and spread a magic circle of flour around him, then sprawled like a net across the doorway. Gilgamesh sat there, with his chin on his knees, and sleep overcame him, as it does all men.

At midnight he awoke. He said to Enkidu, "What happened? Did you touch me? Did a god pass by? What makes my skin creep? Why am I cold? Enkidu, dear friend, I have had a fifth dream, a dream more horrible than all the others. I was wrestling with a gigantic bull, its bellow shattered the ground and raised clouds of dust that darkened the sky, it pinned me down, it crushed me, I felt its breath on my face, then suddenly a man pulled me up, put his arms around me, and gave me fresh water from his waterskin. Dear friend, tell me, what does this mean?"

Enkidu said, "Don't worry, my friend, the dream you had is a favorable one. The gigantic bull is no enemy of ours. He stands for the very god who has helped us, bright Shamash, our protector, lord of the sky, who in every danger will come to our aid. The man who pulled you up from the ground and gave you fresh water from his waterskin is Lugalbanda, your personal god. With his help, we will achieve a triumph greater than any man has achieved."

They had reached the edge of the Cedar Forest. They could hear Humbaba's terrifying roar. Gilgamesh stopped. He was trembling. Tears flowed down his cheeks. "O Shamash," he cried, "protect me on this dangerous journey. Remember me, help me, hear my prayer." They stood and listened. A moment passed. Then, from heaven, the voice of the god called to Gilgamesh: "Hurry, attack, attack Humbaba while the time is right, before he enters the depths of the forest, before he can hide there and wrap himself in his seven auras with their paralyzing glare.

He is wearing just one now. Attack him! Now!" They stood at the edge of the Cedar Forest, gazing, silent. There was nothing to say.

Book V

They stood at the edge of the Cedar Forest, marveling at the great height of the trees. They could see, before them, a well-marked trail beaten by Humbaba as he came and went. From far off they saw the Cedar Mountain, sacred to Ishtar, where the gods dwell, the slopes of it steep, and rich in cedars with their sharp fragrance and pleasant shade. Gripping their axes, their knives unsheathed, they entered the Forest and made their way through the tangle of thorn bushes underfoot.

Suddenly Enkidu was seized by terror, his face turned pale like a severed head. He said to Gilgamesh, "Dear friend, I cannot continue, I am frightened, I cannot go on. You go into the dreadful forest, you kill Humbaba and win the fame. I will return now to great-walled Uruk, and all men will know what a coward I have been."

Gilgamesh answered, "Dear friend, dear brother, I cannot kill Humbaba alone. Please stay here with me. Stand at my side. 'Two boats lashed together will never sink. A three-ply rope is not easily broken.' If we help each other and fight side by side, what harm can come to us? Let us go on and attack the monster. We have come so far. Whatever you are feeling, let us go on."

Enkidu said, "You have never met him, so you don't know the horror that lurks ahead. But when I saw him, my blood ran cold. His teeth are knife-sharp, they stick out like tusks, his face, blood-smeared, is a lion's face, he charges ahead like a raging torrent, his forehead ablaze. Who can withstand him? I am terrified. I cannot go on."

Gilgamesh said, "Courage, dear brother, this is no time to give in to fear. We have come so far, across so many mountains, and our journey is about to reach its goal. You were raised in the wild, with your own hands you have killed marauding lions and wolves, you are brave, your heart has been tested in combat. Though your arms feel weak now and your legs tremble, you are a warrior, you know what to do. Shout out your battle-cry, let your voice pound like a kettle drum. Let your heart inspire you to be joyous in battle, to forget about death. If we help each other and fight side by side, we will make a lasting name for ourselves, we will stamp our fame on men's minds forever."

They walked deep into the Cedar Forest, gripping their axes, their knives unsheathed, following the trail that Humbaba had made.

They came within sight of the monster's den. He was waiting inside it. Their blood ran cold. He saw the two friends, he grimaced, he bared his teeth, he let out a deafening roar. He glared at Gilgamesh. "Young man," he said, "you will never go home. Prepare to die." Dread surged through Gilgamesh, terror flooded his muscles, his heart froze, his mouth went dry, his legs shook, his feet were rooted to the ground.

Enkidu saw his dismay and said, "Dear friend, great warrior, noble hero, don't lose courage, remember this: 'Two boats lashed together will never sink. A three-ply rope is not easily broken.' If we help each other and fight side by side, what harm can come to us? Let us go on."

They advanced to the monster's den. Humbaba charged out roaring at them and said, "I know you, Gilgamesh. Don't be a fool. Go away. Leave the Cedar Forest. Have madmen told you to confront me here? I will tear you limb from limb, I will crush you and leave you bloody and mangled on the ground. And you, Enkidu, you son of a fish or a turtle, you gutless, fatherless spawn who never suckled on mother's milk, I saw you in the pastures when you were young, I saw you graze with the wandering herds but I didn't kill you, you were too scrawny, you wouldn't have made a decent meal. And now you dare to lead Gilgamesh here, you both stand before me looking like a pair of frightened girls. I will slit your throats, I will cut off your heads, I will feed your stinking guts to the shrieking vultures and crows."

Gilgamesh backed away. He said, "How dreadful Humbaba's face has become! It is changing into a thousand nightmare faces, more horrible than I can bear. I feel haunted. I am too afraid to go on."

Enkidu answered, "Why, dear friend, do you speak like a coward? What you just said is unworthy of you. It grieves my heart. We must not hesitate or retreat. Two intimate friends cannot be defeated. Be courageous. Remember how strong you are. I will stand by you. Now let us attack."

Gilgamesh felt his courage return. They charged at Humbaba like two wild bulls. The monster let out a deafening cry, his roar boomed forth like a blast of thunder, he stamped and the ground burst open, his steps split the mountains of Lebanon, the clouds turned black, a sulfurous fog descended on them and made their eyes ache. Then Shamash threw strong winds at Humbaba, the south wind, the north wind, the east and the west, storm wind, gale wind, hurricane, tornado, to pin him down and paralyze his steps. He could not move forward, could not retreat. Gilgamesh saw it, he leaped upon him, he held a

knife to Humbaba's throat.

Humbaba said, "Gilgamesh, have mercy. Let me live here in the Cedar Forest. If you spare my life, I will be your slave, I will give you as many cedars as you wish. You are king of Uruk by the grace of Shamash, honor him with a cedar temple and a glorious cedar palace for yourself. All this is yours, if only you spare me."

Enkidu said, "Dear friend, don't listen to anything that the monster says. Kill him before you become confused."

Humbaba said, "If any mortal, Enkidu, knows the rules of my forest, it is you. You know that this is my place and that I am the forest's guardian. Enlil put me here to terrify men, and I guard the forest as Enlil ordains. If you kill me, you will call down the gods' wrath, and their judgment will be severe. I could have killed you at the forest's edge, I could have hung you from a cedar and fed your guts to the shrieking vultures and crows. Now it is your turn to show me mercy. Speak to him, beg him to spare my life."

Enkidu said, "Dear friend, quickly, before another moment goes by, kill Humbaba, don't listen to his words, don't hesitate, slaughter him, slit his throat, before the great god Enlil can stop us, before the great gods can get enraged, Enlil in Nippur, Shamash in Larsa. Establish your fame, so that forever men will speak of brave Gilgamesh, who killed Humbaba in the Cedar Forest."

Knowing he was doomed, Humbaba cried out, "I curse you both. Because you have done this, may Enkidu die, may he die in great pain, may Gilgamesh be inconsolable, may his merciless heart be crushed with grief."

Gilgamesh dropped his axe, appalled. Enkidu said, "Courage, dear friend. Close your ears to Humbaba's curses. Don't listen to a word. Slaughter him! Now!"

Gilgamesh, hearing his beloved friend, came to himself. He yelled, he lifted his massive axe, he swung it, it tore into Humbaba's neck, the blood shot out, again the axe bit flesh and bone, the monster staggered, his eyes rolled, and at the axe's third stroke he toppled like a cedar and crashed to the ground. At his death-roar the mountains of Lebanon shook, the valleys ran with his blood, for ten miles the forest resounded. Then the two friends sliced him open, pulled out his intestines, cut off his head with its knife-sharp teeth and horrible bloodshot staring eyes. A gentle rain fell onto the mountains. A gentle rain fell onto the mountains.

They took their axes and penetrated deeper into the forest, they went chopping down cedars, the woods chips flew, Gilgamesh chopped down the mighty trees, Enkidu hewed the trunks into timbers. Enkidu said, "By your great strength you have killed Humbaba, the forest's watchman. What could bring you dishonor now? We have chopped down the trees of the Cedar Forest, we have brought to earth the highest of the trees, the cedar whose top once pierced the sky. We will make it into a gigantic door, a hundred feet high and thirty feet wide, we will float it down the Euphrates to Enlil's temple in Nippur. No men shall go through it, but only the gods. May Enlil delight in it, may it be a joy to the people of Nippur."

They bound logs together and built a raft. Enkidu steered it down the great river. Gilgamesh carried Humbaba's head.

Book VI

When he returned to great-walled Uruk, Gilgamesh bathed, he washed his matted hair and shook it over his back, he took off his filthy, blood-spattered clothes, put on a tunic of the finest wool, wrapped himself in a glorious gold-trimmed purple robe and fastened it with a wide fringed belt, then put on his crown.

The goddess Ishtar caught sight of him, she saw how splendid a man he was, her heart was smitten, her loins caught fire.

"Come here, Gilgamesh," Ishtar said, "marry me, give me your luscious fruits, be my husband, be my sweet man. I will give you abundance beyond your dreams: marble and alabaster, ivory and jade, gorgeous servants with blue-green eyes, a chariot of lapis lazuli with golden wheels and guide-horns of amber, pulled by storm-demons like giant mules. When you enter my temple and its cedar fragrance, high priests will bow down and kiss your feet, kings and princes will kneel before you, bringing you tribute from east and west. And I will bless everything that you own, your goats will bear triplets, your ewes will twin, your donkeys will be faster than any mule, your chariot-horses will win every race, your oxen will be the envy of the world. These are the least of the gifts I will shower upon you. Come here. Be my sweet man."

Gilgamesh said, "Your price is too high, such riches are far beyond my means. Tell me, how could I ever repay you, even if I gave you jewels, perfumes, rich robes? And what will happen to me when your heart turns elsewhere and your lust burns out?"

"Why would I want to be the lover of a broken oven that fails in the

cold, a flimsy door that the wind blows through, a palace that falls on its staunchest defenders, a mouse that gnaws through its thin reed shelter, tar that blackens the workman's hands, a waterskin that is full of holes and leaks all over its bearer, a piece of limestone that crumbles and undermines a solid stone wall, a battering ram that knocks down the rampart of an allied city, a shoe that mangles its owner's foot?

“Which of your husbands did you love forever? Which could satisfy your endless desires? Let me remind you of how they suffered, how each one came to a bitter end. Remember what happened to that beautiful boy Tammuz: you loved him when you were both young, then you changed, you sent him to the underworld and doomed him to be wailed for, year after year. You loved the bright-speckled roller bird, then you changed, you attacked him and broke his wings, and he sits in the woods crying Ow-ee! Ow-ee! You loved the lion, matchless in strength, then you changed, you dug seven pits for him, and when he fell, you left him to die. You loved the hot-blooded, war-bold stallion, then you changed, you doomed him to whip and spurs, to endlessly gallop, with a bit in his mouth, to muddy his own water when he drinks from a pool, and for his mother, the goddess Silili, you ordained a weeping that will never end. You loved the shepherd, the master of the flocks, who every day would bake bread for you and would bring you a fresh-slaughtered, roasted lamb, then you changed, you touched him, he became a wolf, and now his own shepherd boys drive him away and his own dogs snap at his hairy thighs. You loved the gardener Ishullanu, who would bring you baskets of fresh-picked dates, every day, to brighten your table, you lusted for him, you drew close and said, ‘Sweet Ishullanu, let me suck your rod, touch my vagina, caress my jewel,’ and he frowned and answered, ‘Why should I eat this rotten meal of yours? What can you offer but the bread of dishonor, the beer of shame, and thin reeds as covers when the cold wind blows?’ But you kept up your sweet-talk and at last he gave in, then you changed, you turned him into a toad and doomed him to live in his devastated garden. And why would my fate be any different? If I too became your lover, you would treat me as cruelly as you treated them.”

Ishtar shrieked, she exploded with fury. Raging, weeping, she went up to heaven, to her father, Anu, and Antu, her mother, as tears of anger poured down her cheeks. “Father, Gilgamesh slandered me! He hurled the worst insults at me, he said horrible, unforgivable things!”

Anu said to the princess Ishtar, “But might you not have provoked this? Did you try to seduce him? Or did he just start insulting you for no reason at all?”

Ishtar said, "Please, Father, I beg you, give me the Bull of Heaven, just for a little while. I want to bring it to the earth, I want it to kill that liar Gilgamesh and destroy his palace. If you say no, I will smash the gates of the underworld, and a million famished ghouls will ascend to devour the living, and the living will be outnumbered by the dead."

Anu said to the princess Ishtar, "But if I give you the Bull of Heaven, Uruk will have famine for seven long years. Have you provided the people with grain for seven years, and the cattle with fodder?"

Ishtar said, "Yes, of course I have gathered grain and fodder, I have stored up enough—more than enough—for seven years."

When Anu heard this, he called for the Bull and handed its nose rope to the princess Ishtar. Ishtar led the Bull down to the earth, it entered and bellowed, the whole land shook, the streams and marshes dried up, the Euphrates' water level dropped by ten feet. When the Bull snorted, the earth cracked open and a hundred warriors fell in and died. It snorted again, the earth cracked open and two hundred warriors fell in and died. When it snorted a third time, the earth cracked open and Enkidu fell in, up to his waist, he jumped out and grabbed the Bull's horns, it spat its slobber into his face, it lifted its tail and spewed dung all over him. Gilgamesh rushed in and shouted, "Dear friend, keep fighting, together we are sure to win." Enkidu circled behind the Bull, seized it by the tail and set his foot on its haunch, then Gilgamesh skillfully, like a butcher, strode up and thrust his knife between its shoulders and the base of its horns.

After they had killed the Bull of Heaven, they ripped out its heart and they offered it to Shamash. Then they both bowed before him and sat down like brothers, side by side.

Ishtar was outraged. She climbed to the top of Uruk's great wall, she writhed in grief and wailed, "Not only did Gilgamesh slander me—now the brute has killed his own punishment, the Bull of Heaven."

When Enkidu heard these words, he laughed, he reached down, ripped off one of the Bull's thighs, and flung it in Ishtar's face. "If only I could catch you, this is what I would do to you, I would rip you apart and drape the Bull's guts over your arms!"

Ishtar assembled her priestesses, those who offer themselves to all men in her honor. They placed the Bull's gory thigh on the altar, and began a solemn lament.

Gilgamesh summoned his master craftsmen. They marveled at the gigantic horns. Each horn was made from thirty pounds of lapis lazuli,

each was as thick as the length of two thumbs, together they held four hundred gallons. He called for that much oil to anoint his father's statue, then hung the two massive horns in the chapel dedicated to Lugalbanda.

The two friends washed themselves in the river and returned to the palace, hand in hand. They rode in a chariot through the main streets, the people shouted and cheered as they passed.

Gilgamesh said to his singing girls, "Tell me: Who is the handsomest of men? Tell me: Who is the bravest of heroes? Gilgamesh—he is the handsomest of men, Enkidu—he is the bravest of heroes. We are the victors who in our fury flung the Bull's thigh in Ishtar's face, and now, in the streets, she has no one to avenge her."

There was singing and feasting in the palace that night. Later, when the warriors were stretched out asleep, Enkidu had a terrifying dream. When he woke up, he said to Gilgamesh, "Dear friend, why are the great gods assembled?"

Book VII

"Beloved brother," Enkidu said, "last night I had a terrifying dream. I dreamed that we had offended the gods, they met in council and Anu said, 'They have slaughtered the Bull of Heaven and killed Humbaba, watchman of the Cedar Forest. Therefore one of the two must die.' Then Enlil said to him, 'Enkidu, not Gilgamesh, is the one who must die.'"

Enkidu fell sick. He lay on his bed, sick at heart, and his tears flowed like streams. He said to Gilgamesh, "Dear friend, dear brother, they are taking me from you. I will not return. I will sit with the dead in the underworld, and never will I see my dear brother again."

When Gilgamesh heard his friend's words, he wept, swiftly the tears flowed down his cheeks. He said to Enkidu, "Dearest brother, you have been a reasonable man, but now you are talking nonsense. How do you know that your dream is not a favorable one? Fear has set your lips buzzing like flies."

Enkidu said, "Beloved brother, last night I had a second bad dream. The heavens thundered, the earth replied, and I was standing on a shadowy plain. A creature appeared with a lion's head, his face was ghastly, he had a lion's paws, an eagle's talons and wings. He flew at me, he seized me by the hair, I tried to struggle, but with one blow he capsize me like a raft, he leaped upon me, like a bull he trampled

my bones. ‘Gilgamesh, save me, save me!’ I cried. But you didn’t save me. You were afraid and you didn’t come. The creature touched me and suddenly feathers covered my arms, he bound them behind me and forced me down to the underworld, the house of darkness, the home of the dead, where all who enter never return to the sweet earth again. Those who dwell there squat in the darkness, dirt is their food, their drink is clay, they are dressed in feathered garments like birds, they never see light, and on door and bolt the dust lies thick. When I entered that house, I looked, and around me were piles of crowns, I saw proud kings who had ruled the land, who had set out roast meat before the gods and offered cool water and cakes for the dead. I saw high priests and acolytes squatting, exorcists and prophets, the ecstatic and the dull, I saw Etana, the primeval king, Sumuqan, the wild animals’ god, and Ereshkigal, the somber queen of the underworld. Belet-seri, her scribe, was kneeling before her, reading from the tablet on which each mortal’s death is inscribed. When the queen saw me, she glared and said, ‘Who has brought this new resident here?’”

Gilgamesh said, “Though it sounds bad, this dream may be a good omen. The gods send dreams just to the healthy, never to the weak, so it is a healthy man who has dreamed this. Now I will pray to the great gods for help, I will pray to Shamash and to your god, to Anu, father of the gods, to Enlil the counselor, and to Ea the wise, I will beg them to show you mercy, then I will have a gold statue made in your image. Don’t worry, dear friend, you will soon get better, this votive image will restore you to health.”

Enkidu said, “There is no gold statue that can cure this illness, beloved friend. What Enlil has decided cannot be changed. My fate is settled. There is nothing you can do.”

At the first glow of dawn, Enkidu cried out to Shamash, he raised his head, and the tears poured down his cheeks. “I turn to you, Lord, since suddenly fate has turned against me. As for that wretched trapper who found me when I was free in the wilderness—because he destroyed my life, destroy his livelihood, may he go home empty, may no animals ever enter his traps, or if they do, may they vanish like mist, and may he starve for bringing me here.”

After he had cursed him to his heart’s content, he then cursed Shamhat, the priestess of Ishtar. “Shamhat, I assign you an eternal fate, I curse you with the ultimate curse, may it seize you instantly, as it leaves my mouth. Never may you have a home and family, never caress a child of your own, may your man prefer younger, prettier girls, may he beat you as a housewife beats a rug, may you never acquire bright alabaster

or shining silver, the delight of men, may your roof keep leaking and no carpenter fix it, may wild dogs camp in your bedroom, may owls nest in your attic, may drunkards vomit all over you, may a tavern wall be your place of business, may you be dressed in torn robes and filthy underwear, may angry wives sue you, may thorns and briars make your feet bloody, may young men jeer and the rabble mock you as you walk the streets. Shamhat, may all this be your reward for seducing me in the wilderness when I was strong and innocent and free.”

Bright Shamash, the protector, heard his prayer. Then from heaven the voice of the god called out: “Enkidu, why are you cursing the priestess Shamhat? Wasn’t it she who gave you fine bread fit for a god and fine beer fit for a king, who clothed you in a glorious robe and gave you splendid Gilgamesh as your intimate friend? He will lay you down on a bed of honor, he will put you on a royal bier, on his left he will place your statue in the seat of repose, the princes of the earth will kiss its feet, the people of Uruk will mourn you, and when you are gone, he will roam the wilderness with matted hair, in a lion skin.”

When Enkidu heard this, his raging heart grew calm. He thought of Shamhat and said, “Shamhat, I assign you a different fate, my mouth that cursed you will bless you now. May you be adored by nobles and princes, two miles away from you may your lover tremble with excitement, one mile away may he bite his lip in anticipation, may the warrior long to be naked beside you, may Ishtar give you generous lovers whose treasure chests brim with jewels and gold, may the mother of seven be abandoned for your sake.”

Then Enkidu said to Gilgamesh, “You who have walked beside me, steadfast through so many dangers, remember me, never forget what I have endured.”

The day that Enkidu had his dreams, his strength began failing. For twelve long days he was deathly sick, he lay in his bed in agony, unable to rest, and every day he grew worse. At last he sat up and called out to Gilgamesh: “Have you abandoned me now, dear friend? You told me that you would come to help me when I was afraid. But I cannot see you, you have not come to fight off this danger. Yet weren’t we to remain forever inseparable, you and I?”

When he heard the death rattle, Gilgamesh moaned like a dove. His face grew dark. “Beloved, wait, don’t leave me. Dearest of men, don’t die, don’t let them take you from me.”

Book VIII

All through the long night, Gilgamesh wept for his dead friend. At the first glow of dawn, he cried out, “Enkidu, dearest brother, you came to Uruk from the wilderness, your mother was a gazelle, your father a wild ass, you were raised on the milk of antelope and deer, and the wandering herds taught you where the best pastures were. May the paths that led you to the Cedar Forest mourn you constantly, day and night, may the elders of great-walled Uruk mourn you, who gave us their blessing when we departed, may the hills mourn you and the mountains we climbed, may the pastures mourn you as their own son, may the forest we slashed in our fury mourn you, may the bear mourn you, the hyena, the panther, the leopard, deer, jackal, lion, wild bull, gazelle, may the rivers Ulaya and Euphrates mourn you, whose sacred waters we offered to the gods, may the young men of great-walled Uruk mourn you, who cheered when we slaughtered the Bull of Heaven, may the farmer mourn you, who praised you to the skies in his harvest song, may the shepherd mourn you, who brought you milk, may the brewer mourn you, who made you fine beer, may Ishtar’s priestess mourn you, who massaged you with sweet-smelling oil, may the wedding guests mourn you like their own brother, may the temple priests mourn you, loosening their hair.

“Hear me, elders, hear me, young men, my beloved friend is dead, he is dead, my beloved brother is dead, I will mourn as long as I breathe, I will sob for him like a woman who has lost her only child. O Enkidu, you were the axe at my side in which my arm trusted, the knife in my sheath, the shield I carried, my glorious robe, the wide belt around my loins, and now a harsh fate has torn you from me, forever. Beloved friend, swift stallion, wild deer, leopard ranging in the wilderness—Enkidu, my friend, swift stallion, wild deer, leopard ranging in the wilderness—together we crossed the mountains, together we slaughtered the Bull of Heaven, we killed Humbaba, who guarded the Cedar Forest—O Enkidu, what is this sleep that has seized you, that has darkened your face and stopped your breath?”

But Enkidu did not answer. Gilgamesh touched his heart, but it did not beat.

Then he veiled Enkidu’s face like a bride’s. Like an eagle Gilgamesh circled around him, he paced in front of him, back and forth, like a lioness whose cubs are trapped in a pit, he tore out clumps of his hair, tore off his magnificent robes as though they were cursed.

At the first glow of dawn, Gilgamesh sent out a proclamation: “Blacksmiths, goldsmiths, workers in silver, metal, and gems—create a statue

of Enkidu, my friend, make it more splendid than any statue that has ever been made. Cover his beard with lapis lazuli, his chest with gold. Let obsidian and all other beautiful stones—a thousand jewels of every color—be piled along with the silver and gold and sent on a barge, down the Euphrates to great-walled Uruk, for Enkidu's statue. I will lay him down on a bed of honor, I will put him on a royal bier, on my left I will place his statue in the seat of repose, the princes of the earth will kiss its feet, the people of Uruk will mourn him, and when he is gone, I will roam the wilderness with matted hair, in a lion skin."

After he sent out the proclamation, he went to the treasury, unlocked the door and surveyed his riches, then he brought out priceless, jewel-studded weapons and tools, with inlaid handles of ivory and gold, and he heaped them up for Enkidu, his friend, as an offering to the gods of the underworld. He gathered fattened oxen and sheep, he butchered them, and he piled them high for Enkidu, his beloved friend. He closed his eyes, in his mind he formed an image of the infernal river, then he opened the palace gate, brought out an offering table of precious yew wood, filled a carnelian bowl with honey, filled a lapis lazuli bowl with butter, and when the offerings were ready he spread out each one in front of Shamash.

To the great queen Ishtar his offering was a polished javelin of pure cedar. "Let Ishtar accept this, let her welcome my friend and walk at his side in the underworld, so that Enkidu may not be sick at heart." To Sin, the god of the moon, he offered a knife with a curved obsidian blade. "Let Sin accept this, let him welcome my friend and walk at his side in the underworld, so that Enkidu may not be sick at heart." To Ereshkigal, the dark queen of the dead, he offered a lapis lazuli flask. "Let the queen accept this, let her welcome my friend and walk at his side in the underworld, so that Enkidu may not be sick at heart." To Tammuz, the shepherd beloved by Ishtar, his offering was a carnelian flute; to Namtar, vizier of the dark gods, a lapis lazuli chair and scepter; to Hushbishag, handmaid of the dark gods, a golden necklace; to Qassa-tabat, the infernal sweeper, a silver bracelet; to the housekeeper, Ninshuluhha, a mirror of alabaster, on the back of which was a picture of the Cedar Forest, inlaid with rubies and lapis lazuli; to the butcher, Bibbu, a double-edged knife with a haft of lapis lazuli bearing a picture of the holy Euphrates. When all the offerings were set out, he prayed, "Let the gods accept these, let them welcome my friend and walk at his side in the underworld, so that Enkidu may not be sick at heart."

After the funeral, Gilgamesh went out from Uruk, into the wilderness with matted hair, in a lion skin.

Book IX

Gilgamesh wept over Enkidu his friend, bitterly he wept through the wilderness. “Must I die too? Must I be as lifeless as Enkidu? How can I bear this sorrow that gnaws at my belly, this fear of death that restlessly drives me onward? If only I could find the one man whom the gods made immortal, I would ask him how to overcome death.”

So Gilgamesh roamed, his heart full of anguish, wandering, always eastward, in search of Utnapishtim, whom the gods made immortal.

Finally he arrived at the two high mountains called the Twin Peaks. Their summits touch the vault of heaven, their bases reach down to the underworld, they keep watch over the sun’s departure and its return. Two scorpion people were posted at the entrance, guarding the tunnel into which the sun plunges when it sets and moves through the earth to emerge above the horizon at dawn. The sight of these two inspired such terror that it could kill an ordinary man. Their auras shimmered over the mountains. When Gilgamesh saw them, he was pierced with dread, but he steadied himself and headed toward them.

The scorpion man called out to his wife, “This one who approaches—he must be a god.”

The scorpion woman called back to him, “He is two-thirds divine and one-third human.”

The scorpion man said, “What is your name? How have you dared to come here? Why have you traveled so far, over seas and mountains difficult to cross, through wastelands and deserts no mortal has ever entered? Tell me the goal of your journey. I want to know.”

“Gilgamesh is my name,” he answered, “I am the king of great-walled Uruk and have come here to find my ancestor Utnapishtim, who joined the assembly of the gods, and was granted eternal life. He is my last hope. I want to ask him how he managed to overcome death.”

The scorpion man said, “No one is able to cross the Twin Peaks, nor has anyone ever entered the tunnel into which the sun plunges when it sets and moves through the earth. Inside the tunnel there is total darkness: deep is the darkness, with no light at all.”

The scorpion woman said, “This brave man, driven by despair, his body frost-chilled, exhausted, and burnt by the desert sun—show him the way to Utnapishtim.”

The scorpion man said, “Ever downward through the deep darkness the tunnel leads. All will be pitch black before and behind you, all

will be pitch black to either side. You must run through the tunnel faster than the wind. You have just twelve hours. If you don't emerge from the tunnel before the sun sets and enters, you will find no refuge from its deadly fire. Penetrate into the mountains' depths, may the Twin Peaks lead you safely to your goal, may they safely take you to the edge of the world. The gate to the tunnel lies here before you. Go now in peace, and return in peace."

As the sun was rising, Gilgamesh entered. He began to run. For one hour he ran, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. For a second and a third hour Gilgamesh ran, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. For a fourth and a fifth hour Gilgamesh ran, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. For a sixth and a seventh hour Gilgamesh ran, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. At the eighth hour Gilgamesh cried out with fear, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. At the ninth hour he felt a breeze on his face, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. For a tenth and eleventh hour Gilgamesh ran, deep was the darkness, with no light at all before and behind him and to either side. At the twelfth hour he emerged from the tunnel into the light. The sun was hurtling toward the entrance. He had barely escaped.

Before him the garden of the gods appeared, with gem-trees of all colors, dazzling to see. There were trees that grew rubies, trees with lapis lazuli flowers, trees that dangled gigantic coral clusters like dates. Everywhere, sparkling on all the branches, were enormous jewels: emeralds, sapphires, hematite, diamonds, carnelians, pearls. Gilgamesh looked up and marveled at it all.

Book X

At the edge of the ocean, the tavern keeper Shiduri was sitting. Her face was veiled, her golden pot-stand and brewing vat stood at her side. As Gilgamesh came toward her, worn out, his heart full of anguish, she thought, "This desperate man must be a murderer. Why else is he heading straight toward me?" She rushed into her tavern, locked the door, then climbed to the roof. Gilgamesh heard the noise, he looked up and saw her standing there, staring at him. "Why did you lock yourself in?" he shouted. "I want to enter now. If you don't let me, I will smash your locks and break down your door."

Shiduri answered, "You seemed so wild that I locked my door and

climbed to the roof. Tell me your name now. Where you are going?”

“Gilgamesh is my name,” he said. “I am the king of great-walled Uruk. I am the man who killed Humbaba in the Cedar Forest, I am the man who triumphed over the Bull of Heaven.”

Shiduri said, “Why are your cheeks so hollow and your features so ravaged? Why is your face frost-chilled, and burnt by the desert sun? Why is there so much grief in your heart? Why are you worn out and ready to collapse, like someone who has been on a long, hard journey?”

Gilgamesh said, “Shouldn’t my cheeks be hollow, shouldn’t my face be ravaged, frost-chilled, and burnt by the desert sun? Shouldn’t my heart be filled with grief? Shouldn’t I be worn out and ready to collapse? My friend, my brother, whom I loved so dearly, who accompanied me through every danger—Enkidu, my brother, whom I loved so dearly, who accompanied me through every danger—the fate of mankind has overwhelmed him. For six days I would not let him be buried, thinking, ‘If my grief is violent enough, perhaps he will come back to life again.’ For six days and seven nights I mourned him, until a maggot fell out of his nose. Then I was frightened, I was terrified by death, and I set out to roam the wilderness. I cannot bear what happened to my friend—I cannot bear what happened to Enkidu—so I roam the wilderness in my grief. How can my mind have any rest? My beloved friend has turned into clay—my beloved Enkidu has turned into clay. And won’t I too lie down in the dirt like him, and never arise again?”

Shiduri said, “Gilgamesh, where are you roaming? You will never find the eternal life that you seek. When the gods created mankind, they also created death, and they held back eternal life for themselves alone. Humans are born, they live, then they die, this is the order that the gods have decreed. But until the end comes, enjoy your life, spend it in happiness, not despair. Savor your food, make each of your days a delight, bathe and anoint yourself, wear bright clothes that are sparkling clean, let music and dancing fill your house, love the child who holds you by the hand, and give your wife pleasure in your embrace. That is the best way for a man to live.”

Gilgamesh cried out, “What are you saying, tavern keeper? My heart is sick for my friend who died. What can your words mean when my heart is sick for Enkidu who died? Show me the road to Utnapishtim. I will cross the vast ocean if I can. If not, I will roam the wilderness in my grief.”

Shiduri said, “Never has there been a path across the vast ocean, nor has there ever been any human who was able to cross it. Only brave Shamash as he climbs the sky can cross the vast ocean—who else can do it? The crossing is harsh, the danger is great, and midway lie the Waters of Death, whose touch kills instantly. Even if you manage to sail that distance, what will you do when you reach the Waters of Death? The one man who can help you is Urshanabi, Utnapishtim’s boatman. He is trimming pine branches down in the forest, and he has the Stone Men with him. Go to him. Ask. If he says yes, you can cross the vast ocean. If he says no, you will have to turn back.”

At these words, Gilgamesh gripped his axe, drew his knife, and crept down toward them. When he was close, he fell upon them like an arrow. His battle-cry rang through the forest. Urshanabi saw the bright knife, saw the axe flash, and he stood there, dazed. Fear gripped the Stone Men who crewed the boat. Gilgamesh smashed them to pieces, then threw them into the sea. They sank in the water.

Gilgamesh came back and stood before him. Urshanabi stared, then he said, “Who are you? Tell me. What is your name? I am Urshanabi, the servant of Utnapishtim, the Distant One.”

“Gilgamesh is my name,” he answered, “I am the king of great-walled Uruk. I have traveled here across the high mountains, I have traveled here on the hidden road through the underworld, where the sun comes forth. Show me the way to Utnapishtim.”

Urshanabi said, “Your own hands have prevented the crossing, since in your fury you have smashed the Stone Men, who crewed my boat and could not be injured by the Waters of Death. But don’t despair. There is one more way we can cross the vast ocean. Take your axe, cut down three hundred punting poles, each a hundred feet long, strip them, make grips, and bring them to me. I will wait for you here.”

Gilgamesh went deep into the forest, he cut down three hundred punting poles, each a hundred feet long, he stripped them, made grips, and brought them to Urshanabi the boatman. They boarded the boat and sailed away.

They sailed, without stopping, for three days and nights, a six weeks’ journey for ordinary men, until they reached the Waters of Death. Urshanabi said, “Now be careful, take up the first pole, push us forward, and do not touch the Waters of Death. When you come to the end of the first pole, drop it, take up a second and a third one, until you come to the end of the three-hundredth pole and the Waters of Death are well behind us.”

When all three hundred poles had been used, Gilgamesh took Urshanabi's robe. He held it as a sail, with both arms extended, and the little boat moved on toward the shore.

Alone on the shore stood Utnapishtim, wondering as he watched them approach. "Where are the Stone Men who crew the boat? Why is there a stranger on board? I have never seen him. Who can he be?"

Gilgamesh landed. When he saw the old man, he said to him, "Tell me, where can I find Utnapishtim, who joined the assembly of the gods, and was granted eternal life?"

Utnapishtim said, "Why are your cheeks so hollow? Why is your face so ravaged, frost-chilled, and burnt by the desert sun? Why is there so much grief in your heart? Why are you worn out and ready to collapse, like someone who has been on a long, hard journey?"

Gilgamesh said, "Shouldn't my cheeks be hollow, shouldn't my face be ravaged, frost-chilled, and burnt by the desert sun? Shouldn't my heart be filled with grief? Shouldn't I be worn out and ready to collapse? My friend, my brother, whom I loved so dearly, who accompanied me through every danger—Enkidu, my brother, whom I loved so dearly, who accompanied me through every danger—the fate of mankind has overwhelmed him. For six days I would not let him be buried, thinking, 'If my grief is violent enough, perhaps he will come back to life again.' For six days and seven nights I mourned him, until a maggot fell out of his nose. Then I was frightened, I was terrified by death, and I set out to roam the wilderness. I cannot bear what happened to my friend—I cannot bear what happened to Enkidu—so I roam the wilderness in my grief. How can my mind have any rest? My beloved friend has turned into clay—my beloved Enkidu has turned into clay. And won't I too lie down in the dirt like him, and never arise again? That is why I must find Utnapishtim, whom men call 'The Distant One.' I must ask him how he managed to overcome death. I have wandered the world, climbed the most treacherous mountains, crossed deserts, sailed the vast ocean, and sweet sleep has rarely softened my face. I have worn myself out through ceaseless striving, I have filled my muscles with pain and anguish. I have killed bear, lion, hyena, leopard, tiger, deer, antelope, ibex, I have eaten their meat and have wrapped their rough skins around me. And what in the end have I achieved? When I reached Shiduri the tavern keeper, I was filthy, exhausted, heartsick. Now let the gate of sorrow be closed behind me, and let it be sealed shut with tar and pitch."

Utnapishtim said, "Gilgamesh, why prolong your grief? Have you ever paused to compare your own blessed lot with a fool's? You were made

from the flesh of both gods and humans, the gods have lavished you with their gifts as though they were your fathers and mothers, from your birth they assigned you a throne and told you, 'Rule over men!' To the fool they gave beer dregs instead of butter, stale crusts instead of bread that is fit for gods, rags instead of magnificent garments, instead of a wide fringed belt an old rope, and a frantic, senseless, dissatisfied mind. Can't you see how fortunate you are? You have worn yourself out through ceaseless striving, you have filled your muscles with pain and anguish. And what have you achieved but to bring yourself one day nearer to the end of your days? At night the moon travels across the sky, the gods of heaven stay awake and watch us, unsleeping, undying. This is the way the world is established, from ancient times.

"Yes: the gods took Enkidu's life. But man's life is short, at any moment it can be snapped, like a reed in a canebrake. The handsome young man, the lovely young woman—in their prime, death comes and drags them away. Though no one has seen death's face or heard death's voice, suddenly, savagely, death destroys us, all of us, old or young. And yet we build houses, make contracts, brothers divide their inheritance, conflicts occur—as though this human life lasted forever. The river rises, flows over its banks and carries us all away, like mayflies floating downstream: they stare at the sun, then all at once there is nothing.

"The sleeper and the dead, how alike they are! Yet the sleeper wakes up and opens his eyes, while no one returns from death. And who can know when the last of his days will come? When the gods assemble, they decide your fate, they establish both life and death for you, but the time of death they do not reveal."

Book XI

Gilgamesh said to Utnapishtim, "I imagined that you would look like a god. But you look like me, you are not any different. I intended to fight you, yet now that I stand before you, now that I see who you are, I can't fight, something is holding me back. Tell me, how is it that you, a mortal, overcame death and joined the assembly of the gods and were granted eternal life?"

Utnapishtim said, "I will tell you a mystery, a secret of the gods. You know Shuruppak, that ancient city on the Euphrates. I lived there once. I was its king once, a long time ago, when the great gods decided to send the Flood. Five gods decided, and they took an oath to keep the plan secret: Anu their father, the counselor Enlil, Ninurta

the gods' chamberlain, and Ennugi the sheriff. Ea also, the cleverest of the gods, had taken the oath, but I heard him whisper the secret to the reed fence around my house. 'Reed fence, reed fence, listen to my words. King of Shuruppak, quickly, quickly tear down your house and build a great ship, leave your possessions, save your life. The ship must be square, so that its length equals its width. Build a roof over it, just as the Great Deep is covered by the earth. Then gather and take aboard the ship examples of every living creature.'

'I understood Ea's words, and I said, 'My lord, I will obey your command, exactly as you have spoken it. But what shall I say when the people ask me why I am building such a large ship?'

'Ea said, 'Tell them that Enlil hates you, that you can no longer live in their city or walk on the earth, which belongs to Enlil, that it is your fate to go down into the Great Deep and live with Ea your lord, and that Ea will rain abundance upon them. They will all have all that they want, and more.'

'I laid out the structure, I drafted plans. At the first glow of dawn, everyone gathered—carpenters brought their saws and axes, reed workers brought their flattening-stones, rope makers brought their ropes, and children carried the tar. The poor helped also, however they could—some carried timber, some hammered nails, some cut wood. By the end of the fifth day the hull had been built: the decks were an acre large, the sides two hundred feet high. I built six decks, so that the ship's height was divided in seven. I divided each deck into nine compartments, drove water plugs into all the holes, brought aboard spars and other equipment, had three thousand gallons of tar poured into the furnace, and three thousand gallons of pitch poured out. The bucket carriers brought three thousand gallons of oil—a thousand were used for the caulking, two thousand were left, which the boatman stored. Each day I slaughtered bulls for my workmen, I slaughtered sheep, I gave them barrels of beer and ale and wine, and they drank it like river water. When all our work on the ship was finished, we feasted as though it were New Year's Day. At sunrise I handed out oil for the ritual, by sunset the ship was ready. The launching was difficult. We rolled her on logs down to the river and eased her in until two-thirds was under the water. I loaded onto her everything precious that I owned: all my silver and gold, all my family, all my kinfolk, all kinds of animals, wild and tame, craftsmen and artisans of every kind.

'Then Shamash announced that the time had come. 'Enter the ship now. Seal the hatch.' I gazed at the sky—it was terrifying. I entered the ship. To Puzur-amurri the shipwright, the man who sealed the

hatch, I gave my palace, with all its contents.

“At the first glow of dawn, an immense black cloud rose on the horizon and crossed the sky. Inside it the storm god Adad was thundering, while Shullat and Hanish, twin gods of destruction, went first, tearing through mountains and valleys. Nergal, the god of pestilence, ripped out the dams of the Great Deep, Ninurta opened the floodgates of heaven, the infernal gods blazed and set the whole land on fire. A deadly silence spread through the sky and what had been bright now turned to darkness. The land was shattered like a clay pot. All day, ceaselessly, the storm winds blew, the rain fell, then the Flood burst forth, overwhelming the people like war. No one could see through the rain, it fell harder and harder, so thick that you couldn’t see your own hand before your eyes. Even the gods were afraid. The water rose higher and higher until the gods fled to Anu’s palace in the highest heaven. But Anu had shut the gates. The gods cowered by the palace wall, like dogs.

“Sweet-voiced Aruru, mother of men, screamed out, like a woman in childbirth: ‘If only that day had never been, when I spoke up for evil in the council of the gods! How could I have agreed to destroy my children by sending the Great Flood upon them? I have given birth to the human race, only to see them fill the ocean like fish.’ The other gods were lamenting with her. They sat and listened to her and wept. Their lips were parched, crusted with scabs.

“For six days and seven nights, the storm demolished the earth. On the seventh day, the downpour stopped. The ocean grew calm. No land could be seen, just water on all sides, as flat as a roof. There was no life at all. The human race had turned into clay. I opened a hatch and the blessed sunlight streamed upon me, I fell to my knees and wept. When I got up and looked around, a coastline appeared, a half mile away. On Mount Nimush the ship ran aground, the mountain held it and would not release it. For six days and seven nights, the mountain would not release it. On the seventh day, I brought out a dove and set it free. The dove flew off, then flew back to the ship, because there was no place to land. I waited, then I brought out a swallow and set it free. The swallow flew off, then flew back to the ship, because there was no place to land. I waited, then I brought out a raven and set it free. The raven flew off, and because the water had receded, it found a branch, it sat there, it ate, it flew off and didn’t return.

“When the waters had dried up and land appeared, I set free the animals I had taken, I slaughtered a sheep on the mountaintop and of-

fered it to the gods, I arranged two rows of seven ritual vases, I burned reeds, cedar, and myrtle branches. The gods smelled the fragrance, they smelled the sweet fragrance and clustered around the offering like flies.

“When Aruru came, she held up in the air her necklace of lapis lazuli, Anu’s gift when their love was new. I swear by this precious ornament that never will I forget these days. Let all the gods come to the sacrifice, except for Enlil, because he recklessly sent the Great Flood and destroyed my children.’

“Then Enlil arrived. When he saw the ship, he was angry, he raged at the other gods. ‘Who helped these humans escape? Wasn’t the Flood supposed to destroy them all?’

“Ninurta answered, ‘Who else but Ea, the cleverest of us, could devise such a thing?’

“Ea said to the counselor Enlil, ‘You, the wisest and bravest of the gods, how did it happen that you so recklessly sent the Great Flood to destroy mankind? It is right to punish the sinner for his sins, to punish the criminal for his crime, but be merciful, do not allow all men to die because of the sins of some. Instead of a flood, you should have sent lions to decimate the human race, or wolves, or a famine, or a deadly plague. As for my taking the solemn oath, I didn’t reveal the secret of the gods, I only whispered it to a fence and Utnapishtim happened to hear. Now you must decide what his fate will be.’

“Then Enlil boarded, he took my hand, he led me out, then he led out my wife. He had us kneel down in front of him, he touched our foreheads and, standing between us, he blessed us. ‘Hear me, you gods: Until now, Utnapishtim was a mortal man. But from now on, he and his wife shall be gods like us, they shall live forever, at the source of the rivers, far away.’ Then they brought us to this distant place at the source of the rivers. Here we live.

“Now then, Gilgamesh, who will assemble the gods for your sake? Who will convince them to grant you the eternal life that you seek? How would they know that you deserve it? First pass this test: Just stay awake for seven days. Prevail against sleep, and perhaps you will prevail against death.”

So Gilgamesh sat down against a wall to begin the test. The moment he sat down, sleep swirled over him, like a fog.

Utnapishtim said to his wife, “Look at this fellow! He wanted to live forever, but the very moment he sat down, sleep swirled over him, like

a fog.”

His wife said, “Touch him on the shoulder, wake him, let him depart and go back safely to his own land, by the gate he came through.”

Utnapishtim said, “All men are liars. When he wakes up, watch how he tries to deceive us. So bake a loaf for each day he sleeps, put them in a row beside him, and make a mark on the wall for every loaf.”

She baked the loaves and put them beside him, she made a mark for each day he slept. The first loaf was rock-hard, the second loaf was dried out like leather, the third had shrunk, the fourth had a whitish covering, the fifth was spotted with mold, the sixth was stale, the seventh loaf was still on the coals when he reached out and touched him. Gilgamesh woke with a start and said, “I was almost falling asleep when I felt your touch.”

Utnapishtim said, “Look down, friend, count these loaves that my wife baked and put here while you sat sleeping. This first one, rock-hard, was baked seven days ago, this leathery one was baked six days ago, and so on for all the rest of the days you sat here sleeping. Look. They are marked on the wall behind you.”

Gilgamesh cried out, “What shall I do, where shall I go now? Death has caught me, it lurks in my bedroom, and everywhere I look, everywhere I turn, there is only death.”

Utnapishtim said to the boatman, “This is the last time, Urshanabi, that you are allowed to cross the vast ocean and reach these shores. As for this man, he is filthy and tired, his hair is matted, animal skins have obscured his beauty. Bring him to the tub and wash out his hair, take off his animal skin and let the waves of the ocean carry it away, moisten his body with sweet-smelling oil, bind his hair in a bright new headband, dress him in fine robes fit for a king. Until he comes to the end of his journey let his robes be spotless, as though they were new.”

He brought him to the tub, he washed out his hair, he took off his animal skin and let the waves of the ocean carry it away, he moistened his body with sweet-smelling oil, he bound his hair in a bright new headband, he dressed him in fine robes fit for a king. Then Gilgamesh and Urshanabi boarded, pushed off, and the little boat began to move away from the shore.

But the wife of Utnapishtim said, “Wait, this man came a very long way, he endured many hardships to get here. Won’t you give him something for his journey home?”

When he heard this, Gilgamesh turned the boat around, and he brought it back to the shore. Utnapishtim said, “Gilgamesh, you came a very long way, you endured many hardships to get here. Now I will give you something for your journey home, a mystery, a secret of the gods. There is a small spiny bush that grows in the waters of the Great Deep, it has sharp spikes that will prick your fingers like a rose’s thorns. If you find this plant and bring it to the surface, you will have found the secret of youth.”

Gilgamesh dug a pit on the shore that led down into the Great Deep. He tied two heavy stones to his feet, they pulled him downward into the water’s depths. He found the plant, he grasped it, it tore his fingers, they bled, he cut off the stones, his body shot up to the surface, and the waves cast him back, gasping, onto the shore.

Gilgamesh said to Urshanabi, “Come here, look at this marvelous plant, the antidote to the fear of death. With it we return to the youth we once had. I will take it to Uruk, I will test its power by seeing what happens when an old man eats it. If that succeeds, I will eat some myself and become a carefree young man again.”

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp. Gilgamesh saw a pond of cool water. He left the plant on the ground and bathed. A snake smelled its fragrance, stealthily it crawled up and carried the plant away. As it disappeared, it cast off its skin.

When Gilgamesh saw what the snake had done, he sat down and wept. He said to the boatman, “What shall I do now? All my hardships have been for nothing. O Urshanabi, was it for this that my hands have labored, was it for this that I gave my heart’s blood? I have gained no benefit for myself but have lost the marvelous plant to a reptile. I plucked it from the depths, and how could I ever manage to find that place again? And our little boat—we left it on the shore.”

At four hundred miles they stopped to eat, at a thousand miles they pitched their camp.

When at last they arrived, Gilgamesh said to Urshanabi, “This is the wall of Uruk, which no city on earth can equal. See how its ramparts gleam like copper in the sun. Climb the stone staircase, more ancient than the mind can imagine, approach the Eanna Temple, sacred to Ishtar, a temple that no king has equaled in size or beauty, walk on the wall of Uruk, follow its course around the city, inspect its mighty foundations, examine its brickwork, how masterfully it is built, observe the land it encloses: the palm trees, the gardens, the orchards, the

glorious palaces and temples, the shops and marketplaces, the houses,
the public squares.”

Genesis

Genesis (Hebrew *Bereshit*, “In the beginning”) opens the text sacred to both Jews and Christians. The first five books of the Bible (the Torah for Jews, the Pentateuch for Christians) were traditionally ascribed to the Lawgiver Moses, who belongs perhaps to the 1200s B.C., around the time of the Late Bronze Age collapse.

Genesis itself begins with two creation stories (the first cosmocentric, the second anthropocentric). These accounts form the basis of the *primeval history* unfolded in Genesis 1-11, which presents the origins of the world, civilization, and humanity’s existential predicament, whereas the rest of the book recounts the *patriarchal history*, the origins of the people of Israel in particular.

These narratives emerge as dramatic variations on the mythologies and stories of the ancient Near East. This background is brought forward in the text itself: Abraham (who could have lived anywhere from 2000 to the 1400s B.C.) is a pastoralist called out of agricultural-urban Mesopotamia, the origin of civilization, into Canaan, a land of hardscrabble independent city-states between the two great river-valley civilizations anchoring the Fertile Crescent—the other being Egypt. (Jacob spends much of his life in Mesopotamia, and Joseph’s success in Egypt draws Israel there.) Genesis shares with analogous Mesopotamian accounts recognition of a primeval chaos (the metaphysics of creation *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing,” is not as such to be found). However, the Mesopotamian myth of creation out of violence and divine need is radically critiqued. The Babylonian creation narrative *Enūma eliš* presents a political mythology legitimizing the storm-god Marduk’s accession to supremacy in the pantheon, which coincided with the achievement of Babylonian hegemony in the time of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.) In this telling of origins, we find that the formation of the heavens and the earth involves the dissection of Tiamat, the goddess of the sea (symbolizing the primordial chaos), who has taken the form of a giant dragon. Humans are then created for the care and feeding of the gods. If Genesis 1-11 indeed consists of mythical, legendary, and archetypal material, nonetheless a different spirit blows through the words. The Israelite insistence on the worship of one God (monolatry) would not become straightforward monotheism until perhaps the Babylonian Exile (586-538 B.C.), but it already changes everything: there is no sexual melodrama in the divine; there is a profound intimacy between God and humanity, exemplified in various covenants; God is only good, and seeks to establish the sovereignty of good in history with the collaboration of humans, male and female.

Modern “higher” criticism of the Bible, a fruit of the Enlightenment which had some scholars no longer taking divine inspiration for granted, was applied to the Pentateuch, resulting in the documentary hypothesis, long regnant, identifying separate sources flatly juxtaposed by a redactor (or compiler) during the post-exilic, Persian period, 538-333 B.C. But the literary unity of the books bears its own intelligibility, and ancient readers had a more capacious sense of narrative logic than we have now. Though immensely enriching our reception of the Bible, historical-critical research often, and curiously, assumes improbably late dating for many texts and can miss the *Gestalt* and existential import of biblical books.

No definitive account can be given of the formation of what Jews call the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh and Christians call the Old Testament, but a strong hypothesis is that the nucleating impetus occurred during the Babylonian Exile. The empires of Mesopotamia decisively shaped the life of the people of Israel. The Neo-Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., leaving only the Southern Kingdom of Judah (thus what was once the Hebrew people became the “Jews”), which was itself almost destroyed by the Neo-Babylonians in 586 B.C. But the Jews deported to Babylon did not lose their identity, and the collation of the library of texts constituting the Bible may have been essential for this survival. Some of the material thus incorporated would have come from many centuries earlier, including from the time of Israel’s United Monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon (ca. 1050-928 B.C.) That the Hebrews could shift from a kinship-based society to a monarchic state, like the peoples around them, depended on two other great powers, Egypt and the Hittites (the first Indo-European speakers in recorded history) having exhausted each other in war, finally at the Battle of Qadesh in 1274 B.C.—possibly around the time of the Exodus. In the hiatus before the recrudescence of Assyria, the small nation of Israel could control its own political destiny. (The creation of the crucial Phoenician maritime commercial network, which spread the Sumerian cultural heritage throughout the Mediterranean basin, also belongs to this imperial hiatus.)

Despite its brief period of monarchical self-assertion, Israel was never an important political player. Yet perhaps no other people has had a more decisive impact on history. The Hebrew prophets in particular converted religion into a moral enterprise, lighting the fire for social justice. Monotheism *could* break the ideological hold of political mythology and release the individual, under God, into a universal responsibility. When reading the Bible, one must pay attention to the genre of the text: law, history, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, legend. Failure to read with literary competence can generate both religious and anti-religious fundamentalisms.

CHAPTER 1

When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And it was evening and it was morning, first day. And God said, "Let there be a vault in the midst of the waters, and let it divide water from water." And God made the vault and it divided the water beneath the vault from the water above the vault, and so it was. And God called the vault Heavens, and it was evening and it was morning, second day. And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered in one place so that the dry land will appear," and so it was. And God called the dry land Earth and the gathering of waters He called Seas, and God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth grow grass, plants yielding seed of each kind and trees bearing fruit of each kind, that has its seed within it." And so it was. And the earth put forth grass, plants yielding seed of each kind, and trees bearing fruit that has its seed within it of each kind, and God saw that it was good. And it was evening and it was morning, third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the heavens to divide the day from the night, and they shall be signs for the fixed times and for days and years, and they shall be lights in the vault of the heavens to light up the earth." And so it was. And God made the two great lights, the great light for dominion of day and the small light for dominion of night, and the stars. And God placed them in the vault of the heavens to light up the earth and to have dominion over day and night and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And it was evening and it was morning, fourth day. And God said, "Let the waters swarm with the swarm of living creatures and let fowl fly over the earth across the vault of the heavens." And God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that crawls, which the water had swarmed forth of each kind, and the winged fowl of each kind, and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in the seas and let the fowl multiply in the earth." And it was evening and it was morning, fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of each kind, cattle and crawling things and wild beasts of each kind." And so it was. And God made wild beasts of each kind and cattle of every kind and crawling things on the ground of each kind, and God saw that it was good.

And God said, "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness, to hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and the cattle and the wild beasts and all the crawling things that crawl upon the earth."

And God created the human in his image,
in the image of God He created him,
male and female He created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and conquer it, and hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and every beast that crawls upon the earth." And God said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the face of all the earth and every tree that has fruit bearing seed, yours they will be for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and to all the fowl of the heavens and to all that crawls on the earth, which has the breath of life within it, the green plants for food." And so it was. And God saw all that He had done, and, look, it was very good. And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.

CHAPTER 2

Then the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their array. And God completed on the seventh day the work He had done, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, for on it He had ceased from all His work that He had done. This is the tale of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

On the day the LORD God made earth and heavens, no shrub of the field being yet on the earth and no plant of the field yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not caused rain to fall on the earth and there was no human to till the soil, and wetness would well from the earth to water all the surface of the soil, then the LORD God fashioned the human, humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and He placed there the human He had fashioned. And the LORD God caused to sprout from the soil every tree lovely to look at and good for food, and the tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge, good and evil. Now a river runs out of Eden to water the garden and from there splits off into four streams. The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is goodly, bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli. And the name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through all the land of Cush. And the name of the

third river is Tigris, the one that goes to the east of Ashur. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the LORD God took the human and set him down in the garden of Eden to till it and watch it. And the LORD God commanded the human, saying, "From every fruit of the garden you may surely eat. But from the tree of knowledge, good and evil, you shall not eat, for on the day you eat from it, you are doomed to die." And the LORD God said, "It is not good for the human to be alone, I shall make him a sustainer beside him." And the LORD God fashioned from the soil each beast of the field and each fowl of the heavens and brought each to the human to see what he would call it, and whatever the human called a living creature, that was its name. And the human called names to all the cattle and to the fowl of the heavens and to all the beasts of the field, but for the human no sustainer beside him was found. And the LORD God cast a deep slumber on the human, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs and closed over the flesh where it had been, and the LORD God built the rib He had taken from the human into a woman and He brought her to the human. And the human said:

This one at last, bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman,
for from man was this one taken.

Therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they become one flesh. And the two of them were naked, the human and his woman, and they were not ashamed.

CHAPTER 3

Now the serpent was most cunning of all the beasts of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Though God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden—" And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the garden's trees we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said, 'You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not be doomed to die. For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will become as gods knowing good and evil." And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was lust to the eyes and the tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her man, and he ate. And the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves loin cloths.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the

garden in the evening breeze, and the human and his woman hid from the LORD God in the midst of the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called to the human and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard your sound in the garden and I was afraid, for I was naked, and I hid." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? From the tree I commanded you not to eat have you eaten?" And the human said, "The woman whom you gave by me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me and I ate." And the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

Cursed be you
of all cattle and all beasts of the field.
On your belly shall you go
and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.
Enmity will I set between you and the woman,
between your seed and hers.
He will boot your head
and you will bite his heel."

To the woman He said,

"I will terribly sharpen your birth pangs,
in pain shall you bear children.
And for your man shall be your longing,
and he shall rule over you."

And to the human He said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree that I commanded you, 'You shall not eat from it,'

Cursed be the soil for your sake,
with pangs shall you eat from it all the days of your life.
Thorn and thistle shall it sprout for you
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread
till you return to the soil,
for from there were you taken,
for dust you are
and to dust shall you return."

And the human called his woman's name Eve, for she was the mother of all that lives. And the LORD God made skin coats for the human and his woman, and He clothed them. And the LORD God said, "Now that the human has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he

may reach out and take as well from the tree of life and live forever.” And the LORD God sent him from the garden of Eden to till the soil from which he had been taken. And He drove out the human and set up east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

CHAPTER 4

And the human knew Eve his woman and she conceived and bore Cain, and she said, “I have got me a man with the LORD.” And she bore as well his brother, Abel, and Abel became a herder of sheep while Cain was a tiller of the soil. And it happened in the course of time that Cain brought from the fruit of the soil an offering to the LORD. And Abel too had brought from the choice firstlings of his flock, and the LORD regarded Abel and his offering but He did not regard Cain and his offering, and Cain was very incensed, and his face fell. And the LORD said to Cain.

“Why are you incensed,
and why is your face fallen?
For whether you offer well,
or whether you do not,
at the tent flap sin crouches
and for you is its longing
but you will rule over it.”

And Cain said to Abel his brother, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him. And the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” And He said, “What have you done? Listen! your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil. And so, cursed shall you be by the soil that gaped with its mouth to take your brother’s blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it will no longer give you its strength. A restless wanderer shall you be on the earth.” And Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is too great to bear. Now that You have driven me this day from the soil and I must hide from Your presence, I shall be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me.” And the LORD said to him, “Therefore whoever kills Cain shall suffer sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD set a mark upon Cain so that whoever found him would not slay him.

And Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and dwelled in the land of Nod east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch. Then he became the builder of a city and called the name

of the city, like his son's name, Enoch. And Irad was born to Enoch, and Irad begot Mehujael and Muhujael begot Methusael and Methusael begot Lamech. And Lamech took him two wives, the name of the one was Adah and the name of the other was Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal: he was the first of tent dwellers with livestock. And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the first of all who play on the lyre and pipe. As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-Cain, who forged every tool of copper and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah. And Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, O hearken my voice,
You wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
For a man have I slain for my wound,
a boy for my bruising.
For sevenfold Cain is avenged,
and Lamech seventy and seven.”

And Adam again knew his wife and she bore a son and called his name Seth, as to say, “God has granted me other seed in place of Abel, for Cain has killed him.” As for Seth, to him, too, a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. It was then that the name of the LORD was first invoked.

CHAPTER 5

This is the book of the lineage of Adam: On the day God created the human, in the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name humankind on the day they were created. And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and he begot in his likeness by his image and called his name Seth. And the days of Adam after he begot Seth were eight hundred years, and he begot sons and daughters. And all the days Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years. Then he died. ...

CHAPTER 6

And it happened as human kind began to multiply over the earth and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were comely, and they took themselves wives howsoever they chose. And the LORD said, “My breath shall not abide in the human forever, for he is but flesh. Let his days be a hundred and twenty years.”

The Nephilim were then on the earth, and afterward as well, the sons of God having come to bed with the daughters of man who bore them

children: they are the heroes of yore, the men of renown.

And the LORD saw that the evil of the human creature was great on the earth and that every scheme of his heart's devising was only perpetually evil. And the LORD regretted having made the human on earth and was grieved to the heart. And the LORD said, "I will wipe out the human race I created from the face of the earth, from human to cattle to crawling thing to the fowl of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. This is the lineage of Noah—Noah was a righteous man, he was blameless in his time, Noah walked with God—and Noah begot three sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth. And the earth was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with outrage. And God saw the earth and, look, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before me, for the earth is filled with outrage by them, and I am now about to destroy them, with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood, with cells you shall make the ark, and caulk it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: three hundred cubits, the ark's length; fifty cubits, its width; thirty cubits, its height. Make a skylight in the ark, within a cubit of the top you shall finish it, and put an entrance in the ark on one side. With lower and middle and upper decks you shall make it. As for me, I am about to bring the Flood, water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh that has within it the breath of life from under the heavens, everything on the earth shall perish. And I will set up my covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, you and your sons and your wife and the wives of your sons, with you. And from all that lives, from all flesh, two of each thing you shall bring to the ark to keep alive with you, male and female they shall be. From the fowl of each kind and from the cattle of each kind and from all that crawls on the earth of each kind, two of each thing shall come to you to be kept alive. As for you, take you from every food that is eaten and store it by you, to serve for you and for them as food." And this Noah did; as all that God commanded him, so he did.

CHAPTER 7

And the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, for it is you I have seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean animal take you seven pairs, each with its mate, and of every animal that is not clean, one pair, each with its mate. Of the fowl of the heavens as well seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive over all the earth. For in seven days' time I will make it rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe out from

the face of the earth all existing things that I have made.” And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came, water over the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives came into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. Of the clean animals and of the animals that were not clean and of the fowl and of all that crawls upon the ground two each came to Noah into the ark, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. And it happened after seven days, that the waters of the Flood were over the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day,

All the wellsprings of the great deep burst
and the casements of the heavens were opened.

And the rain was over the earth forty days and forty nights. That very day, Noah and Shem and Ham and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah’s wife, and the three wives of his sons together with them, came into the ark, they as well as beasts of each kind and cattle of each kind and each kind of crawling thing that crawls on the earth and each kind of bird, each winged thing. They came to Noah into the ark, two by two of all flesh that has the breath of life within it. And those that came in, male and female of all flesh they came, as God had commanded him, and the LORD shut him in. And the Flood was forty days over the earth, and the waters multiplied and bore the ark upward and it rose above the earth. And the waters surged and multiplied mightily over the earth, and the ark went on the surface of the water. And the waters surged most mightily over the earth, and all the high mountains under the heavens were covered. Fifteen cubits above them the waters surged as the mountains were covered. And all flesh that stirs on the earth perished, the fowl and the cattle and the beasts and all swarming things that swarm upon the earth, and all humankind. All that had the quickening breath of life in its nostrils, of all that was on dry land, died. And He wiped out all existing things from the face of the earth, from humans to cattle to crawling things to the fowl of the heavens, they were wiped out from the earth. And Noah alone remained, and those with him in the ark. And the waters surged over the earth one hundred and fifty days.

CHAPTER 8

And God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God sent a wind over the earth and the waters subsided. And the wellsprings of the deep were dammed

up, and the casements of the heavens, the rain from the heavens held back. And the waters receded from the earth little by little, and the waters ebb. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the ark came to rest, on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, on the mountains of Ararat. The waters continued to ebb, until the tenth month, on the first day of the tenth month, the mountaintops appeared. And it happened, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark he had made. And he let out the raven and it went forth to and fro until the waters should dry up from the earth. And he let out the dove to see whether the waters had abated from the surface of the ground. But the dove found no resting place for its foot and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were over all the earth. And he reached out and took it and brought it back to him into the ark. Then he waited another seven days and again let the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him at eventide and, look, a plucked olive leaf was in its bill, and Noah knew that the waters had abated from the earth. Then he waited still another seven days and let out the dove, and it did not return to him again. And it happened in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters dried up from the earth, and Noah took off the covering of the ark and he saw and, look, the surface of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was completely dry. And God spoke to Noah, saying, "Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives, with you. All the animals that are with you of all flesh, fowl and cattle and every crawling thing that crawls on the earth, take out with you, and let them swarm through the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." And Noah went out, his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. Every beast, every crawling thing, and every fowl, everything that stirs on the earth, by families, came out of the ark. And Noah built an altar to the LORD and he took from every clean cattle and every clean fowl and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled the fragrant odor and the LORD said in His heart, "I will not again damn the soil on humankind's score. For the devisings of the human heart are evil from youth. And I will not again strike down all living things as I did. As long as all the days of the earth—

seedtime and harvest
and cold and heat
and summer and winter
and day and night
shall not cease."

CHAPTER 9

And God blessed Noah and his sons and He said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And the dread and fear of you shall be upon all the beasts of the field and all the fowl of the heavens, in all that crawls on the ground and in all the fish of the sea. In your hand they are given. All stirring things that are alive, yours shall be for food, like the green plants, I have given all to you. But flesh with its lifeblood still in it you shall not eat. And just so, your lifeblood I will requite, from every beast I will requite it, and from humankind, from every man’s brother, I will requite human life.

He who sheds human blood
by humans his blood shall be shed,
for in the image of God
He made humankind.
As for you, be fruitful and multiply,
swarm through the earth, and hold sway over it.”

And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “And I, I am about to establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the fowl and the cattle and every beast of the earth with you, all that have come out of the ark, every beast of the earth. And I will establish My covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the Flood, and never again shall there be a Flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I set between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for everlasting generations: My bow I have set in the clouds to be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth, and so, when I send clouds over the earth, the bow will appear in the cloud. Then I will remember My covenant, between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters will no more become a Flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud and I will see it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

And the sons of Noah who came out from the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth spread out. And Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. And he drank of the wine and became drunk, and exposed himself within his tent. And Ham the father of Canaan saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took a cloak

and put it over both their shoulders and walked backward and covered their father's nakedness, their faces turned backward so they did not see their father's nakedness. And Noah woke from his wine and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. And he said,

“Cursed be Canaan,
the lowliest slave shall he be
to his brothers.”

And he said,

“Blessed be the LORD
the God of Shem,
unto them shall Canaan be slave.
May God enlarge Japheth,
may he dwell in the tents of Shem,
unto them shall Canaan be slave.”

And Noah lived after the Flood three hundred and fifty years. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years. Then he died.

CHAPTER 11

And all the earth was one language, one set of words. And it happened as they journeyed from the east that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to each other, “Come, let us bake bricks and burn them hard.” And the brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar. And they said, “Come, let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, that we may make us a name, lest we be scattered over all the earth.” And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the human creatures had built. And the LORD said, “As one people with one language for all, if this is what they have begun to do, nothing they plot will elude them. Come, let us go down and baffle their language there so that they will not understand each other's language.” And the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth and they left off building the city. Therefore it is called Babel, for there the LORD made the language of all the earth babble. And from there the LORD scattered them over all the earth.

CHAPTER 12

And the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your land and your birth place and your father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your

name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and those who damn you I will curse, and all the clans of the earth through you shall be blessed.” And Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him and Lot went forth with him, Abram being seventy-five years old when he left Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew and all the goods they had gotten and the folk they had bought in Haran, and they set out on the way to the land of Canaan, and they came to the land of Canaan. And Abram crossed through the land to the site of Shechem, to the Terebinth of the Oracle. The Canaanite was then in the land. And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your seed I will give this land.” And he built an altar to the LORD who had appeared to him. And he pulled up his stakes from there for the high country east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east, and he built there an altar to the LORD, and he invoked the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed onward by stages to the Negeb.

And there was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was grave in the land. And it happened as he drew near to the border of Egypt that he said to Sarai his wife, “Look, I know you are a beautiful woman, and so when the Egyptians see you and say, ‘She’s his wife,’ they will kill me while you they will let live. Say, please, that you are my sister, so that it will go well with me on your count and I shall stay alive because of you.” And it happened when Abram came into Egypt that the Egyptians saw the woman was very beautiful. And Pharaoh’s courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. And it went well with Abram on her count, and he had sheep and cattle and donkeys and male and female slaves and she-asses and camels. And the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with terrible plagues because of Sarai the wife of Abram. And Pharaoh summoned Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She’s my sister,’ so that I took her to me as wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and get out!” And Pharaoh appointed men over him and they sent him out, with his wife and all he had.

CHAPTER 15

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.” And Abram said, “O my Master, LORD, what can You give me when I am going to my end childless, and the steward of my household is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Look, to me you

have given no seed, and here a member of my household is to be my heir." And now the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one will not be your heir, but he who issues from your loins will be your heir." And He took him outside and He said, "Look up to the heavens and count the stars, if you can count them." And He said, "So shall be your seed." And he trusted in the LORD, and He reckoned it to his merit.

And He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to inherit." And he said, "O my Master, LORD, how shall I know that I shall inherit it?" And He said to him, "Take Me a three-year-old heifer and a three-year-old she-goat and a three-year-old ram and a turtledove and a young pigeon." And he took all of these and clove them through the middle, and each set his part opposite the other, but the birds he did not cleave. And carrion birds came down on the carcasses and Abram drove them off. And as the sun was about to set, a deep slumber fell upon Abram and now a great dark dread came falling upon him. And He said to Abram, "Know well that your seed shall be strangers in a land not theirs and they shall be enslaved and afflicted four hundred years. But upon the nation for whom they slave I will bring judgment, and afterward they shall come forth with great substance. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace, you shall be buried in ripe old age. And in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." And just as the sun had set, there was a thick gloom and, look, a smoking brazier with a flaming torch that passed between those parts. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your seed I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

CHAPTER 16

Now Sarai Abram's wife had born him no children, and she had an Egyptian slavegirl named Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Look, pray, the LORD has kept me from bearing children. Pray, come to bed with my slavegirl. Perhaps I shall be built up through her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar the Egyptian her slavegirl after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he came to bed with Hagar and she conceived and she saw that she had conceived and her mistress seemed slight in her eyes. And Sarai said to Abram, "This outrage against me is because of you! I myself put

my slavegirl in your embrace and when she saw she had conceived, I became slight in her eyes. Let the LORD judge between you and me!" And Abram said to Sarai, "Look, your slavegirl is in your hands. Do to her whatever you think right." And Sarai harassed her and she fled from her. And the LORD'S messenger found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slavegirl of Sarai! Where have you come from and where are you going?" And she said, "From Sarai my mistress I am fleeing." And the LORD'S messenger said to her, "Return to your mistress and suffer harassment at her hand." And the LORD'S messenger said to her, "I will surely multiply your seed and it will be beyond all counting." And the LORD'S messenger said to her:

"Look, you have conceived and will bear a son
and you will call his name Ishmael.
for the LORD has heeded your suffering.

And he will be a wild ass of a man—
his hand against all, the hand of all against him,
he will encamp in despite of all his kin."

And she called the name of the LORD who had addressed her, "El-Roi," for she said, "Did not I go on seeing here after He saw me?" Therefore is the well called Beer-Lahai-Roi, which is between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram called his son whom Hagar had born Ishmael. And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

CHAPTER 17

And Abram was ninety-nine years old and the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with Me and be blameless, and I will grant My covenant between Me and you and I will multiply you very greatly." And Abram flung himself on his face, and God spoke to him, saying, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: you shall be father to a multitude of nations. And no longer shall your name be called Abram but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you father to a multitude of nations. And I will make you most abundantly fruitful and turn you into nations, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you through their generations as an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give unto you and your seed after you the land in which you sojourn, the whole land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding, and I will be their God."

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep My commandment, you and your seed after you through their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you: every male among you must be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. Eight days old every male among you shall be circumcised through your generations, even slaves born in the household and those purchased with silver from any foreigner who is not of your seed. Those born in your household and those purchased with silver must be circumcised, and My covenant in your flesh shall be an everlasting covenant. And a male with a foreskin, who has not circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his folk. My covenant he has broken." And God said to Abraham, "Sarai your wife shall no longer call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name." And I will bless her and I will also give you from her a son and I will bless him, and she shall become nations, kings of peoples shall issue from her." And Abraham flung himself on his face and he laughed, saying to himself,

"To a hundred-year-old will a child be born,
will ninety-year-old Sarah give birth?"

And Abraham said to God, "Would that Ishmael might live in Your favor!" And God said, "Yet Sarah your wife is to bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac and I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant, for his seed after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Look, I will bless him and make him fruitful and will multiply him most abundantly, twelve chieftains he shall beget, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac whom Sarah will bear you by this season next year." And He finished speaking with him, and God ascended from Abraham.

And Abraham took Ishmael his son and all the slaves born in his household and those purchased with silver, every male among the people of Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that very day as God had spoken to him. And Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised. And Ishmael was thirteen years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised. On that very day Abraham was circumcised, and Ishmael his son, and all the men of his household, those born in the household and those purchased with silver from the foreigners, were circumcised with him.

CHAPTER 18

And the LORD appeared to him in the Terebinths of Mamre when he was sitting by the tent flap in the heat of the day. And he raised his eyes and saw, and, look, three men were standing before him. He saw, and he ran toward them from the tent flap and bowed to the ground. And he said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be fetched and bathe your feet and stretch out under the tree, and let me fetch a morsel of bread, and refresh yourselves. Then you may go on, for have you not come by your servant?" And they said, "Do as you have spoken." And Abraham hurried to the tent to Sarah and he said, "Hurry! Knead three seahs of choice semolina flour and make loaves." And to the herd Abraham ran and fetched a tender and goodly calf and gave it to the lad, who hurried to prepare it. And he fetched curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and he set these before them, he standing over them under the tree, and they ate. And they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "There, in the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this very season and, look, a son shall Sarah your wife have," and Sarah was listening at the tent flap, which was behind him. And Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, Sarah no longer had her woman's flow. And Sarah laughed inwardly, saying, "After being shriveled, shall I have pleasure, and my husband is old?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why is it that Sarah laughed, saying, 'Shall I really give birth, old as I am?' Is anything beyond the LORD? In due time I will return to you, at this very season, and Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah dissembled, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "Yes, you did laugh."

CHAPTER 21

And the LORD singled out Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. And Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the set time that God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised Isaac his son when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac his son was born to him. And Sarah said,

"Laughter has God made me,
Whoever hears will laugh at me."

And she said,

“Who would have uttered to Abraham—
‘Sarah is suckling sons!’
For I have born a son in his old age.”

And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, laughing. And she said to Abraham, “Drive out this slavegirl and her son, for the slavegirl’s son shall not inherit with my son, with Isaac.” And the thing seemed evil in Abraham’s eyes because of his son. And God said to Abraham, “Let it not seem evil in your eyes on account of the lad and on account of your slavegirl. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her voice, for through Isaac shall your seed be acclaimed. But the slavegirl’s son, too, I will make a nation, for he is your seed.”

And Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar, placing them on her shoulder, and he gave her the child, and sent her away, and she went wandering through the wilderness of Beersheba. And when the water in the skin was gone, she flung the child under one of the bushes and went off and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away, for she thought, “Let me not see when the child dies.” And she sat at a distance and raised her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad and God’s messenger called out from the heavens and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the lad’s voice where he is.

Rise, lift up the lad
and hold him by the hand,
for a great nation will I make him.”

And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the skin with water and gave to the lad to drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew up and dwelled in the wilderness, and he became a seasoned bowman. And he dwelled in the wilderness of Paran and his mother took him a wife from the land of Egypt.

CHAPTER 22

And it happened after these things that God tested Abraham. And He said to him, “Abraham!” and he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “Take, pray your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go forth to the land of Moriah and offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall say to you.” And Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took his two lads with him, and Isaac his son, and he split wood for the offering, and rose

and went to the place that God had said to him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from afar. And Abraham said to his lads, "Sit you here with the donkey and let me and the lad walk ahead and let us worship and return to you." And Abraham took the wood for the offering and put it on Isaac his son and he took in his hand the fire and the cleaver, and the two of them went together. And Isaac said to Abraham his father, "Father!" and he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Here is the fire and the wood but where is the sheep for the offering?" And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for the offering, my son." And the two of them went together. And they came to the place that God had said to him, and Abraham built there an altar and laid out the wood and bound Isaac his son and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham reached out his hand and took the cleaver to slaughter his son. And the LORD'S messenger called out to him from the heavens and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" and he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not reach out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him, for now I know that you fear God and you have not held back your son, your only one, from Me." And Abraham raised his eyes and saw and, look, a ram was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up as a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place YHWH-Yireh, as is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD there is sight." And the LORD's messenger called out to Abraham once again from the heavens, and He said, "By My own Self I swear, declares the LORD, that because you have done this thing and have not held back your son, your only one, I will greatly bless you and will greatly multiply your seed, as the stars in the heavens and as the sand on the shore of the sea, and your seed shall take hold of its enemies' gate. And all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed because you have listened to my voice." And Abraham returned to his lads, and they rose and went together to Beersheba, and Abraham dwelled in Beersheba.

Homer,
Odyssey

The fountainhead of the classical (Greek and Roman) literary cultures are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, epic poems in dactylic hexameter presumably fashioned from preexisting oral traditions by Homer, a blind bard writing in perhaps the 700s B.C., around when the Greeks repurposed an alphabet taken from the Phoenicians, a Semitic-speaking seafaring people. (These Canaanites lived primarily in what would today be Lebanon.) This borrowing restored literacy to Greece after its Dark Ages, which followed upon the end of the Mycenaean palatial civilization—the historical setting for Homer’s poems. (Around 1400 B.C., the Mycenaeans had conquered the Minoans of Crete, the first civilization in the Greek world.) In the Late Bronze Age, around 1200 B.C., there was a catastrophic collapse of civilization across the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. In Greece, this meant massive depopulation, regression to village culture, breakdown of trade, and loss of literacy. It is in this timeframe that the Trojan War would presumably have occurred—the traditional dating of the sack of Troy being 1184 B.C. (After the Late Bronze Age collapse of empires, the Phoenicians established the first great maritime trade network, which diffused Mesopotamian culture throughout the Mediterranean.)

Troy was probably a city on the Asian side of the Dardanelles, thus presiding over the only sea route between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and occupying a pivotal point between Europe and Asia. The Greeks may have been seeking to gain control of a crucial trading position. In any case, Homer’s poems have as their subject the Trojan War and its aftermath. The *Iliad* takes place during the last year of a ten-year conflict, its great themes being war, mortality, and *kleos* (renown or glory). The *Odyssey* recounts ten more years of wandering by Odysseus as he tries to reach home after the war, its great themes being the quest for knowledge and *nostos* (homecoming). What are the ultimate effects of the heroic honor code? What is life like after war? Both begin *in medias res*, in the middle of the action, with the *Odyssey* displaying a quite complicated narrative structure.

Cultural memories running from the Middle Bronze Age (preserved by the conservatism of the formulae of oral tradition)—the acme of Mycenaean civilization having occurred between 1400 and 1200 B.C.—up to Homer’s present in the Iron Age are mixed together in the poems. Homer’s shaping of received rhapsodic material seems to have occurred in the dawning Archaic period sparked by demographic recovery and the new alphabetic literacy. This period sees the rise of *poleis* (plural for *polis*, the independent Greek city-state, which should be distinguished from kingdoms) and the political ethos of public deliberation, signs of which can be discerned in Homer’s epics. In a time of still-profound material humility, these poems recalled the Mycenaean glory days, when Greece was mighty and somewhat united: thus poetry as guardian of memory helped inspire the Greek recovery. Population growth after about 900 B.C., as well as the Phoenician example, spurred colonization and trade. Hellenizing expansion onto the western coast of modern-day Turkey had begun in the Dark Ages. Athens, in particular, seems to have been involved in the colonization of Ionia, a central section of this Mediterranean region opposite Hellas, or Greece. Homer is traditionally thought to have come from Ionia. His poems, especially the *Iliad*, constituted the heart of classical Greek education and culture, its *paideia*. Many of the patterns and tensions of Western “man” confront us in these epic poems.

Book 1, The Boy and the Goddess

Tell me about a complicated man.
Muse, tell me how he wandered and was lost
when he had wrecked the holy town of Troy,
and where he went, and who he met, the pain
he suffered on the sea, and how he worked
to save his life and bring his men back home.
He failed, and for their own mistakes, they died.
They ate the Sun God's cattle, and the god
kept them from home. Now goddess, child of Zeus,
tell the old story for our modern times.
Find the beginning.

All the other Greeks
who had survived the brutal sack of Troy
sailed safely home to their own wives—except
this man alone. Calypso, a great goddess,
had trapped him in her cave; she wanted him
to be her husband. When the year rolled round
in which the gods decreed he should go home
to Ithaca, his troubles still went on.
The man was friendless. All the gods took pity,
except Poseidon's anger never ended
until Odysseus was back at home.
But now the distant Ethiopians,
who live between the sunset and the dawn,
were worshipping the Sea God with a feast,
a hundred cattle and a hundred rams.
There sat the god, delighting in his banquet.
The other gods were gathered on Olympus,
in Father Zeus' palace. He was thinking
of fine, well-born Aegisthus, who was killed
by Agamemnon's famous son Orestes.
He told the deathless gods,

“This is absurd,
that mortals blame the gods! They say we cause
their suffering, but they themselves increase it
by folly. So Aegisthus overstepped:
he took the legal wife of Agamemnon,
then killed the husband when he came back home,
although he knew that it would doom them all.
We gods had warned Aegisthus; we sent down

perceptive Hermes, who flashed into sight and told him not to murder Agamemnon or court his wife; Orestes would grow up and come back to his home to take revenge. Aegisthus would not hear that good advice. But now his death has paid all debts.”

Athena

looked at him steadily and answered, “Father, he did deserve to die. Bring death to all who act like him! But I am agonizing about Odysseus and his bad luck.

For too long he has suffered, with no friends, sea all around him, sea on every side, out on an island where a goddess lives, daughter of fearful Atlas, who holds up the pillars of the sea, and knows its depths—those pillars keep the heaven and earth apart. His daughter holds that poor unhappy man, and tries beguiling him with gentle words to cease all thoughts of Ithaca; but he longs to see even just the smoke that rises from his own homeland, and he wants to die. You do not even care, Olympian! Remember how he sacrificed to you on the broad plain of Troy beside his ships? So why do you dismiss Odysseus?”

“Daughter!” the Cloud God said, “You must be joking, since how could I forget Odysseus? He is more sensible than other humans, and makes more sacrifices to the gods. But Lord Poseidon rages, unrelenting, because Odysseus destroyed the eye of godlike Polyphemus, his own son, the strongest of the Cyclopes—whose mother, Thoösa, is a sea-nymph, child of Phorcys, the sea king; and she lay beside Poseidon inside a hollow cave. The Lord of Earthquakes prevents Odysseus from reaching home but does not kill him. Come then, we must plan: how can he get back home? Poseidon must give up his anger, since he cannot fight alone against the will of all the gods.”

Athena's eyes lit up and she replied,
"Great Father, if the blessed gods at last
will let Odysseus return back home,
then hurry, we must send our messenger,
Hermes the giant-slayer. He must swoop
down to Ogygia right away and tell
the beautiful Calypso we have formed
a firm decision that Odysseus
has waited long enough. He must go home.
And I will go to Ithaca to rouse
the courage of his son, and make him call
a meeting, and speak out against the suitors
who kill his flocks of sheep and longhorn cattle
unstoppably. Then I will send him off
to Pylos and to Sparta, to seek news
about his father's journey home, and gain
a noble reputation for himself."

With that, she tied her sandals on her feet,
the marvelous golden sandals that she wears
to travel sea and land, as fast as wind.
She took the heavy bronze-tipped spear she uses
to tame the ranks of warriors with whom
she is enraged. Then from the mountain down
she sped to Ithaca, and stopped outside
Odysseus' court, bronze spear in hand.
She looked like Mentès now, the Taphian leader,
a guest-friend. There she found the lordly suitors
sitting on hides—they killed the cows themselves—
and playing checkers. Quick, attentive house slaves
were waiting on them. Some were mixing wine
with water in the bowls, and others brought
the tables out and wiped them off with sponges,
and others carved up heaping plates of meat.
Telemachus was sitting with them, feeling
dejected. In his mind he saw his father
coming from somewhere, scattering the suitors,
and gaining back his honor, and control
of all his property. With this in mind,
he was the first to see Athena there.
He disapproved of leaving strangers stranded,
so he went straight to meet her at the gate,
and shook her hand, and took her spear of bronze,
and let his words fly out to her.

“Good evening, stranger, and welcome. Be our guest, come share our dinner, and then tell us what you need.” He led her in, and Pallas followed him. Inside the high-roofed hall, he set her spear beside a pillar in a polished stand, in which Odysseus kept stores of weapons. And then he led her to a chair and spread a smooth embroidered cloth across the seat, and pulled a footstool up to it. He sat beside her on a chair of inlaid wood, a distance from the suitors, so their shouting would not upset the stranger during dinner; also to ask about his absent father. A girl brought washing water in a jug of gold, and poured it on their hands and into a silver bowl, and set a table by them. A deferential slave brought bread and laid a wide array of food, a generous spread. The carver set beside them plates of meat of every kind, and gave them golden cups. The cup boy kept on topping up the wine. The suitors sauntered in and sat on chairs, observing proper order, and the slaves poured water on their hands. The house girls brought baskets of bread and heaped it up beside them, and house boys filled their wine-bowls up with drink. They reached to take the good things set before them. Once they were satisfied with food and drink, the suitors turned their minds to other things—singing and dancing, glories of the feast. A slave brought out a well-tuned lyre and gave it to Phemius, the man the suitors forced to sing for them. He struck the chords to start his lovely song.

Telemachus leaned in close to Athena, so they would not hear, and said,

“Dear guest—excuse my saying this—these men are only interested in music, a life of ease. They make no contribution. This food belongs to someone else, a man

whose white bones may be lying in the rain
or sunk beneath the waves. If they saw him
return to Ithaca, they would all pray
for faster feet, instead of wealth and gold
and fancy clothes. In fact, he must have died.
We have no hope. He will not come back home.
If someone says so, we do not believe it.
But come now, tell me this and tell the truth.
Who are you? From what city, and what parents?
What kind of ship did you arrive here on?
What sailors brought you here, and by what route?
You surely did not travel here on foot!
Here is the thing I really want to know:
have you been here before? Are you a friend
who visited my father? Many men
came to his house. He traveled many places.”

Athena’s clear bright eyes met his. She said,
“Yes, I will tell you everything. I am
Mentes, the son of wise Anchialus,
lord of the Taphians, who love the oar.
I traveled with my ship and my companions
over the wine-dark sea to foreign lands,
with iron that I hope to trade for copper
in Temese. My ship is in the harbor
far from the town, beneath the woody hill.
And you and I are guest-friends through our fathers,
from long ago—Laertes can confirm it.
I hear that fine old man no longer comes
to town, but lives out in the countryside,
stricken by grief, with only one old slave,
who gives him food and drink when he trails back
leg-weary from his orchard, rich in vines.
I came because they told me that your father
was here—but now it seems that gods have blocked
his path back home. But I am sure that he
is not yet dead. The wide sea keeps him trapped
upon some island, captured by fierce men
who will not let him go. Now I will make
a prophecy the gods have given me,
and I think it will all come true, although
I am no prophet. He will not be gone
much longer from his own dear native land,
even if chains of iron hold him fast.

He will devise a means of getting home.
He is resourceful. Tell me now—are you
Odysseus' son? You are so tall!
Your handsome face and eyes resemble his.
We often met and knew each other well,
before he went to Troy, where all the best
leaders of Argos sailed in hollow ships.
From that time on, we have not seen each other.”

Telemachus was careful as he answered.
“Dear guest, I will be frank with you. My mother
says that I am his son, but I cannot
be sure, since no one knows his own begetting.
I wish I were the son of someone lucky,
who could grow old at home with all his wealth.
Instead, the most unlucky man alive
is said to be my father—since you ask.”

Athena looked at him with sparkling eyes.
“Son of Penelope, you and your sons
will make a name in history, since you are
so clever. But now tell me this. Who are
these banqueters? And what is the occasion?
A drinking party, or a wedding feast?
They look so arrogant and self-indulgent,
making themselves at home. A wise observer
would surely disapprove of how they act.”

Telemachus said moodily, “My friend,
since you have raised the subject, there was once
a time when this house here was doing well,
our future bright, when he was still at home.
But now the gods have changed their plans and cursed us,
and cast my father into utter darkness.
If he had died it would not be this bad—
if he had fallen with his friends at Troy,
or in his loved ones' arms, when he had wound
the threads of war to end. The Greeks would then
have built a tomb for him; he would have won
fame for his son. But now, the winds have seized him,
and he is nameless and unknown. He left
nothing but tears for me. I do not weep
only for him. The gods have given me
so many other troubles. All the chiefs
of Same, Zacynthus, Dulichium,

and local lords from rocky Ithaca,
are courting Mother, wasting our whole house.
She does not turn these awful suitors down,
nor can she end the courting. They keep eating,
spoil my house—and soon, they will kill me!”

Athena said in outrage, “This is monstrous!
You need Odysseus to come back home
and lay his hands on all those shameless suitors!
If only he would come here now and stand
right at the gates, with two spears in his hands,
in shield and helmet, as when I first saw him!
Odysseus was visiting our house,
drinking and having fun on his way back
from sailing in swift ships to Ephyra
to visit Ilus. He had gone there looking
for deadly poison to anoint his arrows.
Ilus refused, because he feared the gods.
My father gave Odysseus the poison,
loving him blindly. May Odysseus
come meet the suitors with that urge to kill!
A bitter courtship and short life for them!
But whether he comes home to take revenge,
or not, is with the gods. You must consider
how best to drive these suitors from your house.
Come, listen carefully to what I say.
Tomorrow call the Achaean chiefs to meeting,
and tell the suitors—let the gods be witness—
‘All of you, go away! To your own homes!’
As for your mother, if she wants to marry,
let her return to her great father’s home.
They will make her a wedding and prepare
abundant gifts to show her father’s love.
Now here is some advice from me for you.
Fit out a ship with twenty oars, the best,
and go find out about your long-lost father.
Someone may tell you news, or you may hear
a voice from Zeus, best source of information.
First go to Pylos, question godlike Nestor;
from there, to Sparta; visit Menelaus.
He came home last of all the Achaean heroes.
If you should hear that he is still alive
and coming home, put up with this abuse
for one more year. But if you hear that he

is dead, go home, and build a tomb for him, and hold a lavish funeral to show the honor he deserves, and give your mother in marriage to a man. When this is done, consider deeply how you might be able to kill the suitors in your halls—by tricks or openly. You must not stick to childhood; you are no longer just a little boy. You surely heard how everybody praised Orestes when he killed the man who killed his famous father—devious Aegisthus? Dear boy, I see how big and tall you are. Be brave, and win yourself a lasting name. But I must go now, on my nimble ship; my friends are getting tired of waiting for me. Remember what I said and heed my words.”

Telemachus was brooding on her words, and said, “Dear guest, you were so kind to give me this fatherly advice. I will remember. I know that you are eager to be off, but please enjoy a bath before you go, and take a gift with you. I want to give you a precious, pretty treasure as a keepsake to mark our special friendship.”

But the goddess Athena met his gaze and said, “Do not hold me back now. I must be on my way. As for the gift you feel inspired to give me, save it for when I come on my way home and let me give you presents then as well in fair exchange.”

With that, the owl-eyed goddess flew away like a bird, up through the smoke. She left him feeling braver, more determined, and with his father even more in mind. Watching her go, he was amazed and saw she was a god. Then godlike, he went off to meet the suitors.

They were sitting calmly, listening to the poet, who sang how Athena cursed the journey of the Greeks

as they were sailing home from Troy. Upstairs,
Penelope had heard the marvelous song.
She clambered down the steep steps of her house,
not by herself—two slave girls came with her.
She reached the suitors looking like a goddess,
then stopped and stood beside a sturdy pillar,
holding a gauzy veil before her face.
Her slave girls stood, one on each side of her.
In tears, she told the holy singer,

“Stop,
please, Phemius! You know so many songs,
enchanted tales of things that gods and men
have done, the deeds that singers publicize.
Sing something else, and let them drink in peace.
Stop this upsetting song that always breaks
my heart, so I can hardly bear my grief.
I miss him all the time—that man, my husband,
whose story is so famous throughout Greece.”

Sullen Telemachus said, “Mother, no,
you must not criticize the loyal bard
for singing as it pleases him to sing.
Poets are not to blame for how things are;
Zeus is; he gives to each as is his will.
Do not blame Phemius because he told
about the Greek disasters. You must know
the newest song is always praised the most.
So steel your heart and listen to the song.
Odysseus was not the only one
who did not come back home again from Troy.
Many were lost. Go in and do your work.
Stick to the loom and distaff. Tell your slaves
to do their chores as well. It is for men
to talk, especially me. I am the master.”

That startled her. She went back to her room,
and took to heart her son’s deliberate scolding.
She went upstairs, along with both her slaves,
and wept there for her dear Odysseus,
until Athena gave her eyes sweet sleep.

Throughout the shadowy hall the suitors clamored,
praying to lie beside her in her bed.

Telemachus inhaled, then started speaking.

“You suitors, you are taking this too far.
Let us enjoy the feast in peace. It is
a lovely thing to listen to a bard,
especially one with such a godlike voice.
At dawn, let us assemble in the square.
I have to tell you this—it is an order.
You have to leave my halls. Go dine elsewhere!
Eat your own food, or share between your houses.
Or if you think it easier and better
to ruin one man’s wealth, and if you think
that you can get away with it—go on!
I call upon the gods; Zeus will grant vengeance.
You will be punished and destroyed, right here!”

He spoke, and they began to bite their lips,
shocked that Telemachus would dare to speak
so boldly. But Antinous replied,

“Telemachus, the gods themselves have taught you
such pride, to talk so big and brash in public!
May Zeus the son of Cronus never grant you
your true inheritance, which is the throne
of Ithaca.”

His mind alert and focused,
Telemachus replied, “Antinous,
you will not like this, but I have to say,
I hope Zeus does give me the throne. Do you
deny it is an honorable thing
to be a king? It brings the household wealth,
and honor to the man. But there are many
other great chiefs in sea-girt Ithaca,
both old and young. I know that. One of them
may seize the throne, now that Odysseus
has died. But I shall be at least the lord
of my own house and of the slaves that he
seized for my benefit.”

Eurymachus
replied, “Telemachus, the gods must choose
which of us will be king of Ithaca.
But still, I hope you keep your own possessions,
and rule your house. May no man drive you out,
and seize your wealth, while Ithaca survives.

Now, friend, I want to ask about the stranger.
Where was he from, what country? Did he say?
Where is his place of birth, his native soil?
Does he bring news your father will come home?
Or did he come here for some other purpose?
How suddenly he darted off, not waiting
for us to meet him. Yet he looked important.”

The boy said soberly, “Eurymachus,
my father is not ever coming home.
I do not listen now to any gossip,
or forecasts from the psychics whom my mother
invites to visit us. The stranger was
my father’s guest-friend Mentès, son of wise
Anchialus, who rules the Taphians,
the people of the oar.”

Those were his words,
but in his mind he knew she was a god.
They danced to music and enjoyed themselves
till evening, then they went back home to sleep.
Telemachus’ bedroom had been built
above the courtyard, so it had a view.
He went upstairs, preoccupied by thought.
A loyal slave went with him, Eurycleia,
daughter of Ops; she brought the burning torches.
Laertes bought her many years before
when she was very young, for twenty oxen.
He gave her status in the household, equal
to his own wife, but never slept with her,
avoiding bitter feelings in his marriage.
She brought the torches now; she was the slave
who loved him most, since she had cared for him
when he was tiny. Entering the room,
he sat down on the bed, took off his tunic,
and gave it to the vigilant old woman.
She smoothed it out and folded it, then hung it
up on a hook beside his wooden bed,
and left the room. She used the silver latch
to close the door; the strap pulled tight the bolt.
He slept the night there, wrapped in woolen blankets,
planning the journey told him by Athena.

Book 5, From the Goddess to the Storm

Then Dawn rose up from bed with Lord Tithonus,
to bring the light to deathless gods and mortals.
The gods sat down for council, with the great
Thunderlord Zeus. Athena was concerned
about Odysseus' many troubles,
trapped by the nymph Calypso in her house.

"Father, and all immortal gods," she said,
"No longer let a sceptered king be kind,
or gentle, or pay heed to right and wrong.
Let every king be cruel, his acts unjust!
Odysseus ruled gently, like a father,
but no one even thinks about him now.
The wretched man is stranded on an island;
Calypso forces him to stay with her.
He cannot make his way back to his country.
He has no ships, no oars, and no companions
to help him sail across the wide-backed sea.
His son has gone for news of his lost father,
in sandy Pylos and in splendid Sparta;
they plot to kill the boy when he returns!"

Smiling at her, Lord Zeus who heaps the clouds
replied, "Ah, daughter! What a thing to say!
Did you not plan all this yourself, so that
Odysseus could come and take revenge
upon those suitors? Now use all your skill:
ensure Telemachus comes safely home,
and that the suitors fail and sail away."

Then turning to his son he said, "Dear Hermes,
you are my messenger. Go tell the goddess
our fixed intention: that Odysseus
must go back home—he has endured enough.
Without a god or human as his guide,
he will drift miserably for twenty days
upon a makeshift raft, and then arrive
at fertile Scheria. The magical
Phaeacians will respect him like a god,
and send him in a ship to his dear homeland,
with gifts of bronze and heaps of gold and clothing,
more than he would have brought with him from Troy
if he had come directly, with his share

of plunder. It is granted him to see
the ones he loves, beneath his own high roof,
in his own country.”

Hermes heard these words.
At once he fastened on his feet the sandals
of everlasting gold with which he flies
on breath of air across the sea and land;
he seized the wand he uses to enchant
men’s eyes to sleep or wake as he desires,
and flew. The god flashed bright in all his power.
He touched Pieria, then from the sky
he plunged into the sea and swooped between
the waves, just like a seagull catching fish,
wetting its whirring wings in tireless brine.
So Hermes scudded through the surging swell.
Then finally, he reached the distant island,
stepped from the indigo water to the shore,
and reached the cavern where the goddess lived.

There sat Calypso with her braided curls.
Beside the hearth a mighty fire was burning.
The scent of citrus and of brittle pine
suffused the island. Inside, she was singing
and weaving with a shuttle made of gold.
Her voice was beautiful. Around the cave
a luscious forest flourished: alder, poplar,
and scented cypress. It was full of wings.
Birds nested there but hunted out at sea:
the owls, the hawks, the gulls with gaping beaks.
A ripe and verdant vine, hung thick with grapes,
was stretched to coil around her cave. Four springs
spurted with sparkling water as they laced
with crisscross currents intertwined together.
The meadow softly bloomed with celery
and violets. He gazed around in wonder
and joy, at sights to please even a god.
Even the deathless god who once killed Argos
stood still, his heart amazed at all he saw.
At last he went inside the cave. Calypso,
the splendid goddess, knew the god on sight:
the deathless gods all recognize each other,
however far away their homes may be.

But Hermes did not find Odysseus,

since he was sitting by the shore as usual,
sobbing in grief and pain; his heart was breaking.
In tears he stared across the fruitless sea.

Divine Calypso told her guest to sit
upon a gleaming, glittering chair, and said,
“Dear friend, Lord Hermes of the golden wand,
why have you come? You do not often visit.
What do you have in mind? My heart inclines
to help you if I can, if it is fated.
For now, come in, and let me make you welcome.”

At that the goddess led him to a table
heaped with ambrosia, and she mixed a drink:
red nectar. So swift-flashing Hermes drank
and ate till he was satisfied, and then
the diplomat explained why he had come.

“You are a goddess, I a god—and yet
you ask why I am here. Well, I will tell you.
Zeus ordered me to come—I did not want to.
Who would desire to cross such an expanse
of endless salty sea? No human town
is near here, where gods get fine sacrifices.
Still, none can sway or check the will of Zeus.
He says the most unhappy man alive
is living here—a warrior from those
who fought the town of Priam for nine years
and in the tenth they sacked it and sailed home.
But on the journey back, they wronged Athena.
She roused the wind and surging sea against them
and all his brave companions were destroyed,
while he himself was blown here by the waves.
Zeus orders you to send him on his way
at once, since it is not his destiny
to die here far away from those he loves.
It is his fate to see his family
and come back home, to his own native land.”

Calypso shuddered and let fly at him.
“You cruel, jealous gods! You bear a grudge
whenever any goddess takes a man
to sleep with as a lover in her bed.
Just so the gods who live at ease were angry
when rosy-fingered Dawn took up Orion,

and from her golden throne, chaste Artemis
attacked and killed him with her gentle arrows.
Demeter with the cornrows in her hair
indulged her own desire, and she made love
with Iasion in triple-furrowed fields—
till Zeus found out, hurled flashing flame and killed him.
So now, you male gods are upset with me
for living with a man. A man I saved!
Zeus pinned his ship and with his flash of lightning
smashed it to pieces. All his friends were killed
out on the wine-dark sea. This man alone,
clutching the keel, was swept by wind and wave,
and came here, to my home. I cared for him
and loved him, and I vowed to set him free
from time and death forever. Still, I know
no other god can change the will of Zeus.
So let him go, if that is Zeus' order,
across the barren sea. I will not give
an escort for this trip across the water;
I have no ships or rowers. But I will
share what I know with him, and gladly give
useful advice so he can safely reach
his home.”

The mediator, Zeus' servant,
replied, “Then send him now, avoid the wrath
of Zeus, do not enrage him, or one day
his rage will hurt you.” With these words, he vanished.

Acknowledging the edict sent from Zeus,
The goddess went to find Odysseus.
She found him on the shore. His eyes were always
tearful; he wept sweet life away, in longing
to go back home, since she no longer pleased him.
He had no choice. He spent his nights with her
inside her hollow cave, not wanting her
though she still wanted him. By day he sat
out on the rocky beach, in tears and grief,
staring in heartbreak at the fruitless sea.

The goddess stood by him and said, “Poor man!
Stop grieving, please. You need not waste your life.
I am quite ready now to send you off.
Using your sword of bronze, cut trunks and build
a raft, fix decks across, and let it take you

across the misty sea. I will provide water, red wine, and food, to stop you starving, and I will give you clothes, and send a wind to blow you safely home, if this is what those sky gods want. They are more powerful than me; they get their way.”

Odysseus

informed by many years of pain and loss, shuddered and let his words fly out at her. “Goddess, you have some other scheme in mind, not my safe passage. You are telling me to cross this vast and terrifying gulf, in just a raft, when even stable schooners sped on by winds from Zeus would not succeed? No, goddess, I will not get on a raft, unless you swear to me a mighty oath you are not planning yet more pain for me.”

At that, divine Calypso smiled at him. She reached out and caressed him with her hand, saying, “You scalawag! What you have said shows that you understand how these things work. But by this earth, and by the sky above, and by the waters of the Styx below, which is the strongest oath for blessed gods, I swear I will not plot more pain for you. I have made plans for you as I would do for my own self, if I were in your place. I am not made of iron; no, my heart is kind and decent, and I pity you.”

And with those words, the goddess quickly turned and led the way; he followed in her footsteps. They reached the cave together, man and goddess. The chair that Hermes had been sitting on was empty now; Odysseus sat there. The goddess gave him human food and drink. She sat and faced godlike Odysseus while slave girls brought her nectar and ambrosia. They reached to take the good things set before them, and satisfied their hunger and their thirst.

The goddess-queen began. “Odysseus, son of Laertes, blessed by Zeus—your plans

are always changing. Do you really want to go back to that home you love so much? Well then, good-bye! But if you understood how gluttoned you will be with suffering before you reach your home, you would stay here with me and be immortal—though you might still wish to see that wife you always pine for. And anyway, I know my body is better than hers is. I am taller too. Mortals can never rival the immortals in beauty.”

So Odysseus, with tact,
said “Do not be enraged at me, great goddess.
You are quite right. I know my modest wife
Penelope could never match your beauty.
She is a human; you are deathless, ageless.
But even so, I want to go back home,
and every day I hope that day will come.
If some god strikes me on the wine-dark sea,
I will endure it. By now I am used
to suffering—I have gone through so much,
at sea and in the war. Let this come too.”

The sun went down and brought the darkness on.
They went inside the hollow cave and took
the pleasure of their love, held close together.

When vernal Dawn first touched the sky with flowers,
they rose and dressed: Odysseus put on
his cloak and tunic, and Calypso wore
her fine long robe of silver. Round her waist
she wrapped a golden belt, and veiled her head.
Then she prepared the journey for the man.
She gave an axe that fitted in his grip,
its handle made of finest olive wood;
its huge bronze blade was sharp on either side.
She also gave a polished adze. She led him
out to the island’s end, where tall trees grew:
black poplar, alder, fir that touched the sky,
good for a nimble boat of seasoned timber.
When she had shown him where the tall trees grew,
Calypso, queen of goddesses, went home.
Odysseus began and made good progress.
With his bronze axe he cut down twenty trunks,
polished them skillfully and planed them straight.

Calypso brought a gimlet and he bored
through every plank and fitted them together,
fixing it firm with pegs and fastenings.
As wide as when a man who knows his trade
marks out the curving hull to fit a ship,
so wide Odysseus marked out his raft.
He notched the side decks to the close-set frame
and fixed long planks along the ribs to finish.
He set a mast inside, and joined to it
a yardarm and a rudder to steer straight.
He heaped the boat with brush, and caulked the sides
with wickerwork, to keep the water out.
Calypso brought him fabric for a sail,
and he constructed that with equal skill.
He fastened up the braces, clews and halyards,
and using levers, launched her on the sea.

The work had taken four days; on the fifth
Calypso let him go. She washed and dressed him
in clothes that smelled of incense. On the raft
she put a flask of wine, a bigger flask
of water, and a large supply of food.
She sent him off with gentle, lukewarm breezes.
Gladly Odysseus spread out his sails
to catch the wind; with skill he steered the rudder.
No sleep fell on his eyes; he watched the stars,
the Pleiades, late-setting Boötes,
and Bear, which people also call the Plow,
which circles in one place, and marks Orion—
the only star that has no share of Ocean.
Calypso, queen of goddesses, had told him
to keep the Bear on his left side while sailing.
He sailed the sea for seven days and ten,
and on the eighteenth day, a murky mountain
of the Phaeacian land appeared—it rose
up like a shield beyond the misty sea.

Returning from the Ethiopians,
and pausing on Mount Solyma, Poseidon,
Master of Earthquakes, saw the distant raft.
Enraged, he shook his head and told himself,
“This is outrageous! So it seems the gods
have changed their plans about Odysseus
while I was absent! He has almost reached

Phaeacia, where it is his destiny
to flee the rope of pain that binds him now.
But I will goad him to more misery,
till he is sick of it.”

He gathered up
the clouds, and seized his trident and stirred round
the sea and roused the gusts of every wind,
and covered earth and sea with fog. Night stretched
from heaven. Eurus, Notus, blasting Zephyr
and Boreas, the child of sky, all fell
and rolled a mighty wave. Odysseus
grew weak at knees. He cried out in despair,

“More pain? How will it end? I am afraid
the goddess spoke the truth: that I will have
a sea of sufferings before I reach
my homeland. It is coming true! Zeus whirls
the air. Look at those clouds! He agitates
the waves, as winds attack from all directions.
I can hold on to one thing: certain death.
Those Greeks were lucky, three and four times over,
who died upon the plain of Troy to help
the sons of Atreus. I wish I had
died that same day the mass of Trojans hurled
their bronze-tipped spears at me around the corpse
of Peleus’ son. I would have had
a funeral, and honor from the Greeks;
but now I have to die this cruel death!”

A wave crashed onto him, and overturned
the raft, and he fell out. The rudder slipped
out of his hands. The winds blew all directions
and one enormous gust snapped off the mast.
The sail and yardarm drifted out to sea.
Then for a long time rushing, crashing waves
kept him submerged: he could not reach the surface.
The clothes Calypso gave him weighed him down.
At last he rose and spat the sour saltwater
out of his mouth—it gushed forth in a torrent.
Despite his pain and weakness, he remembered
his raft, and lunged to get it through the waves;
he climbed on top of it and clung to life.
The great waves carried it this way and that.
As when the thistles, clumping close together,

are borne across the prairie by the North Wind,
so these winds swept the raft across the sea.
The South Wind hurls it, then the North Wind grabs it,
then East Wind yields and lets the West Wind drive it.
But stepping softly, Ino, the White Goddess,
Cadmus' child, once human, human-voiced,
now honored with the gods in salty depths,
noticed that he was suffering and lost,
with pity. Like a gull with wings outstretched
she rose up from the sea, sat on the raft
and said,

“Poor man! Why does enraged Poseidon
create an odyssey of pain for you?
But his hostility will not destroy you.
You seem intelligent. Do as I say.
Strip off your clothes and leave the raft behind
for winds to take away. With just your arms
swim to Phaeacia. Fate decrees that there
you will survive. Here, take my scarf and tie it
under your chest: with this immortal veil,
you need not be afraid of death or danger.
But when you reach dry earth, untie the scarf
and throw it out to sea, away from land,
and turn away.” With that, the goddess gave it,
and plunged back down inside the surging sea,
just like a gull. The black wave covered her.

The hero who had suffered so much danger
was troubled and confused. He asked himself,
“Some deity has said to leave the raft.
But what if gods are weaving tricks again?
I will not trust her yet: with my own eyes
I saw the land she said I should escape to,
and it is far away. I will do this:
as long as these wood timbers hold together,
I will hang on, however hard it is.
But when the waves have smashed my raft to pieces,
then I will have no choice, and I will swim.”

While he was thinking this, the Lord of Earthquakes,
Poseidon, roused a huge and dreadful wave
that arched above his head: he hurled it at him.
As when a fierce wind ruffles up a heap
of dry wheat chaff; it scatters here and there;

so were the raft's long timbers flung apart.
He climbed astride a plank and rode along
as if on horseback. He took off the clothes
Calypso gave him, but he tied the scarf
around his chest, and dove into the sea,
spreading his arms to swim. The Lord of Earthquakes
saw him and nodded, muttering, "At last
you are in pain! Go drift across the sea,
till you meet people blessed by Zeus, the Sky Lord.
But even then, I think you will not lack
for suffering." He spurred his fine-maned horses,
and went to Aegae, where he had his home.

Athena, child of Zeus, devised a plan.
She blocked the path of all the other winds,
told them to cease and made them go to sleep,
but roused swift Boreas and smoothed the waves
in front of him, so that Odysseus
could reach Phaeacia and escape from death.

Two days and nights he drifted on the waves:
each moment he expected he would die.
But when the Dawn with dazzling braids brought day
for the third time, the wind died down. No breeze,
but total calm. As he was lifted up
by an enormous wave, he scanned around,
and saw the shore nearby. As when a father
lies sick and weak for many days, tormented
by some cruel spirit, till at last the gods
restore him back to life; his children feel
great joy; Odysseus felt that same joy
when he saw land. He swam and longed to set
his feet on earth. But when he was in earshot,
he heard the boom of surf against the rocks.
The mighty waves were crashing on the shore,
a dreadful belching. Everything was covered
in salty foam. There were no sheltering harbors
for ships, just sheer crags, reefs and solid cliffs.
Odysseus' heart and legs gave way.
Shaken but purposeful, he told himself,

"Zeus went beyond my hopes and let me see
dry land! I made it, cutting the abyss!
But I see no way out from this gray sea.
There are steep cliffs offshore, and all around

the rushing water roars; the rock runs sheer;
the sea is deep near shore; there is no way
to set my feet on land without disaster.
If I attempt to scramble out, a wave
will seize and dash me on the jagged rock;
a useless effort. But if I swim on farther,
looking for bays or coves or slanting beaches,
storm winds may seize me once again and drag me,
howling with grief, towards the fish-filled sea.
A god may even send a great sea-monster,
the kind that famous Amphitrite rears.
I know Poseidon wants to do me harm.”

As he was thinking this, the waves grew big
and hurled him at the craggy shore. His skin
would have been ripped away, and his bones smashed,
had not Athena given him a thought.
He grabbed a rock as he was swept along
with both hands, and clung to it, groaning, till
the wave passed by. But then the swell rushed back,
and struck him hard and hurled him out to sea.
As when an octopus, dragged from its den,
has many pebbles sticking to its suckers,
so his strong hands were skinned against the rocks.
A mighty wave rolled over him again.
He would have died too soon, in misery,
without the inspiration of Athena.
He came up from the wave that spewed to shore
and swam towards the land, in search of beaches
with gradual slopes, or inlets from the sea.
He swam until he reached a river's mouth
with gentle waters; that place seemed ideal,
smooth and not stony, sheltered from the wind.
He sensed its current; in his heart he prayed,

“Unknown god, hear me! How I longed for you!
I have escaped the salt sea and Poseidon.
Even the deathless gods respect a man
who is as lost as I am now. I have
gone through so much and reached your flowing streams.
Pity me, lord! I am your supplicant.”

The current ceased; the River God restrained
the waves and made them calm. He brought him safe

into the river mouth. His legs cramped up;
the sea had broken him. His swollen body
gushed brine from mouth and nostrils. There he lay,
winded and silent, hardly fit to move.
A terrible exhaustion overcame him.
When he could breathe and think again, he took
the goddess' scarf off, and let it go
into the river flowing to the sea;
strong currents swept it down and Ino's hands
took it. He crawled on land and crouched beside
the reeds and bent to kiss life-giving earth,
and trembling, he spoke to his own heart.

“What now? What will become of me? If I
stay up all wretched night beside this river,
the cruel frost and gentle dew together
may finish me: my life is thin with weakness.
At dawn a cold breeze blows beside the river.
But if I climb the slope to those dark woods
and go to rest in that thick undergrowth,
letting sweet sleep take hold of me, and losing
my cold and weariness—wild beasts may find me
and treat me as their prey.”

But he decided
to go into the woods. He found a place
beside a clearing, near the water's edge.
He crawled beneath two bushes grown together,
of olive and thorn. No strong wet wind could blow
through them, no shining sunbeam ever strike them,
no rain could penetrate them; they were growing
so thickly intertwined. Odysseus
crept under, and he scraped a bed together,
of leaves: there were enough to cover two
against the worst of winter. Seeing this,
the hero who had suffered for so long
was happy. He lay down inside and heaped
more leaves on top. As when a man who lives
out on a lonely farm that has no neighbors
buries a glowing torch inside black embers
to save the seed of fire and keep a source—
so was Odysseus concealed in leaves.
Athena poured down sleep to shut his eyes
so all his painful weariness could end.

Book 9, A Pirate in a Shepherd's Cave

Wily Odysseus, the lord of lies,
answered,

“My lord Alcinous, great king,
it is a splendid thing to hear a poet
as talented as this. His voice is godlike.
I think that there can be no greater pleasure
than when the whole community enjoys
a banquet, as we sit inside the house,
and listen to the singer, and the tables
are heaped with bread and meat; the wine boy ladles
drink from the bowl and pours it into cups.
To me this seems ideal, a thing of beauty.
Now something prompted you to ask about
my own sad story. I will tell you, though
the memory increases my despair.
Where shall I start? Where can I end? The gods
have given me so much to cry about.
First I will tell my name, so we will be
acquainted and if I survive, you can
be my guest in my distant home one day.
I am Odysseus, Laertes' son,
known for my many clever tricks and lies.
My fame extends to heaven, but I live
in Ithaca, where shaking forest hides
Mount Neriton. Close by are other islands:
Dulichium, and wooded Zacynthus
and Same. All the others face the dawn;
my Ithaca is set apart, most distant,
facing the dark. It is a rugged land,
but good at raising children. To my eyes
no country could be sweeter. As you know,
divine Calypso held me in her cave,
wanting to marry me; and likewise Circe,
the trickster, trapped me, and she wanted me
to be her husband. But she never swayed
my heart, since when a man is far from home,
living abroad, there is no sweeter thing
than his own native land and family.
Now let me tell you all the trouble Zeus
has caused me on my journey home from Troy.
A blast of wind pushed me off course towards

the Cicones in Ismarus. I sacked
the town and killed the men.

...

With heavy hearts we sailed along and reached
the country of the lawless Cyclopes,
lacking in customs. They put trust in gods,
and do not plant their food from seed, nor plow,
and yet the barley, grain, and clustering wine-grapes
all flourish there, increased by rain from Zeus.
They hold no councils, have no common laws,
but live in caves on lofty mountaintops,
and each makes laws for his own wife and children,
without concern for what the others think.
A distance from this island is another,
across the water, slantways from the harbor,
level and thickly wooded. Countless goats
live there but people never visit it.
No hunters labor through its woods to scale
its hilly peaks. There are no flocks of sheep,
no fields of plowland—it is all untilled,
unsown and uninhabited by humans.
Only the bleating goats live there and graze.
Cyclopic people have no red-cheeked ships
and no shipwright among them who could build
boats, to enable them to row across
to other cities, as most people do,
crossing the sea to visit one another.
With boats they could have turned this island into
a fertile colony, with proper harvests.
By the gray shore there lie well-watered meadows,
where vines would never fail. There is flat land
for plowing, and abundant crops would grow
in the autumn; there is richness underground.
The harbor has good anchorage; there is
no need of anchor stones or ropes or cables.
The ships that come to shore there can remain
beached safely till the sailors wish to leave
and fair winds blow. Up by the harbor head
freshwater gushes down beneath the caves.
The poplars grow around it. There we sailed:
the gods were guiding us all through the darkness.
Thick fog wrapped round our ships and in the sky

the moon was dark and clothed in clouds, so we saw nothing of the island. None of us could see the great waves rolling in towards the land, until we rowed right to the beach. We lowered all the sails and disembarked onto the shore, and there we fell asleep.

When early Dawn shone forth with rosy fingers, we roamed around that island full of wonders. The daughters of the great King Zeus, the nymphs, drove out the mountain goats so that my crew could eat. On seeing them, we dashed to fetch our javelins and bows from on board ship. We split into three groups, took aim and shot. Some god gave us good hunting. All twelve crews had nine goats each, and ten for mine. We sat there all day till sunset, eating meat and drinking our strong red wine. The ships' supply of that had not run out; when we had sacked the holy citadel of the Cicones, we all took gallons of it, poured in great big pitchers. We looked across the narrow strip of water at the Cyclopic island, saw their smoke, and heard the baaing of their sheep and goats. The sun went down and in the hours of darkness we lay and slept on shore beside the sea. But when the rosy hands of Dawn appeared, I called my men together and addressed them.

'My loyal friends! Stay here, the rest of you, while with my boat and crew I go to check who those men are, find out if they are wild, lawless aggressors, or the type to welcome strangers, and fear the gods.'

With that, I climbed on board and told my crew to come with me and then untie the cables of the ship. Quickly they did so, sat along the benches, and struck the whitening water with their oars. The journey was not long. Upon arrival, right at the edge of land, beside the sea, we saw a high cave overhung with laurel, the home of several herds of sheep and goats. Around that cave was built a lofty courtyard,

of deep-set stones, with tall pines rising up,
and leafy oaks. There lived a massive man
who shepherded his flocks all by himself.
He did not go to visit other people,
but kept apart, and did not know the ways
of custom. In his build he was a wonder,
a giant, not like men who live on bread,
but like a wooded peak in airy mountains,
rising alone above the rest.

I told
my loyal crew to guard the ship, while I
would go with just twelve chosen men, my favorites.
I took a goatskin full of dark sweet wine
that I was given by Apollo's priest,
Maron the son of Euanthes, who lived
inside the shady grove on Ismarus.
In reverence to the god, I came to help him,
and save his wife and son. He gave me gifts:
a silver bowl and seven pounds of gold,
well wrought, and siphoned off some sweet strong wine,
and filled twelve jars for me—a godlike drink.
The slaves knew nothing of this wine; it was
known just to him, his wife, and one house girl.
Whenever he was drinking it, he poured
a single shot into a cup, and added
twenty of water, and a marvelous smell
rose from the bowl, and all would long to taste it.
I filled a big skin up with it, and packed
provisions in a bag—my heart suspected
that I might meet a man of courage, wild,
and lacking knowledge of the normal customs.

We soon were at the cave, but did not find
the Cyclops; he was pasturing his flocks.
We went inside and looked at everything.
We saw his crates weighed down with cheese, and pens
crammed full of lambs divided up by age:
the newborns, middlings, and those just weaned.
There were well-crafted bowls and pails for milking,
all full of whey. My crew begged, 'Let us grab
some cheese and quickly drive the kids and lambs
out of their pens and down to our swift ships,
and sail away across the salty water!'

That would have been the better choice. But I refused. I hoped to see him, and find out if he would give us gifts. In fact he brought no joy to my companions. Then we lit a fire, and made a sacrifice, and ate some cheese, and sat to wait inside the cave until he brought his flocks back home. He came at dinnertime, and brought a load of wood to make a fire. He hurled it noisily into the cave. We were afraid, and cowered towards the back. He drove his ewes and nannies inside to milk them, but he left the rams and he-goats in the spacious yard outside. He lifted up the heavy stone and set it to block the entrance of the cave. It was a rock so huge and massive, twenty-two strong carts could not have dragged it from the threshold. He sat, and all in order milked his ewes and she-goats, then he set the lambs to suck beside each bleating mother. Then he curdled half of the fresh white milk, set that aside in wicker baskets, and the rest he stored in pails so he could drink it with his dinner. When he had carefully performed his chores, he lit a fire, then looked around and saw us.

‘Strangers! Who are you? Where did you come from across the watery depths? Are you on business, or roaming round without a goal, like pirates, who risk their lives at sea to bring disaster to other people?’

So he spoke. His voice, so deep and booming, and his giant size, made our hearts sink in terror. Even so, I answered,

‘We are Greeks, come here from Troy. The winds have swept us off in all directions across the vast expanse of sea, off course from our planned route back home. Zeus willed it so. We are proud to be the men of Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, whose fame is greatest under the sky, for sacking that vast city and killing many people. Now we beg you,

here at your knees, to grant a gift, as is the norm for hosts and guests. Please sir, my lord: respect the gods. We are your suppliants, and Zeus is on our side, since he takes care of visitors, guest-friends, and those in need.'

Unmoved he said, 'Well, foreigner, you are a fool, or from some very distant country. You order me to fear the gods! My people think nothing of that Zeus with his big scepter, nor any god; our strength is more than theirs. If I spare you or spare your friends, it will not be out of fear of Zeus. I do the bidding of my own heart. But are you going far in that fine ship of yours, or somewhere near?'

He spoke to test me, but I saw right through him. I know how these things work. I answered him deceitfully.

 'Poseidon, the Earth-Shaker,
shipwrecked me at the far end of your island.
He pushed us in; wind dashed us on the rocks.
We barely managed to survive.'

 But he
made no reply and showed no mercy. Leaping up high, he reached his hands towards my men, seized two, and knocked them hard against the ground like puppies, and the floor was wet with brains. He ripped them limb by limb to make his meal, then ate them like a lion on the mountains, devouring flesh, entrails, and marrow bones, and leaving nothing. Watching this disaster, we wept and lifted up our hands in prayer to Zeus. We felt so helpless. When the Cyclops had filled his massive belly with his meal of human meat and unmixed milk, he lay stretched out among his flocks. Then thinking like a military man, I thought I should get out my sword, go up to him and thrust right through his torso, feeling for his liver. That would have doomed us all. On second thoughts, I realized we were too weak to move the mighty stone he set in the high doorway.

So we stayed there in misery till dawn.

Early the Dawn appeared, pink fingers blooming,
and then he lit his fire and milked his ewes
in turn, and set a lamb by every one.

When he had diligently done his chores,
he grabbed two men and made a meal of them.

After he ate, he drove his fat flock out.

He rolled the boulder out and back with ease,
as one would set the lid upon a quiver.

Then whistling merrily, the Cyclops drove
his fat flocks to the mountain. I was left,
scheming to take revenge on him and hurt him,
and gain the glory, if Athena let me.

I made my plan. Beside the pen there stood
a great big club, green olive wood, which he
had cut to dry, to be his walking stick.

It was so massive that it looked to us
like a ship's mast, a twenty-oared black freighter
that sails across the vast sea full of cargo.

I went and cut from it about a fathom,
and gave it to the men, and ordered them
to scrape it down. They made it smooth and I
stood by and sharpened up the tip, and made it
hard in the blazing flame. The cave was full
of dung; I hid the club beneath a pile.

Then I gave orders that the men cast lots
for who would lift the stake with me and press it
into his eye, when sweet sleep overtook him.
The lots fell on the men I would have chosen:
four men, and I was fifth among their number.

At evening he drove back his woolly flocks
into the spacious cave, both male and female,
and left none in the yard outside—perhaps
suspecting something, or perhaps a god
told him to do it. He picked up and placed
the stone to form a door, and sat to milk
the sheep and bleating goats in turn, then put
the little ones to suck. His chores were done;
he grabbed two men for dinner. I approached
and offered him a cup of ivy wood,
filled full of wine. I said,

‘Here, Cyclops! You have eaten human meat; now drink some wine, sample the merchandise our ship contains. I brought it as a holy offering, so you might pity me and send me home. But you are in a cruel rage, beyond what anyone could bear. Do you expect more guests, when you have treated us so rudely?’

He took and drank the sweet delicious wine; he loved it, and demanded more.

‘Another!

And now tell me your name, so I can give you a present as my guest, one you will like. My people do have wine; grape clusters grow from our rich earth, fed well by rain from Zeus. But this is nectar, god food!’

So I gave him another cup of wine, and then two more. He drank them all, unwisely. With the wine gone to his head, I told him, all politeness,

‘Cyclops, you asked my name. I will reveal it; then you must give the gift you promised me, of hospitality. My name is Noman. My family and friends all call me Noman.’

He answered with no pity in his heart, ‘I will eat Noman last; first I will eat the other men. That is my gift to you.’ Then he collapsed, fell on his back, and lay there, his massive neck askew. All-conquering sleep took him. In drunken heaviness, he spewed wine from his throat, and chunks of human flesh. And then I drove the spear into the embers to heat it up, and told my men, ‘Be brave!’ I wanted none of them to shrink in fear. The fire soon had seized the olive spear, green though it was, and terribly it glowed. I quickly snatched it from the fire. My crew stood firm: some god was breathing courage in us. They took the olive spear, its tip all sharp, and shoved it in his eye. I leaned on top and twisted it, as when a man drills wood

for shipbuilding. Below, the workers spin
the drill with straps, stretched out from either end.
So round and round it goes, and so we whirled
the fire-sharp weapon in his eye. His blood
poured out around the stake, and blazing fire
sizzled his lids and brows, and fried the roots.
As when a blacksmith dips an axe or adze
to temper it in ice-cold water; loudly
it shrieks. From this, the iron takes on its power.
So did his eyeball crackle on the spear.
Horribly then he howled, the rocks resounded,
and we shrank back in fear. He tugged the spear
out of his eye, all soaked with gushing blood.
Desperately with both hands he hurled it from him,
and shouted to the Cyclopes who lived
in caves high up on windy cliffs around.
They heard and came from every side, and stood
near to the cave, and called out, 'Polyphemus!
What is the matter? Are you badly hurt?
Why are you screaming through the holy night
and keeping us awake? Is someone stealing
your herds, or trying to kill you, by some trick
or force?'

Strong Polyphemus from inside
replied, 'My friends! Noman is killing me
by tricks, not force.'

Their words flew back to him:
If no one hurts you, you are all alone:
Great Zeus has made you sick; no help for that.
Pray to your father, mighty Lord Poseidon.'

Then off they went, and I laughed to myself,
at how my name, the 'no man' maneuver, tricked him.
The Cyclops groaned and labored in his pain,
felt with blind hands and took the door-stone out,
and sat there at the entrance, arms outstretched,
to catch whoever went out with the sheep.
Maybe he thought I was a total fool.
But I was strategizing, hatching plans,
so that my men and I could all survive.
I wove all kinds of wiles and cunning schemes;
danger was near and it was life or death.
The best idea I formed was this: there were

those well-fed sturdy rams with good thick fleece,
wool as dark as violets—all fine big creatures.
So silently I tied them with the rope
used by the giant Cyclops as a bed.
I bound the rams in sets of three and set
a man beneath each middle sheep, with one
on either side, and so my men were saved.
One ram was best of all the flock; I grabbed
his back and curled myself up underneath
his furry belly, clinging to his fleece;
by force of will I kept on hanging there.
And then we waited miserably for day.

When early Dawn revealed her rose-red hands,
the rams jumped up, all eager for the grass.
The ewes were bleating in their pens, un milked,
their udders full to bursting. Though their master
was weak and worn with pain, he felt the back
of each ram as he lined them up—but missed
the men tied up beneath their woolly bellies.
Last of them all, the big ram went outside,
heavy with wool and me—the clever trickster.
Strong Polyphemus stroked his back and asked him,

‘Sweet ram, why are you last today to leave
the cave? You are not normally so slow.
You are the first to eat the tender flowers,
leaping across the meadow, first to drink,
and first to want to go back to the sheepfold
at evening time. But now you are the last.
You grieve for Master’s eye; that wicked man,
helped by his nasty henchmen, got me drunk
and blinded me. Noman will not escape!
If only you could talk like me, and tell me
where he is skulking in his fear of me.
Then I would dash his brains out on the rocks,
and make them spatter all across the cave,
to ease the pain that no-good Noman brought.’

With that, he nudged the ram away outside.
We rode a short way from the cave, then I
first freed myself and then untied my men.
We stole his nice fat animals, and ran,
constantly glancing all around and back
until we reached the ship. The other men

were glad to see us, their surviving friends,
but wept for those who died. I ordered them
to stop their crying, scowling hard at each.
I made them shove the fleecy flock on board,
and row the boat out into salty water.
So they embarked, sat on their rowing benches,
and struck their oar blades in the whitening sea.
When I had gone as far as shouts can carry,
I jeered back,

‘Hey, you, Cyclops! Idiot!
The crew trapped in your cave did not belong
to some poor weakling. Well, you had it coming!
You had no shame at eating your own guests!
So Zeus and other gods have paid you back.’

My taunting made him angrier. He ripped
a rock out of the hill and hurled it at us.
It landed right in front of our dark prow,
and almost crushed the tip of the steering oar.
The stone sank in the water; waves surged up.
The backflow all at once propelled the ship
landwards; the swollen water pushed us with it.
I grabbed a big long pole, and shoved us off.
I told my men, ‘Row fast, to save your lives!’
and gestured with my head to make them hurry.
They bent down to their oars and started rowing.
We got out twice as far across the sea,
and then I called to him again. My crew
begged me to stop, and pleaded with me.

‘Please!
Calm down! Why are you being so insistent
and taunting this wild man? He hurled that stone
and drove our ship right back to land. We thought
that we were going to die. If he had heard us,
he would have hurled a jagged rock and crushed
our heads and wooden ship. He throws so hard!

But my tough heart was not convinced; I was
still furious, and shouted back again,

‘Cyclops! If any mortal asks you how
your eye was mutilated and made blind,
say that Odysseus, the city-sacker,
Laertes’ son, who lives in Ithaca,

destroyed your sight.'

He groaned, 'The prophecy!
It has come true at last! There was a tall
and handsome man named Telemus, the son
of Eurymus, who lived among my people;
he spent his life here, soothsaying for us.
He told me that Odysseus' hands
would make me lose my sight. I always thought
somebody tall and handsome, strong and brave
would come to me. But now this little weakling,
this little nobody, has blinded me;
by wine he got the best of me. Come on,
Odysseus, and let me give you gifts,
and ask Poseidon's help to get you home.
I am his son; the god is proud to be
my father. He will heal me, if he wants,
though no one else, not god nor man, can do it.'

After he said these words, I answered him,
'If only I could steal your life from you,
and send you down to Hades' house below,
as sure as nobody will ever heal you,
even the god of earthquakes.'

But he prayed
holding his arms towards the starry sky,
'Listen, Earth-Shaker, Blue-Haired Lord Poseidon:
acknowledge me your son, and be my father.
Grant that Odysseus, the city-sacker,
will never go back home. Or if it is
fated that he will see his family,
then let him get there late and with no honor,
in pain and lacking ships, and having caused
the death of all his men, and let him find
more trouble in his own house.'

Blue Poseidon
granted his son's prayer. Polyphemus raised
a rock far bigger than the last, and swung,
then hurled it with immeasurable force.
It fell a little short, beside our rudder,
and splashed into the sea; the waves surged up,
and pushed the boat ahead, to the other shore.
We reached the island where our ships were docked.

The men were sitting waiting for us, weeping.
We beached our ship and disembarked, then took
the sheep that we had stolen from the Cyclops
out of the ship's hold, and we shared them out
fairly, so all the men got equal portions.
But in dividing up the flock, my crew
gave me alone the ram, the Cyclops' favorite.
There on the shore, I slaughtered him for Zeus,
the son of Cronus, god of Dark Clouds, Lord
of all the world. I burned the thighs. The god
ignored my offering, and planned to ruin
all of my ships and all my loyal men.
So all day long till sunset we were sitting,
feasting on meat and drinking sweet strong wine.
But when the sun went down and darkness fell,
we went to sleep beside the breaking waves.
Then when rose-fingered Dawn came, bright and early,
I roused my men and told them to embark
and loose the cables. Quickly they obeyed,
sat at their rowing benches, all in order,
and struck the gray saltwater with their oars.
So we sailed on, with sorrow in our hearts,
glad to survive, but grieving for our friends."

Book 23, The Olive Tree Bed

Chuckling with glee, the old slave climbed upstairs
to tell the queen that her beloved husband
was home. Her weak old knees felt stronger now;
with buoyant steps she went and stood beside
her mistress, at her head, and said,

"Dear child,
wake up and see! At long last you have got
your wish come true! Odysseus has come!
He is right here inside this house! At last!
He slaughtered all the suitors who were wasting
his property and threatening his son!"

But cautiously Penelope replied,
"You poor old thing! The gods have made you crazy.
They have the power to turn the sanest person
mad, or make fools turn wise. You used to be
so sensible, but they have damaged you.

Why else would you be mocking me like this,
with silly stories, in my time of grief?
Why did you wake me from the sleep that sweetly
wrapped round my eyes? I have not slept so soundly
since my Odysseus marched off to see
that cursed town—Evelium. Go back!
If any other slave comes here to wake me
and tell me all this nonsense, I will send her
back down at once, and I will not be gentle.
Your old age will protect you from worse scolding.”

But Eurycleia answered with affection,
“Dear child, I am not mocking you. I am
telling the truth: Odysseus is here!
He is the stranger that they all abused.
Telemachus has known for quite some time,
but sensibly he kept his father’s plans
a secret, so Odysseus could take
revenge for all their violence and pride.”

Penelope was overjoyed; she jumped
from bed and hugged the nurse, and started crying.
Her words flew fast.

“Dear Nanny! If this is
the truth, if he has come back to this house,
how could he have attacked those shameless suitors,
when he is just one man, and there were always
so many crowded in there?”

Eurycleia
answered, “I did not see or learn the details.
I heard the sound of screaming from the men
as they were killed. We huddled in our room
and kept the doors tight shut, until your son
called me—his father sent him. Then I saw
Odysseus surrounded by dead bodies.
They lay on top of one another, sprawled
across the solid floor. You would have been
thrilled if you saw him, like a lion, drenched
in blood and gore. Now they are all piled up
out by the courtyard gates, and he is burning
a mighty fire to fumigate the palace,
restoring all its loveliness. He sent me
to fetch you. Come with me, so both of you

can start to live in happiness. You have endured such misery. Your wish came true! He is alive! He has come home again, and found you and your son, and he has taken revenge on all the suitors who abused him.”

Penelope said carefully, “Do not start gloating. As you know, my son and I would be delighted if he came. We all would. However, what you say cannot be true. Some god has killed the suitors out of anger at their abuse of power and their pride. They failed to show respect to visitors, both good and bad. Their foolishness has killed them. But my Odysseus has lost his home, and far away from Greece, he lost his life.”

The nurse replied, “Dear child! How can you say your husband will not come, when he is here, beside the hearth? Your heart has always been mistrustful. But I have clear evidence! When I was washing him, I felt the scar made when the boar impaled him with its tusk. I tried to tell you, but he grabbed my throat and stopped me spoiling all his plans. Come with me. I swear on my own life: if I am lying, then kill me.”

Wise Penelope said, “Nanny, it must be hard for you to understand the ways of gods, despite your cleverness. But let us go to meet my son, so I can see the suitors dead, and see the man who killed them.”

So she went downstairs. Her heart could not decide if she should keep her distance as she was questioning her own dear husband, or go right up to him and kiss his face and hold his hands in hers. She crossed the threshold and sat across from him beside the wall, in firelight. He sat beside the pillar, and kept his eyes down, waiting to find out whether the woman who once shared his bed would speak to him. She sat in silence, stunned.

Sometimes when she was glancing at his face it seemed like him; but then his dirty clothes were unfamiliar. Telemachus scolded her.

“Mother! Cruel, heartless Mother! Why are you doing this, rejecting Father? Why do you not go over, sit beside him, and talk to him? No woman in the world would be so obstinate! To keep your distance from him when he has come back after twenty long years of suffering! Your heart is always harder than rock!”

But thoughtfully she answered, “My child, I am confused. I cannot speak, or meet his eyes. If this is really him, if my Odysseus has come back home, we have our ways to recognize each other, through secret signs known only to us two.”

Hardened Odysseus began to smile. He told the boy,

“You must allow your mother to test me out; she will soon know me better. While I am dirty, dressed in rags, she will not treat me with kindness or acknowledge me. Meanwhile, we must make plans. If someone murders even just one man, even one who had few friends in his community, the killer is forced to run away and leave his homeland and family. But we have killed the mainstay of Ithaca, the island’s best young men. So what do you suggest?”

Telemachus said warily, “You have to work it out. They say you have the finest mind in all the world; no mortal man can rival you in cleverness. Lead me, and I will be behind you right away. And I will do my best to be as brave as I can be.”

Odysseus was quick to form a plan. He told him, “Here is what I think is best.

The three of you should wash and change your clothes,
and make the slave girls go put on clean dresses.
Then let the godlike singer take the lyre
and play a clear and cheerful dancing tune,
so passersby or neighbors hearing it
will think it is a wedding. We must not
allow the news about the suitors' murder
to spread too far until we reach the woods
of our estate, and there we can decide
the best path forward offered us by Zeus."

They did as Lord Odysseus had said.
They washed and changed their tunics, and the slave girls
prepared themselves. The singer took the lyre,
and roused in them desire to hear sweet music,
and dance. The house resounded with the thump
of beating feet from all the dancing men
and girls in pretty sashes. Those outside
who heard the noises said to one another,

"So somebody is marrying the queen
who had so many suitors! Headstrong woman!
She must have lacked the strength to wait it out
and keep her husband's house safe till he came."
They spoke with no idea what really happened.

Eurynome the slave woman began
to wash strong-willed Odysseus. She rubbed him
with olive oil, and dressed him in a tunic
and handsome cloak. And then Athena poured
attractiveness from head to toe, and made him
taller and stronger, and his hair grew thick
and curly as a hyacinth. As when
a craftsman whom Athena or Hephaestus
has trained in metalwork, so he can make
beautiful artifacts, pours gold on silver—
so she poured beauty on his head and shoulders.
After his bath he looked like an immortal.
He sat down in the same chair opposite
his wife and said,

"Extraordinary woman!
The gods have given you the hardest heart.
No other wife would so reject a husband
who had been suffering for twenty years

and finally come home. Well, Nanny, make a bed for me, so I can rest. This woman must have an iron heart!”

Penelope

said shrewdly, “You extraordinary man! I am not acting proud, or underplaying this big event; yet I am not surprised at how you look. You looked like this the day your long oars rowed away from Ithaca. Now, Eurycleia, make the bed for him outside the room he built himself. Pull out the bedstead, and spread quilts and blankets on it. She spoke to test him, and Odysseus was furious, and told his loyal wife,

“Woman! Your words have cut my heart! Who moved my bed? It would be difficult for even a master craftsman—though a god could do it with ease. No man, however young and strong, could pry it out. There is a trick to how this bed was made. I made it, no one else. Inside the court there grew an olive tree with delicate long leaves, full-grown and green, as sturdy as a pillar, and I built the room around it. I packed stones together, and fixed a roof and fitted doors. At last I trimmed the olive tree and used my bronze to cut the branches off from root to tip and planed it down and skillfully transformed the trunk into a bedpost. With a drill, I bored right through it. This was my first bedpost, and then I made the other three, inlaid with gold and silver and with ivory. I stretched ox-leather straps across, dyed purple. Now I have told the secret trick, the token. But woman, wife, I do not know if someone—a man—has cut the olive trunk and moved my bed, or if it is still safe.”

At that,

her heart and body suddenly relaxed. She recognized the tokens he had shown her. She burst out crying and ran straight towards him and threw her arms around him, kissed his face,

and said,

“Do not be angry at me now,
Odysseus! In every other way
you are a very understanding man.
The gods have made us suffer: they refused
to let us stay together and enjoy
our youth until we reached the edge of age
together. Please forgive me, do not keep
bearing a grudge because when I first saw you,
I would not welcome you immediately.
I felt a constant dread that some bad man
would fool me with his lies. There are so many
dishonest, clever men. That foreigner
would never have got Helen into bed,
if she had known the Greeks would march to war
and bring her home again. It was a goddess
who made her do it, putting in her heart
the passion that first caused my grief as well.
Now you have told the story of our bed,
the secret that no other mortal knows,
except yourself and me, and just one slave,
Actoris, whom my father gave to me
when I came here, who used to guard our room.
You made my stubborn heart believe in you.”

This made him want to cry. He held his love,
his faithful wife, and wept. As welcome as
the land to swimmers, when Poseidon wrecks
their ship at sea and breaks it with great waves
and driving winds; a few escape the sea
and reach the shore, their skin all caked with brine.
Grateful to be alive, they crawl to land.
So glad she was to see her own dear husband,
and her white arms would not let go his neck.
They would have wept until the rosy Dawn
began to touch the sky, but shining-eyed
Athena intervened. She held night back,
restraining golden Dawn beside the Ocean,
and would not let her yoke her swift young colts,
Shining and Bright. Odysseus, mind whirling,
said,

“Wife, we have not come yet to the end of all our troubles; there are more to come, many hard labors which I must complete. The spirit of Tiresias informed me, that day I went inside the house of Hades to ask about the journey home for me and for my men. But come now, let us go to bed together, wife; let us enjoy the pleasure of sweet sleep.”

Penelope, who always thought ahead, said, “When you wish. The bed is yours. The gods have brought you home, back to your well-built house. But since a god has made you speak about these future labors, tell me what they involve. I will find out eventually, and better to know now.”

He answered warily, “You really are extraordinary. Why would you make me tell you something to cause you pain? It hurts me too, but I will tell the truth, not hide it from you. Tiresias foretold that I must travel through many cities carrying an oar, till I reach men who do not know the sea, and do not eat their food with salt, or use boats painted red around the prow, or oars, which are the wings of ships. He said that I will know I have arrived when I encounter someone who calls the object on my back a winnowing fan. Then I must fix my oar firm in the earth, and make a sacrifice to Lord Poseidon, of a ram and ox and stud-boar, perfect animals, then come back home and give a hecatomb to all the deathless gods who live above the sky. If I do this, I will not die at sea; I will grow old in comfort and will meet a gentle death, surrounded by my people, who will be rich and happy.”

Sensibly Penelope said, “If the gods allow you to reach old age in comfort, there is hope that there will be an end to all our troubles.”

They talked like this. Meanwhile, the slaves were working:
Eurynome and Eurycleia laid
soft blankets on the sturdy bed by torchlight.
The nurse went off to sleep; Eurynome
picked up the torch and led them to their bed,
then went to her room. Finally, at last,
with joy the husband and the wife arrived
back in the rites of their old marriage bed.

Meanwhile, the herdsmen and Telemachus
stopped dancing, made the women stop, and went
to bed inside the darkened house.

And when
the couple had enjoyed their lovemaking,
they shared another pleasure—telling stories.
She told him how she suffered as she watched
the crowd of suitors ruining the house,
killing so many herds of sheep and cattle
and drinking so much wine, because of her.
Odysseus told her how much he hurt
so many other people, and in turn
how much he had endured himself. She loved
to listen, and she did not fall asleep
until he told it all.

Heraclitus and Parmenides, Fragments

The history of Greece after the fall of the Mycenaean civilization goes from the Dark Ages to the Archaic and Classical periods. The Archaic might be understood as running from the foundation of the Olympic Games in 776 B.C. to the second Persian invasion of Greece (480-479 B.C.) Great spiritual forces were massing in this time, which would effloresce in the classical age. Presumably Homer's life coincides with renewed Greek expansion into settlements along the Black Sea littoral and throughout the Mediterranean world—except for the western North African coast under the hegemony of Carthage, a Phoenician settlement. The Phoenicians and Greeks had competed for trade, but the conquest of the original Phoenician city-states by the Assyrians during the 700s B.C. left the field open for the Greeks. Increasing population levels forced migrations out of the mountain-bound (and therefore agriculturally constrained) city-states of the Greek mainland. This process of colonial Hellenization generated a cosmopolitan dynamic (including a more direct and intimate contact with the wisdom of the ancient Near East) which catalyzed new breakthroughs for humanity, none more significant than the emergence of philosophy. Several factors are relevant: the new alphabetic literacy, trade with Egypt and Mesopotamia, communication between widely dispersed, independent (increasingly republican, even democratic) Greek *poleis*.

Philosophy arose in Ionia, a section of the western Anatolian coast settled by Ionians (one of the four major tribes thought to constitute the Greek people, to which the Athenians belonged). This region had been ruled by the Hittite Empire (before its collapse in the Late Bronze Age), and then by the Lydians, before Cyrus the Great made it part of his Achaemenid Persian Empire around 546 B.C. Thales of Miletus is considered the first philosopher, flourishing perhaps around 585 B.C. Miletus was one of the most important commercial cities of the Greek world. In his prime perhaps around 500 B.C., the philosopher Heraclitus came from Ephesus, another Ionian city, after its Persian subjugation. Parmenides may have been a generation younger than Heraclitus. He was a native of Elea in Magna Graecia, the Roman name for the Greek-settled coastal areas of southern Italy, including Sicily. In his dialogue *Parmenides*, Plato has a 65-year-old Parmenides meeting a young Socrates in Athens.

The eruption of early Greek philosophy, what is often known as “Presocratic” philosophy, is as momentous as any development in the history of humanity. It was not unprecedented, though. The spiritual quest for the meaning of existence conducted in the ancient Near East, and operative in the mythological poetry of Homer and Hesiod (probably a contemporary of Homer’s), finds a new mode in philosophy: one in which mythology, though certainly not rejected (see the framing for Parmenides’ discourse), does not determine the procession of thought. (And, intensifying a critical tendency to be found in Homer and Hesiod, philosophy would strengthen the capacity of the individual person to think beyond the constraints of hierarchical interests and sociopolitical conservation.) Heraclitus’ aphorisms, though hardly irreligious, induce in the soul a new orientation with regard to reality. The energy of his thinking crackles off the page in a way reminiscent of Nietzsche. Parmenides gives us the first sustained logical argument of which we have record—but logic and mysticism are not opposed to each other in Parmenides, and he still writes in verse. The “rationalism” of the earliest philosophers is not to be confused with the secularized and deracinated rationalism of modernity, though Greek philosophy did initiate development of scientific methodology in which gods are not resorted to in the first place when it comes to the construction of causal accounts of what we experience. There was indeed a new quality of attention given to natural phenomena. With the “Ionian enlightenment,” we have a philosophical/scientific search for causes that gives scope for each human intellect to investigate reality. Unfortunately, the writings of the Presocratics only survive in fragments, passages haphazardly quoted by later authors. But this broken condition itself provides a spur to thinking.

Heraclitus

The Path of Investigation

1. Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it—not only before hearing it, but even after they have heard it for the first time. That is to say, although all things come to pass in accordance with this Logos, men seem to be quite without any experience of it—at least if they are judged in the light of such words and deeds as I am here setting forth.
2. We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet, although the Logos is common to all, most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own.
3. Men who love wisdom should acquaint themselves with a great many particulars.
4. Seekers after gold dig up much earth and find little.
5. Let us not make arbitrary conjectures about the greatest matters.
6. Much learning does not teach understanding, otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus.
7. Of those whose discourses I have heard there is not one who attains to the realization that wisdom stands apart from all else.
8. I have searched myself.
9. It pertains to all men to know themselves and to be temperate.
10. To be temperate is the greatest virtue. Wisdom consists in speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things.
11. The things of which there can be sight, hearing, and learning—these are what I especially prize.
12. Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears.
13. Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men having barbarian souls.
14. One should not act or speak as if he were asleep.
15. The waking have one world in common, whereas each sleeper turns away to a private world of his own.
16. Whatever we see when awake is death; when asleep, dreams.
17. Nature loves to hide itself.

18. The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but gives signs.
19. Unless you expect the unexpected you will never find truth, for it is hard to discover and hard to attain.

The Idea of Continuum

20. Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.
21. You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing one.
22. Cool things become warm, the warm grows cool; the moist dries, the parched becomes moist.
23. It is in changing that things find repose.
24. Time is a child moving counters in a game; the royal power is a child's.
25. War is both father and king of all; some he has shown forth as gods and others as men, some he has made slaves and others free.
26. It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife.
27. Homer was wrong in saying, "Would that strife might perish from amongst gods and men." For if that were to occur, then all things would cease to exist.

On Nature

28. There is exchange of all things for fire and of fire for all things, as there is of wares for gold and of gold for wares.
29. This universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man, but it always has been is, and will be—an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures.
30. The phases of fire are craving and satiety.
31. It throws apart and then brings together again; it advances and retires.
32. The transformations of fire—first, sea; and of sea, half becomes earth and half the lightning-flash.

33. When earth has melted into sea, the resultant amount is the same as there had been before sea became hardened into earth.
34. Fire lives in the death of earth, air in the death of fire, water in the death of air, and earth in the death of water.
35. The thunderbolt pilots all things.
36. The sun is new each day.
37. The sun is the breadth of a man's foot.
38. If there were no sun, the other stars would not suffice to prevent its being night.
39. The boundary line of evening and morning is the Bear; and opposite the Bear is the boundary of bright Zeus.
40. The fairest universe is but a heap of rubbish piled up at random.
41. Every beast is driven to pasture by a blow.

On the Spiritual

42. You could not discover the limits of soul, even if you traveled by every path in order to do so; such is the depth of its meaning.
43. Soul is the vaporization out of which everything else is composed; moreover it is the least corporeal of things and is in ceaseless flux, for the moving world can only be known by what is in motion.
44. Souls are vaporized from what is moist.
45. Soul has its own inner law of growth.
46. A dry soul is wisest and best. [or] The best and wisest soul is a dry beam of light.
47. Souls take pleasure in becoming moist.
48. A drunken man has to be led by a boy, whom he follows stumbling and not knowing whither he goes, for his soul is moist.
49. It is death to souls to become water, and it is death to water to become earth. Conversely, water comes into existence out of earth, and souls out of water.
50. Even the sacred barley drink separates when it is not stirred.
51. It is hard to fight against impulsive desire; whatever it wants it will buy at the cost of the soul.

52. It would not be better if things happened to men just as they wish.
53. Although it is better to hide our ignorance, this is hard to do when we relax over wine.
54. A foolish man is a-flutter at every word.
55. Fools, although they hear, are like the deaf: to them the adage applies that when present they are absent.
56. Bigotry is the sacred disease.
57. Most people do not take heed of the things they encounter, nor do they grasp them even when they have learned about them, although they think they do.
58. If all existing things were smoke, it is by smell that we would distinguish them.
59. In Hades souls perceive by smelling.
60. Corpses are more fit to be thrown out than dung.

On the Divine

61. Human nature has no real understanding; only the divine nature has it.
62. Man is not rational; there is intelligence only in what encompasses him.
63. What is divine escapes men's notice because of their incredulity.
64. Although intimately connected with the Logos, men keep setting themselves against it.
65. As in the nighttime a man kindles for himself (*haptetai*) a light, so when a living man lies down in death with his vision extinguished he attaches himself (*haptetai*) to the state of death; even as one who has been awake lies down with his vision extinguished and attaches himself to the state of Sleep.
66. Immortals become mortals, mortals become immortals; they live in each other's death and die in each other's life.
67. There await men after death such things as they neither expect nor have any conception of.
68. They arise into wakefulness and become guardians of the living and the dead.

69. A man's character is his guardian divinity.
70. Greater dooms win greater destinies.
71. Justice will overtake fabricators of lies and false witnesses.
72. Fire in its advance will catch all things by surprise and judge them.
73. How can anyone hide from that which never sets?
74. [When visitors unexpectedly found Heraclitus warming himself by the cooking fire:] Here, too, are gods.
75. They pray to images, much as if they were to talk to houses; for they do not know what gods and heroes are.
76. Night-walkers, magicians, bacchantes, revelers, and participants in the mysteries What are regarded as mysteries among men are unholy rituals.
77. Their processions and their phallic hymns would be disgraceful exhibitions were it not that they are done in honor of Dionysos. But Dionysos in whose honor they rave and hold revels, is the same as Hades.
78. When defiled they purify themselves with blood, as though one who had stepped into filth were to wash himself with filth. If any of his fellow-men should perceive him acting in such a way, they would regard him as mad.
79. The Sibyl with raving mouth utters solemn, unadorned, unlovely words, but she reaches out over a thousand years with her voice because of the god within her.

Counsels

80. Thinking is common to all.
81. Men should speak with rational mind and thereby hold strongly to that which is shared in common—as a city holds on to its law, and even more strongly. For all human laws are nourished by the one divine law, which prevails as far as it wishes, suffices for all things, and yet is something more than they are.
82. The people should fight for their law as for their city wall.
83. Law involves obeying the counsel of one.
84. To me one man is worth ten thousand if he is first-rate.

85. The best of men choose one thing in preference to all else, immortal glory in preference to mortal good; whereas the masses simply glut themselves like cattle.
86. Gods and men honor those slain in battle.
87. Even those who are most in repute know and maintain only what is reputed.
88. To extinguish hubris is more needed than to extinguish a fire.
89. It is weariness to keep toiling at the same things so that one becomes ruled by them.
90. Dogs bark at a person whom they do not know.
91. What sort of mind or intelligence have they? They believe popular folk-tales and follow the crowd as their teachers, ignoring the adage that the many are bad, the good are few.
92. Men are deceived in their knowledge of things that are manifest, even as Homer was who was the wisest of all the Greeks. For he was even deceived by boys killing lice when they said to him: "What we have seen and grasped, these we leave behind; whereas what we have not seen and grasped, these we carry away."
93. Homer deserves to be thrown out of the contests and flogged and Archilochus too.
94. Hesiod distinguishes good days and evil days, not knowing that every day is like every other.
95. The Ephesians had better go hang themselves, every man of them, and leave their city to be governed by youngsters, for they have banished Hermadorus, the finest man among them, declaring: "Let us not have anyone among us who excels the rest; if there should be such a one, let him go and live elsewhere."
96. May you have plenty of wealth, you men of Ephesus, in order that you may be punished for your evil ways.
97. After birth men have the wish to live and to accept their dooms; then they leave behind them children to become dooms in their turn.

This Paradoxical Universe

98. Opposition brings concord. Out of discord comes the fairest harmony.

99. It is by disease that health is pleasant, by evil that good is pleasant, by hunger satiety, by weariness rest.
100. Men would not have known the name of justice if these things had not occurred.
101. Sea water is at once very pure and very foul: it is drinkable and healthful for fishes, but undrinkable and deadly for men.
102. Donkeys would prefer hay to gold.
103. Pigs wash in mud, and domestic fowls in dust or ashes.
104. The handsomest ape is ugly compared with humankind; the wisest man appears as an ape when compared with a god—in wisdom, in beauty, and in all other ways.
105. Man is regarded as childish by a spirit (*daemon*), just as a boy is by a man.
106. To God all things are beautiful, good, and right. Men, on the other hand, deem some things right and others wrong.
107. Doctors cut, burn, and torture the sick, and then demand of them an undeserved fee for such services.
108. The way up and the way down are one and the same.
109. In the circumference of the circle the beginning and the end are common.
110. Into the same rivers we step and do not step.
111. For wool-carders the straight and the winding way are one and the same.
112. The bones connected by joints are at once a unitary whole and not a unitary whole. To be in agreement is to differ; the concordant is the discordant. From out of all the many particulars comes oneness, and out of oneness comes all the many particulars.
113. It is one and the same thing to be living and dead, awake or asleep, young or old. The former aspect in each case becomes the latter, and the latter becomes the former, by sudden unexpected reversal.
114. Hesiod, whom so many accept as their wise teacher, did not even understand the nature of day and night; for they are one.
115. The name of the bow is life, but its work is death.
116. The hidden harmony is better than the obvious.

117. People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the cases of the bow and the lyre.
118. Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to acknowledge that all things are one.
119. Wisdom is one and unique; it is unwilling and yet willing to be called by the name of Zeus.
120. Wisdom is one—to know the intelligence by which all things are steered through all things.
121. God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. But he undergoes transformations, just as [fire] when mixed with spices is named according to the particular aroma which it gives off.
122. The sun will not overstep his measures; if he were to do so, the Erinyes, handmaidens of justice, would seek him out for punishment.
123. All things come in their due season.
124. Even sleepers are workers and collaborators in what goes on in the universe.

Parmenides

1. The mares which carry me as far as my spirit ever aspired
were escorting me, when they brought me and proceeded along the
renowned route
of the goddess, which brings a knowing mortal to all cities one by one.
On this route I was being brought, on it wise mares were bringing me,
straining the chariot, and maidens were guiding the way.
The axle in the center of the wheel was shrilling forth the bright sound of
a musical pipe,
ablaze, for it was being driven forward by two rounded
wheels at either end, as the daughters of the Sun
were hastening to escort [me] after leaving the house of Night
for the light, having pushed back the veils from their heads with their
hands.
There are the gates of the roads of Night and Day,
and a lintel and a stone threshold contain them.
High in the sky they are filled by huge doors
of which avenging Justice holds the keys that fit them.
The maidens beguiled her with soft words

and skillfully persuaded her to push back the bar for them quickly from the gates. They made a gaping gap of the doors when they opened them, swinging in turn in their sockets the bronze posts fastened with bolts and rivets. There, straight through them then, the maidens held the chariot and horses on the broad road. And the goddess received me kindly, took my right hand in hers, and addressed me with these words: Young man, accompanied by immortal charioteers who reach my house by the horses which bring you, welcome—since it was not an evil destiny that sent you forth to travel this route (for indeed it is far from the beaten path of humans), but Right and Justice. It is right that you learn all things—both the unshaken heart of well-persuasive Truth and the beliefs of mortals, in which there is no true trust. But nevertheless you will learn these too—how it were right that the things that seem be reliably, being indeed, the whole of things.

2. But come now, I will tell you—and you, when you have heard the story, bring it safely away— which are the only routes of inquiry that are for thinking: the one, that is and that it is not possible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth), the other, that it is not and that it is right that it not be, this indeed I declare to you to be a path entirely unable to be investigated:
For neither can you know what is not (for it is not to be accomplished) nor can you declare it.

3. . . . for the same thing is for thinking and for being.

4. But gaze upon things which although absent are securely present to the mind.
For you will not cut off what-is from clinging to what-is, neither being scattered everywhere in every way in order nor being brought together.

5. . . . For me, it is indifferent from where I am to begin: for that is where I will arrive back again.

6. It is right both to say and to think that it is what-is: for it can be, but nothing is not: these things I bid you to ponder.
For I [...] you from this first route of inquiry, and then from that, on which mortals, knowing nothing, wander, two-headed: for helplessness in their

breasts steers their wandering mind. They are borne along deaf and blind alike, dazed, hordes without judgment for whom to be and not to be are thought to be the same and not the same, and the path of all is backward-turning.

7. For in no way may this prevail, that things that are not are; but you, hold your thought back from this route of inquiry and do not let habit, rich in experience, compel you along this route to direct an aimless eye and an echoing ear and tongue, but judge by reasoning (logos) the much-contested examination spoken by me.

8. . . . Just one story of a route is still left: that it is. On this [route] there are signs very many, that what-is is ungenerated and imperishable, a whole of a single kind, unshaken, and complete. Nor was it ever, nor will it be, since it is now, all together one, holding together: For what birth will you seek out for it? How and from what did it grow? From what-is-not I will allow you neither to say nor to think: For it is not to be said or thought that it is not. What need would have roused it, later or earlier, having begun from nothing, to grow? In this way it is right either fully to be or not. Nor will the force of true conviction ever permit anything to come to be beside it from what-is-not. For this reason neither coming to be nor perishing did Justice allow, loosening her shackles, but she [Justice] holds it fast. And the decision about these things is in this: is or is not; and it has been decided, as is necessary, to leave the one [route] unthought of and unnamed (for it is not a true route), so that the other [route] is and is genuine. But how can what-is be hereafter? How can it come to be? For if it came to be, it is not, not even if it is sometime going to be. Thus coming-to-be has been extinguished and perishing cannot be investigated. Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike, and not at all more in any way, which would keep it from holding together, or at all less, but it is all full of what-is. Therefore it is all holding together; for what-is draws near to what-is. But unchanging in the limits of great bonds it is without starting or ceasing, since coming-to-be and perishing have wandered very far away; and true trust drove them away.

Remaining the same and in the same and by itself it lies
 and so remains there fixed; for mighty Necessity
 holds it in bonds of a limit which holds it in on all sides.
 For this reason it is right for what-is to be not incomplete;
 for it is not lacking; otherwise, what-is would be in want of everything.
 What is for thinking is the same as that on account of
 which there is thought.

For not without what-is, on which it depends, having been
 solemnly pronounced,
 will you find thinking; for nothing else either is or will be
 except what-is, since precisely this is what Fate shackled
 to be whole and changeless. Therefore it has been named all things
 that mortals, persuaded that they are true, have posited
 both to come to be and to perish, to be and not,
 and to change place and alter bright color.

But since the limit is ultimate, it [namely, what-is] is complete
 from all directions like the bulk of a ball well-rounded from all sides
 equally matched in every way from the middle; for it is right
 for it to be not in any way greater or lesser than in another.
 For neither is there what-is-not—which would stop it from reaching
 the same—nor is there any way in which what-is would be more than
 what-is in one way

and in another way less, since it is all inviolable;
 for equal to itself from all directions, it meets uniformly with its limits.
 At this point, I end for you my reliable account and thought
 about truth. From here on, learn mortal opinions,
 listening to the deceitful order of my words.

For they established two forms to name in their judgments,
 of which it is not right to name one—in this they have gone astray—
 and they distinguished things opposite in body, and established signs
 apart from one another—for one, the aetherial fire of flame,
 mild, very light, the same as itself in every direction,
 but not the same as the other; but that other one, in itself
 is opposite—dark night, a dense and heavy body.
 I declare to you all the ordering as it appears,
 so that no mortal judgment may ever overtake you.

9. But since all things have been named light and night
 and the things which accord with their powers have been assigned to
 these things and those,
 all is full of light and obscure night together,
 of both equally, since neither has any share of nothing.

10. You shall know the nature of the Aithēr and all the signs

in the Aithēr
and the destructive deeds of the shining sun's pure
torch and whence they came to be,
and you shall learn the wandering deeds of the round-faced moon
and its nature, and you shall know also the surrounding heaven,
from what it grew and how Necessity led and shackled it
to hold the limits of the stars.

11. . . . how earth and sun and moon
and the Aithēr that is common to all and the Milky Way and
furthest Olympus and the hot force of the stars surged forth
to come to be.

12. For the narrower [wreaths] were filled with unmixed fire,
the ones next to them with night, but a due amount of fire is
inserted among it,
and in the middle of these is the goddess who governs all things.
For she rules over hateful birth and union of all things,
sending the female to unite with male and in opposite fashion,
male to female.

13. First of all gods she contrived Love.

14. Night-shining foreign light wandering around earth.

15. Always looking toward the rays of the sun.

16. As on each occasion there is a mixture of the much-wandering
limbs,
so is mind present to humans; for the same thing
is what the nature of the limbs thinks in men,
both in all and in each; for the more is thought.

17. [That the male is conceived in the right part of the uterus has
been said by others of the ancients. For Parmenides says:]
[The goddess brought] boys [into being] on the right [side of the uterus],
girls on the left.

18. As soon as woman and man mingle the seeds of love
that come from
their veins, a formative power fashions well-constructed bodies
from their two differing bloods, if it maintains a balance.
For if when the seed is mingled the powers clash
and do not create a single [power] in the body resulting from the
mixture,
with double seed they will dreadfully disturb the nascent sex [of the
child].

19. In this way, according to opinion (*doxa*), these things have grown
and now are
and afterwards after growing up will come to an end.
And upon them humans have established a name to mark each one.
20. Such, unchanging, is that for which as a whole the name is
“to be.”

Sophocles,
Antigone

The life of Sophocles spans most of the fifth century B.C. (497/6-406/5), which sees the rise of Athenian hegemony in Greece due to its leadership in resisting the invading Persian Empire, the cultural efflorescence of democratic Athens in the age of Pericles, and the catastrophic Peloponnesian War. The poet-statesman Solon would lay the groundwork for Athenian democracy with his constitutional reforms, enacted around the time of Thales' philosophical breakthrough in the early sixth century B.C. Athens was to become the most radical of the ancient democratic republics, eventually with every freeborn native male of military age a citizen. Democracy, rule by the people (*demos*), was a natural way for the Greek *polis* to develop, each one being fairly compact and possessing an autonomous, distinctly constituted, regime or way of life: each with its own law code, political system, religious observances, socioeconomic structure. There were eventually around one thousand *poleis* across the Greek-speaking world, maybe half of which were democracies. This political way of life proved superior in war to the autocratic regimentation of the Persian Empire, a victory inaugurating the Classical period. Athens assumed leadership of the Delian League, a confederation of city-states formed to counteract future Persian attempts on Greek liberty and to free Greek cities still under the Persian yoke. Unfortunately, Athens eventually transformed the League into its own empire, robbing its confederates of their liberty. Exacted tribute funded Athenian democracy (making possible payment for jury and other civic service), as well as Pericles' great building projects, including the Parthenon.

Sophocles was the preeminent playwright of the century. He was also a leading citizen, serving a term as one of the ten treasurers of the Delian League and elected a *stratēgos* (general) along with Pericles during the Samian War (440-39) and again at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. He was chosen as one of the ten commissioners responding to the disastrous Sicilian expedition. Sophocles seems to have helped introduce to Athens the cult (or practice of ritualized devotion) in honor of Asclepius, housing his image until a proper place could be prepared—for which role he was posthumously honored as a hero under the title of *Dexion* ("receiver"). His *Antigone* grapples with what the higher law (and that of the household or *oikos*) might require of us in contradiction to the apparent demands of the *polis*.

In ancient societies, the political and the religious were coextensive. The body politic was at the same time the religious congregation; indeed, the word for the citizen-assembly, *ekklēsia*, gives us the word ecclesial. Theater was essential to the religio-political life of Athenian democracy. Greek tragedy is one of the greatest achievements of the human spirit. The tragedians demythologize only to remythologize on a more critical basis, as part of a civic education—though civic relevance always risks a return to political mythology. Poetic drama was central to the great Athenian festival, the City Dionysia, open to all Greeks, held in March and April in honor of Dionysus—god of wine, ecstasy, fertility. He was especially honored in Athens as *Eleutherios* (“the liberator”). During this festival, three playwrights presented a tetralogy (three tragedies plus a satyr play, a kind of farce) in competition (*agōn*). The poets were selected by the eponymous archon (the chief magistrate of the *polis*, for whom the year was named), who also selected the producers. These productions were one of the “liturgies,” or public works, for which the wealthiest were responsible. Sophocles had perhaps fifteen citizens in his choruses, which sang and danced during the plays, and it seems that Sophocles was responsible for the innovation of adding a third actor. Experiencing and pondering the often-unbearable dramatic tensions on display in the great tragedies make possible a more inward and examined life—and might, just perhaps, increase our prudence as we negotiate the unfathomable complexities, obscurities, and losses of existence and of coexistence.

Persons Represented:

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

EURYDICE

CREON

HAIMON

TEIRESIAS

A SENTRY

A MESSENGER

CHORUS

SCENE: Before the Palace of Creon, King of Thebes. A central double door, and two lateral doors. A platform extends the length of the façade, and from this platform three steps lead down into the “orchestra,” or chorus-ground. TIME: Dawn of the day after the repulse of the Argive army from the assault on Thebes.

Prologue

[ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter from the central door of the Palace.]

ANTIGONE:

Ismene, dear sister,

You would think that we had already suffered enough

For the curse on Oedipus:

I cannot imagine any grief

That you and I have not gone through. And now —

Have they told you of the new decree of our King Creon?

ISMENE:

I have heard nothing: I know

That two sisters lost two brothers, a double death

In a single hour; and I know that the Argive army

Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.

ANTIGONE:

I thought so. And that is why I wanted you

To come out here with me. There is something we must do.

ISMENE:

Why do you speak so strangely?

ANTIGONE:

Listen, Ismene:

Creon buried our brother Eteocles

With military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral,
And it was right that he should; but Polyneices,
They fought as bravely and died as miserably, —
They say that Creon has sworn
No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him,
But this body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure
For carrion birds to find as they search for food.
That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here
To announce it publicly; and the penalty—
Stoning to death in the public square
There it is,
And now you can prove what you are:
A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

ISMENE:

Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

ANTIGONE:

You must decide whether you will help me or not.

ISMENE:

I do not understand you. Help you in what?

ANTIGONE:

Ismene, I am going to bury him. Will you come?

ISMENE:

Bury him! You have just said the new law forbids it.

ANTIGONE:

He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

ISMENE:

But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do!

ANTIGONE:

Creon is not enough to stand in my way.

ISMENE:

Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him
For what his own search brought to light, his eyes
Ripped out by his own hand; and Iocaste died,
His mother and wife at once: she twisted the cords
That strangled her life; and our two brothers died,
Each killed by the other's sword. And we are left:
But oh, Antigone,
Think how much more terrible than these

Our own death would be if we should go against Creon
And do what he has forbidden! We are only women,
We cannot fight with men, Antigone!
The law is strong, we must give in to the law
In this thing, and in worse. I beg the Dead
To forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield
To those in authority. And I think it is dangerous business
To be always meddling.

ANTIGONE:

If that is what you think,
I should not want you, even if you asked to come.
You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be.
But I will bury him; and if I must die,
I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down
With him in death, and I shall be as dear
To him as he to me.
It is the dead
Not the living, who make the longest demands:
We die for ever. . .
You may do as you like
Since apparently the laws of the god mean nothing to you.

ISMENE:

They mean a great deal to me, but I have no strength
To break laws that were made for the public good.

ANTIGONE:

That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me,
I will bury the brother I love.

ISMENE:

Antigone,
I am so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE:

You need not be:
You have yourself to consider, after all.

ISMENE:

But no one must hear of this, you must tell no one!
I will keep it a secret, I promise!

ANTIGONE:

Oh tell it! Tell everyone.
Think how they'll hate you when it all comes out
If they learn that you knew about it all the time!

ISMENE:

So fiery! You should be cold with fear.

ANTIGONE:

Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must.

ISMENE:

But can you do it? I say that you cannot.

ANTIGONE

Very well: when my strength gives out, I shall do no more.

ISMENE:

Impossible things should not be tried at all.

ANTIGONE:

Go away, Ismene:

I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will too,

For your words are hateful. Leave me my foolish plan:

I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death,

It will not be the worst of deaths —death without honor.

ISMENE:

Go then, if you feel that you must.

You are unwise,

But a loyal friend indeed to those who love you.

[*Exit into the Palace. ANTIGONE goes off, left. Enter the CHORUS.*]

PARODOS

CHORUS:

Now the long blade of the sun, lying

[*Strophe 1*]

Level east to west, touches with glory

Thebes of the Seven Gates. Open, unlidded

Eye of golden day! O marching light

Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream,

Striking the white shields of the enemy

Thrown headlong backward from the blaze of morning!

CHORAGOS:

Polyneices their commander

Roused them with windy phrases,

He the wild eagle screaming

Insults above our land,

His wings their shields of snow,

His crest their marshaled helms.

CHORUS: [*Antistrophe 1*]
Against our seven gates in a yawning ring
The famished spears came onward in the night;
But before his jaws were sated with our blood,
Or pine fire took the garland of our towers,
He was thrown back; and as he turned, great Thebes—
No tender victim for his noisy power—
Rose like a dragon behind him, shouting war.

CHORAGOS:
For God hates utterly
The bray of bragging tongues;
And when he beheld their smiling,
Their swagger of golden helmets,
The frown of his thunder blasted
Their first man from our walls

CHORUS: [*Strophe 2*]
We heard his shout of triumph high in the air
Turn to a scream; far out in a flaming arc
He fell with his windy torch, and the earth struck him.
And others storming in fury no less than his
Found shock of death in the dusty joy of battle.

CHORAGOS:
Seven captains at seven gates
Yielded their clanging arms to the god
That bends the battle-line and breaks it.
These two only, brothers in blood,
Face to face in matchless rage,
Mirroring each the other's death,
Clashed in long combat.

CHORUS: [*Antistrophe 2*]
But now in the beautiful morning of victory
Let Thebes of the many chariots sing for joy!
With hearts for dancing we'll take leave of war:
Our temples shall be sweet with hymns of praise,
And the long night shall echo with our chorus.

Scene 1

CHORAGOS:
But now at last our new King is coming:
Creon of Thebes, Menoikeus' son.

In this auspicious dawn of his reign
What are the new complexities
That shifting Fate has woven for him?
What is his counsel? Why has he summoned
The old men to hear him?

[*Enter CREON from the Palace, center. He addresses the CHORUS from the top step.*]

CREON:

Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you that our Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful wisdom of Heaven. I have summoned you here this morning because I know that I can depend upon you: your devotion to King Laios was absolute; you never hesitated in your duty to our late ruler Oedipus; and when Oedipus died, your loyalty was transferred to his children. Unfortunately, as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and Polyneices, have killed each other in battle, and I, as the next in blood, have succeeded to the full power of the throne.

I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office. Nevertheless, I say to you at the very outset that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of Governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the State; and as for the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare, —I have no use for him, either. I call God to witness that if I saw my country headed for ruin, I should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and I need hardly remind you that I would never have any dealings with an enemy of the people. No one values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember that friends made at the risk of wrecking our Ship are not real friends at all.

These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I have made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who died as a man should die, fighting for his country, is to be buried with full military honors, with all the ceremony that is usual when the greatest heroes die; but his brother Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods, whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery— Polyneices, I say, is to have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied; and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.

This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it.

As long as I am King, no traitor is going to be honored with the loyal man. But whoever shows by word and deed that he is on the side of the State, —he shall have my respect while he is living and my reverence when he is dead.

CHORAGOS:

If that is your will, Creon son of Menoikeus,
You have the right to enforce it: we are yours.

CREON:

That is my will. Take care that you do your part.

CHORAGOS:

We are old men: let the younger ones carry it out.

CREON:

I do not mean that: the sentries have been appointed.

CHORAGOS:

Then what is it that you would have us do?

CREON:

You will give no support to whoever breaks this law.

CHORAGOS:

Only a crazy man is in love with death!

CREON:

And death it is; yet money talks, and the wisest
Have sometimes been known to count a few coins too many.

[*Enter SENTRY from left.*]

SENTRY:

I'll not say that I'm out of breath from running, King, because every time I stopped to think about what I have to tell you, I felt like going back. And all the time a voice kept saying, "You fool, don't you know you're walking straight into trouble?"; and then another voice: "Yes, but if you let somebody else get the news to Creon first, it will be even worse than that for you!" But good sense won out, at least I hope it was good sense, and here I am with a story that makes no sense at all; but I'll tell it anyhow, because, as they say, what's going to happen's going to happen, and—

CREON:

Come to the point. What have you to say?

SENTRY:

I did not do it. I did not see who did it. You must not punish me for what someone else has done.

CREON:

A comprehensive defense! More effective, perhaps,
If I knew its purpose. Come: what is it?

SENTRY:

A dreadful thing. . . I don't know how to put it—

CREON:

Out with it!

SENTRY:

Well, then;

The dead man—

Polyneices—

[*Pause. The SENTRY is overcome, fumbles for words. CREON waits impassively.*]

out there—

someone, —

new dust on the slimy flesh!

[*Pause. No sign from CREON.*]

Someone has given it burial that way, and

Gone . . .

[*Long pause. CREON finally speaks with deadly control.*]

CREON:

And the man who dared do this?

SENTRY:

I swear I do not know! You must believe me!

Listen: the ground was dry, not a sign of digging, no,

Not a wheel track in the dust, no trace of anyone.

It was when they relieved us this morning: and one of them,

The corporal, pointed to it.

There it was, the strangest—

Look: the body, just mounded over with light dust: you see?

Not buried really, but as if they'd covered it

Just enough for the ghost's peace. And no sign

Of dogs or any wild animal that had been there.

And then what a scene there was! Every man of us

Accusing the other: we all proved the other man did it,

We all had proof that we could not have done it.

We were ready to take hot iron in our hands,

Walk through fire, swear by all the gods,

It was not I!

I do not know who it was, but it was not I!

[CREON's rage has been mounting steadily, but the SENTRY is too intent upon his story to notice it.]

And then, when this came to nothing, someone said
A thing that silenced us and made us stare
Down at the ground: you had to be told the news,
And one of us had to do it! We threw the dice,
And the bad luck fell to me. So here I am,
No happier to be here than you are to have me:
Nobody likes the man who brings bad news.

CHORAGOS:

I have been wondering, King: can it be that the gods have done this?

CREON: [Furiously.]

Stop!

Must you doddering wrecks

Go out of your heads entirely? "The gods!"

Intolerable!

The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he served them?

Tried to loot their temples, burn their images,

Yes, and the whole State, and its laws with it!

Is it your senile opinion that the gods love to honor bad men?

A pious thought! —

No, from the very beginning

There have been those who have whispered together,

Stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads together,

Scheming against me in alleys. These are the men,

And they have bribed my own guard to do this thing.

Money! [Sententiously.]

There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money.

Find that man, bring him here to me, or your death

Will be the least of your problems: I'll string you up

Alive, and there will be certain ways to make you

Discover your employer before you die;

And the process may teach you a lesson you seem to have missed.

The dearest profit is sometimes all too dear:

That depends on the source. Do you understand me?

A fortune won is often misfortune.

SENTRY:

King, may I speak?

CREON:

Your very voice distresses me.

SENTRY:

Are you sure that it is my voice, and not your conscience?

CREON:

By God, he wants to analyze me now!

SENTRY:

It is not what I say, but what has been done, that hurts you.

CREON:

You talk too much.

SENTRY:

Maybe; but I've done nothing.

CREON:

Sold your soul for some silver: that's all you've done.

SENTRY:

How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!

CREON:

Your figures of speech

May entertain you now; but unless you bring me the man,

You will get little profit from them in the end.

[*Exit CREON into the Palace.*]

SENTRY:

"Bring me the man" —!

I'd like nothing better than bringing him the man!

But bring him or not, you have seen the last of me here.

At any rate, I am safe!

[*Exit SENTRY.*]

ODE I

CHORUS:

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none [*Strophe 1*]

More wonderful than man; the stormgray sea

Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high;

Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven

With shining furrows where his plows have gone

Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

The lightboned birds and beasts that cling to cover, [*Antistrophe 1*]

The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,

All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;

The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,

Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

Words also, and thought as rapid as air, [Strophe 2]
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,
And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure—from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure! [Antistrophe 2]
O fate of man, working both good and evil!
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,
Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts.

Scene 2

[*Re-enter SENTRY leading ANTIGONE.*]

CHORAGOS:
What does this mean? Surely this captive woman
Is the Princess, Antigone. Why should she be taken?

SENTRY:
Here is the one who did it! We caught her
In the very act of burying him. —Where is Creon?

CHORAGOS:
Just coming from the house.
[*Enter Creon, center.*]

CREON:
What has happened?
Why have you come back so soon?

SENTRY:
O King, a man should never be too sure of anything:
I would have sworn

That you'd not see me here again: your anger
Frightened me so, and the things you threatened me with;
But how could I tell then
That I'd be able to solve the case so soon?

No dice-throwing this time: I was only too glad to come!

Here is this woman. She is the guilty one:
We found her trying to bury him.
Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will.
I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

CREON:
But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

SENTRY:
She was burying him, I tell you!

CREON: [*Severely.*]
Is this the truth?

SENTRY:
I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

CREON:
The details: come, tell me quickly!

SENTRY:
It was like this:
After those terrible threats of yours, King.
We went back and brushed the dust away from the body.
The flesh was soft by now, and stinking,
So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard.
No napping happened until the white round sun
Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:
Then, suddenly,
A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky
Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees
In the stinging dark. We closed our eyes and endured it.
The whirlwind lasted a long time, but it passed;
And then we looked, and there was Antigone!
I have seen
A mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard
Her crying bitterly a broken note or two
For the young ones stolen. Just so, when this girl
Found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted,
She wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands

That had done this thing
And then she brought more dust
And sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost.
We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid,
Not even when we charged her with what she had done.
She denied nothing.
And this was a comfort to me,
And some uneasiness: for it is a good thing
To escape from death, but it is no great pleasure
To bring death to a friend.
Yet I always say
There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!

CREON: [*Slowly, dangerously.*]
And you, Antigone,
You with your head hanging—do you confess this thing?

ANTIGONE:
I do. I deny nothing.

CREON: [*To SENTRY.*]
You may go.
[*Exit SENTRY. To ANTIGONE.*]
Tell me, tell me briefly:
Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

ANTIGONE:
It was public. Could I help hearing it?

CREON:
And yet you dared defy the law.

ANTIGONE:
I dared.
It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice
That rules the world below makes no such laws.

Your edict, King, was strong,
But all your strength is weakness itself against
The immortal unrecorded laws of God.
They are not merely now: they were, and shall be,
Operative forever, beyond man utterly.
I knew I must die, even without your decree:
I am only mortal. And if I must die
Now, before it is my time to die,
Surely this is no hardship: can anyone
Living, as I live, with evil all about me,

Think Death less than a friend? This death of mine
Is of no importance; but if I had left my brother
Lying in death unburied, I should have suffered.
Now I do not.

You smile at me. Ah Creon,
Think me a fool, if you like; but it may well be
That a fool convicts me of folly.

CHORAGOS:

Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to reason!
She has never learned to yield.

She has much to learn.

The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron
Cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their necks
At the pull of the smallest curb.

Pride? In a slave?

This girl is guilty of a double insolence,
Breaking the given laws and boasting of it.

Who is the man here,

She or I, if this crime goes unpunished?

Sister's child, or more than sister's child,

Or closer yet in blood—she and her sister

Win bitter death for this!

[*To servants:*]

Go, some of you,

Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.

Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the house there.

Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark

Cry for light, and the guardian brain shudders:

But now much worse than this

Is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

ANTIGONE:

Creon, what more do you want than my death?

CREON:

Nothing.

That gives me everything.

ANTIGONE:

Then I beg you: kill me.

This talking is a great weariness: your words

Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine

Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so:

I should have praise and honor for what I have done.

All these men here would praise me
Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you.
Ah the good fortune of kings, [Bitterly.]
Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

CREON:
You are alone here in that opinion.

ANTIGONE:
No, they are with me. But they keep their tongues in leash.

CREON:
Maybe. But you are guilty, and they are not.

ANTIGONE:
There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

CREON:
But Eteocles—was he not your brother too?

ANTIGONE:
My brother too.

CREON:
And you insult his memory?

ANTIGONE: [Softly.]
The dead man would not say that I insult it.

CREON:
He would: for you honor a traitor as much as him.

ANTIGONE:
His own brother, traitor or not, and equal in blood.

CREON:
He made war on his country. Eteocles defended it.

ANTIGONE:
Nevertheless, there are honors due all the dead.

CREON:
But not the same for the wicked as for the just.

ANTIGONE:
Ah Creon, Creon,
Which of us can say what the gods hold wicked?

CREON:
An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

ANTIGONE:

It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

CREON:

[*Finally losing patience.*]

Go join them, then; if you must have your love,
Find it in hell!

CHORAGOS:

But see, Ismene comes:

[*Enter ISMENE, guarded.*]

Those tears are sisterly, the cloud
That shadows her eyes rains down gentle sorrow.

CREON:

You too, Ismene,

Snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood
Stealthily—and all the time I never knew
That these two sisters were aiming at my throne!
Ismene, do you confess your share in this crime, or deny it?
Answer me.

ISMENE:

Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty.

ANTIGONE:

[*Coldly.*]

No, Ismene. You have no right to say so.
You would not help me, and I will not have you help me.

ISMENE:

But now I know what you meant; and I am here
To join you, to take my share of punishment.

ANTIGONE:

The dead man and the gods who rule the dead
Know whose act this was. Words are not friends.

ISMENE:

Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die with you:
I too have a duty that I must discharge to the dead.

ANTIGONE:

You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

ISMENE:

What do I care for life when you are dead?

ANTIGONE:

Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his opinions.

ISMENE:

You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

ANTIGONE:

It's a joyless laughter, Ismene.

ISMENE:

But can I do nothing?

ANTIGONE:

Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you.

There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too.

ISMENE:

But we are equally guilty!

ANTIGONE:

No more, Ismene.

You are alive, but I belong to Death.

CREON:

[*To the CHORUS:*]

Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls:

One has just now lost her mind; the other,

It seems, has never had a mind at all.

ISMENE:

Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, King.

CREON:

Yours certainly did, when you assumed guilt with the guilty!

ISMENE:

But how could I go on living without her?

CREON:

You are.

She is already dead.

ISMENE:

But your own son's bride!

CREON:

There are places enough for him to push his plow.

I want no wicked women for my sons!

ISMENE:

O dearest Haimon, how your father wrongs you!

CREON:

I've had enough of your childish talk of marriage!

CHORAGOS:

Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son?

CREON:

No; Death will do that for me.

CHORAGOS:

Then she must die?

CREON:

You dazzle me.

—But enough of this talk!

[*Ironically.*]

[*To GUARDS:*]

You, there, take them away and guard them well:

For they are but women, and even brave men run

When they see Death coming.

[*Exeunt ISMENE, ANTIGONE, and GUARDS.*]

ODE II

CHORUS:

[*Strophe 1*]

Fortunate is the man who has never tasted God's vengeance!

Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is shaken

For ever: damnation rises behind each child

Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,

When the long darkness under sea roars up

And bursts drumming death upon the windwhipped sand.

[*Antistrophe 1*]

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past

Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation from generation

Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.

So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line

Drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word

And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty.

What mortal arrogance

Transcends the wrath of Zeus?

[*Strophe 2*]

Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long months

Of the timeless gods: but he is young for ever,

And his house is the shining day of high Olympos.

All that is and shall be,

And all the past, is his.

No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

The straying dreams of men

[*Antistrophe 2*]

May bring them ghosts of joy:
But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;
Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.
But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:

Fate works most for woe

With Folly's fairest show.

Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.

Scene III

CHORAGOS:

But here is Haimon, King, the last of all your sons.
Is it grief for Antigone, that brings him here,
And bitterness at being robbed of his bride?

[Enter HAIMON.]

CREON:

We shall soon see, and no need of diviners.
—Son, you have heard my final judgment on that girl:
Have you come here hating me, or have you come
With deference and with love, whatever I do?

HAIMON:

I am your son, father. You are my guide.
You make things clear for me, and I obey you.
No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom.

CREON:

Good. That is the way to behave: subordinate
Everything else, my son, to your father's will
This is what a man prays for, that he may get
Sons attentive and dutiful in his house,
Each one hating his father's enemies,
Honoring his father's friends. But if his sons
Fail him, if they turn out unprofitably,
What has he fathered but trouble for himself
And amusement for the malicious?
So you are right not to lose your head over this woman.
Your pleasure with her would soon, grow cold, Haimon,
And then you'd have a hellcat in bed and elsewhere.
Let her find her husband in Hell!
Of all the people in this city, only she
Has had contempt for my law and broken it.

Do you want me to show myself weak before the people?
Or to break my sworn word? No, and I will not.
The woman dies.

I suppose she'll plead "family ties." Well, let her.

If I permit my own family to rebel,
How shall I earn the world's obedience?

Show me the man who keeps his house in hand,
He's fit for public authority.

I'll have no dealings

With law-breakers, critics of the government:

Whoever is chosen to govern should be obeyed—

Must be obeyed, in all things, great and small,

Just and unjust! O Haimon,

The man who knows how to obey, and that man only,

Knows how to give commands when the time comes.

You can depend on him, no matter how fast

The spears come: he's a good soldier, he'll stick it out.

Anarchy, anarchy! Show me a greater evil!

This is why cities tumble and the great houses rain down,

This is what scatters armies!

No, no: good lives are made so by discipline.

We keep the laws then, and the lawmakers,

And no woman shall seduce us. If we must lose,

Let's lose to a man, at least! Is a woman stronger than we?

CHORAGOS:

Unless time has rusted my wits,

What you say, King, is said with point and dignity.

HAIMON:

[*Boyishly earnest.*]

Father:

Reason is God's crowning gift to man, and you are right

To warn me against losing mine. I cannot say—

I hope that I shall never want to say! —that you

Have reasoned badly. Yet there are other men

Who can reason, too; and their opinions might be helpful.

You are not in a position to know everything

That people say or do, or what they feel:

Your temper terrifies them—everyone

Will tell you only what you like to hear.

But I, at any rate, can listen; and I have heard them

Muttering and whispering in the dark about this girl.

They say no woman has ever, so unreasonably,

Died so shameful a death for a generous act:
“She covered her brother’s body. Is this indecent?
She kept him from dogs and vultures. Is this a crime?
Death? —She should have all the honor that we can give her!”

This is the way they talk out there in the city.

You must believe me:

Nothing is closer to me than your happiness.
What could be closer? Must not any son
Value his father’s fortune as his father does his?
I beg you, do not be unchangeable:
Do not believe that you alone can be right.
The man who thinks that,
The man who maintains that only he has the power
To reason correctly, the gift to speak, to soul—
A man like that, when you know him, turns out empty.

It is not reason never to yield to reason!

In flood time you can see how some trees bend,
And because they bend, even their twigs are safe,
While stubborn trees are torn up, roots and all.
And the same thing happens in sailing:
Make your sheet fast, never slacken,—and over you go,
Head over heels and under: and there’s your voyage.
Forget you are angry! Let yourself be moved!
I know I am young; but please let me say this:
The ideal condition
Would be, I admit, that men should be right by instinct;
But since we are all too likely to go astray,
The reasonable thing is to learn from those who can teach.

CHORAGOS:

You will do well to listen to him, King,
If what he says is sensible. And you, Haimon,
Must listen to your father. —Both speak well.

CREON:

You consider it right for a man of my years and experience
To go to school to a boy?

HAIMON:

It is not right
If I am wrong. But if I am young, and right,
What does my age matter?

CREON:

You think it right to stand up for an anarchist?

HAIMON:

Not at all. I pay no respect to criminals.

CREON:

Then she is not a criminal?

HAIMON:

The City says she is not.

CREON:

And the City proposes to teach me how to rule?

HAIMON:

Ah. Who is it that's talking like a boy now?

CREON:

My voice is the one voice giving orders in this City!

HAIMON:

It is no City if it takes orders from one voice.

CREON:

The State is the King!

HAIMON:

Yes, if the State is a desert.

[Pause.]

CREON:

This boy, it seems, has sold out to a woman.

HAIMON:

If you are a woman: my concern is only for you.

CREON:

So? Your "concern"! In a public brawl with your father!

HAIMON:

How about you, in a public brawl with justice?

CREON:

With justice, when all that I do is within my rights?

HAIMON:

You have no right to trample on God's right.

CREON:

[Completely out of control.]

Fool, adolescent fool! Taken in by a woman!

HAIMON:

You'll never see me taken in by anything vile.

CREON:

Every word you say is for her!

HAIMON:

[*Quietly, darkly.*]

And for you.

And for me. And for the gods under the earth.

CREON:

You'll never marry her while she lives.

HAIMON:

Then she must die. —But her death will cause another.

CREON:

Another?

Have you lost your senses? Is this an open threat?

HAIMON:

There is no threat in speaking to emptiness.

CREON:

I swear you'll regret this superior tone of yours!

You are the empty one!

HAIMON:

If you were not my father,

I'd say you were perverse.

CREON:

You girlstruck fool, don't play at words with me!

HAIMON:

I am sorry. You prefer silence.

CREON:

Now, by God—!

I swear, by all the gods in heaven above us,

You'll watch it, I swear you shall

[*To the SERVANTS.*]

Bring her out!

Bring the woman out! Let her die before his eyes!

Here, this instant, with her bridegroom beside her!

HAIMON:

Not here, no; she will not die here, King.

And you will never see my face again.

Go on raving as long as you've a friend to endure you.
[Exit HAIMON.]

CHORAGOS:
Gone, gone.
Creon, a young man in a rage is dangerous!

CREON:
Let him do, or dream to do, more than a man can.
He shall not save these girls from death.

CHORAGOS:
These girls?
You have sentenced them both?

CREON:
No, you are right
I will not kill the one whose hands are clean.

CHORAGOS:
But Antigone?

CREON: [Somberly.]
I will carry her far away
Out there in the wilderness, and lock her
Living in a vault of stone. She shall have food,
As the custom is, to absolve the State of her death.
And there let her pray to the gods of hell:
They are her only gods:
Perhaps they will show her an escape from death,
Or she may learn, though late,
That piety shown the dead is pity in vain.
[Exit CREON.]

ODE III

CHORUS: [Strophe]
Love, unconquerable
Waster of rich men, keeper
Of warm lights and all-night vigil
In the soft face of a girl:
Sea-wanderer, forest-visitor!
Even the pure Immortals cannot escape you,
And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,
Trembles before your glory.

Surely you swerve upon ruin
The just man's consenting heart,
As here you have made bright anger
Strike between father and son—
And none has conquered but Love!
A girl's glance working the will of heaven:
Pleasure to her alone who mock us,
Merciless Aphrodite.

[*Antistrophe*]

Scene IV

CHORAGOS: [As ANTIGONE enters guarded.]
But I can no longer stand in awe of this,
Nor, seeing what I see, keep back my tears.
Here is Antigone, passing to that chamber
Where all find sleep at last.

ANTIGONE: [*Strophe 1*]
Look upon me, friends, and pity me
Turning back at the night's edge to say
Good-bye to the sun that shines for me no longer;
Now sleepy Death
Summons me down to Acheron, that cold shore:
There is no bridesong there, nor any music.

CHORUS:
Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of honor,
You walk at last into the underworld;
Untouched by sickness, broken by no sword.
What woman has ever found your way to death?

ANTIGONE: [*Antistrophe 1*]
How often I have heard the story of Niobe,
Tantalos' wretched daughter, how the stone
Clung fast about her, ivy-close: and they say
The rain falls endlessly
And rifting soft snow; her tears are never done.
I feel the loneliness of her death in mine.

CHORUS:
But she was born of heaven, and you
Are woman, woman-born. If her death is yours,
A mortal woman's, is this not for you
Glory in our world and in the world beyond?

ANTIGONE:

You laugh at me. Ah, friends, friends, [Strophe 2]
Can you not wait until I am dead? O Thebes,
O men many-charioted, in love with Fortune,
Dear spring of Dirce, sacred Theban grove,
Be witnesses for me, denied all pity,
Unjustly judged! and think a word of love
For her whose path turns
Under dark earth, where there are no more tears.

CHORUS:

You have passed beyond human daring and come at last
Into a place of stone where Justice sits.
I cannot tell what shape of your father's guilt appears in this.

ANTIGONE:

You have touched it at last: that bridal bed [Antistrophe 2]
Unspeakable, horror of son and mother mingling:
Their crime, infection of all our family!
O Oedipus, father and brother!
Your marriage strikes from the grave to murder mine.
I have been a stranger here in my own land:
All my life
The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

CHORUS:

Reverence is a virtue, but strength
Lives in established law: that must prevail.
You have made your choice,
Your death is the doing of your conscious hand.

ANTIGONE:

[Epode]
Then let me go, since all your words are bitter,
And the very light of the sun is cold to me.
Lead me to my vigil, where I must have
Neither love nor lamentation; no song, but silence.

[CREON *interrupts impatiently.*]

CREON:

If dirges and planned lamentations could put off death,
Men would be singing for ever.

[To the SERVANTS:]

Take her, go!

You know your orders: take her to the vault
And leave her alone there. And if she lives or dies,
That's her affair, not ours: our hands are clean.

ANTIGONE:

O tomb, vaulted bride-bed in eternal rock,
Soon I shall be with my own again
Where Persephone welcomes the thin ghost underground:
And I shall see my father again, and you, mother,
And dearest Polyneices—
dearest indeed
To me, since it was my hand
That washed him clean and poured the ritual wine:
And my reward is death before my time!
And yet, as men's hearts know, I have done no wrong,
I have not sinned before God. Or if I have,
I shall know the truth in death. But if the guilt
Lies upon Creon who judged me, then, I pray,
May his punishment equal my own.

CHORAGOS:

O passionate heart,
Unyielding, tormented still by the same winds!

CREON:

Her guards shall have good cause to regret their delaying.

ANTIGONE:

Ah! That voice you no reason to think voice of death!

CREON:

I can give you no reason to think you are mistaken.

ANTIGONE:

Thebes, and you my fathers' gods,
And rulers of Thebes, you see me now, the last
Unhappy daughter of a line of kings,
Your kings, led away to death. You will remember
What things I suffer, and at what men's hands,
Because I would not transgress the laws of heaven.

[*To the GUARDS, simply.*]

Come: let us wait no longer.

[*Exit ANTIGONE, left, guarded.*]

ODE IV

CHORUS:

All Danaë's beauty was locked away [Strophe 1]
In a brazen cell where the sunlight could not come:
A small room, still as any grave, enclosed her.
Yet she was a princess too,
And Zeus in a rain of gold poured love upon her.
O child, child,
No power in wealth or war
Or tough sea-blackened ships
Can prevail against untiring Destiny!

And Dryas' son also, that furious king, [Antistrophe 1]
Bore the god's prisoning anger for his pride:
Sealed up by Dionysos in deaf stone,
His madness died among echoes.
So at the last he learned what dreadful power
His tongue had mocked:
For he had profaned the revels,
And fired the wrath of the nine
Implacable Sisters that love the sound of the flute.

And old men tell a half-remembered tale [Strophe 2]
Of horror done where a dark ledge splits the sea
And a double surf beats on the gray shores:
How a king's new woman, sick
With hatred for the queen he had imprisoned,
Ripped out his two sons' eyes with her bloody hands
While grinning Ares watched the shuttle plunge
Four times: four blind wounds crying for revenge,

Crying, tears and blood mingled, —Piteously born, [Antistrophe 2]
Those sons whose mother was of heavenly birth!
Her father was the god of the North Wind
And she was cradled by gales,
She raced with young colts on the glittering hills
And walked untrammelled in the open light:
But in her marriage, deathless Fate found means
To build a tomb like yours for all her joy.

Scene V

[Enter blind TEIRESIAS, led by a boy. The opening speeches of TEIRESIAS should be in singsong contrast to the realistic lines of CREON.]

TEIRESIAS:

This is the way the blind man comes, Princes, Princes,
Lock-step, two heads lit by the eyes of one.

CREON:

What new thing have you to tell us, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS:

I have much to tell you: listen to the prophet, Creon.

CREON:

I admit my debt to you. But what have you to say?

TEIRESIAS:

Listen, Creon:

I was sitting in my chair of augury, at the place
Where the birds gather about me. They were all a-chatter,
As is their habit, when suddenly I heard
A strange note in their jangling, a scream, a
Whirring fury; I knew that they were fighting,
Tearing each other, dying
In a whirlwind of wings clashing. And I was afraid.
I began the rites of burnt-offering at the altar,
But Hephaistos failed me: instead of bright flame,
There was only the sputtering slime of the fat thigh-flesh
Melting: the entrails dissolved in gray smoke,
The bare bone burst from the welter. And no blaze!

This was a sign from heaven. My boy described it,
Seeing for me as I see for others.

I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought
This new calamity upon us. Our hearths and altars
Are stained with the corruption of dogs and carrion birds
That glut themselves on the corpse of Oedipus' son.
The gods are deaf when we pray to them, their fire
Recoils from our offering, their birds of omen
Have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged
With the thick blood of the dead.

O my son,

These are no trifles! Think: all men make mistakes,

But a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong,
And repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man, then: do not fight with a corpse—
What glory is it to kill a man who is dead?
Think, I beg you:
It is for your own good that I speak as I do.
You should be able to yield for your own good.

CREON:

It seems that prophets have made me their especial province.
All my life long
I have been a kind of butt for dull arrows
Of doddering fortune-tellers!

No, Teiresias:

If your birds—if the great eagles of God himself
Should carry him stinking bit by bit to heaven,
I would not yield. I am not afraid of pollution:
No man can defile the gods.

Do what you will,

Go into business, make money, speculate
In India gold or that synthetic gold from Sardis,
Get rich otherwise than by my consent to bury him.
Teiresias, it is a sorry thing when a wise man
Sells his wisdom, lets out his words for hire!

TEIRESIAS:

Ah Creon! Is there no man left in the world—

CREON:

To do what? —Come, let's have the aphorism!

TEIRESIAS:

No man who knows that wisdom outweighs any wealth?

CREON:

As surely as bribes are baser than any baseness.

TEIRESIAS:

You are sick, Creon! You are deathly sick!

CREON:

As you say: it is not my place to challenge a prophet.

TEIRESIAS:

Yet you have said my prophecy is for sale.

CREON:

The generation of prophets has always loved gold.

TEIRESIAS:

The generation of kings has always loved brass.

CREON:

You forget yourself! You are speaking to your King.

TEIRESIAS:

I know it. You are a king because of me.

CREON:

You have a certain skill; but you have sold out.

TEIRESIAS:

King, you will drive me to words that—

CREON:

Say them, say them!

Only remember: I will not pay you for them.

TEIRESIAS:

No, you will find them too costly.

CREON:

No doubt. Speak:

Whatever you say, you will not change my will.

TEIRESIAS:

Then take this, and take it to heart!

The time is not far off when you shall pay back

Corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh.

You have thrust the child of this world into living night,

You have kept from the gods below the child that is theirs:

The one in a grave before her death, the other,

Dead, denied the grave. This is your crime:

And the Furies and the dark gods of Hell

Are swift with terrible punishment for you.

Do you want to buy me now, Creon?

Not many days,

And your house will be full of men and women weeping,

And curses will be hurled at you from far

Cities grieving for sons unburied, left to rot

Before the walls of Thebes.

These are my arrows, Creon: they are all for you.

[To BOY:]

But come, child: lead me home.

Let him waste his fine anger upon younger men.

Maybe he will learn at last

To control a wiser tongue in a better head.

[Exit TEIRESIAS.]

CHORAGOS:

The old man has gone, King, but his words

Remain to plague us. I am old, too,

But I cannot remember that he was ever false.

CREON:

That is true.It troubles me.

Oh it is hard to give in! but it is worse

To risk everything for stubborn pride.

CHORAGOS:

Creon: take my advice.

CREON:

What shall I do?

CHORAGOS:

Go quickly: free Antigone from her vault

And build a tomb for the body of Polyneices.

CREON:

You would have me do this?

CHORAGOS:

Creon, yes!

And it must be done at once: God moves

Swiftly to cancel the folly of stubborn men.

CREON:

It is hard to deny the heart! But I

Will do it: I will not fight with destiny.

CHORAGOS:

You must go yourself, you cannot leave it to others.

CREON:

I will go.

—Bring axes, servants:

Come with me to the tomb. I buried her, I

Will set her free.

Oh quickly!
My mind misgives—
The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them
To the last day of his life!
[Exit CREON.]

PAEAN

CHORAGOS:
God of many names [Strophe 1]

CHORUS:
O Iacchos
son
of Kadmeian Semele
O born of the Thunder!
Guardian of the West
Regent
of Eleusis' plain
O Prince of maenad Thebes
and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenos:

CHORAGOS:
God of many names [Antistrophe 1]

CHORUS:
the flame of torches
flares on our hills
the nymphs of Iacchos
dance at the spring of Castalia:
from the vine-close mountain
come ah come in ivy:
Evohe evohe! s i n g s through the streets of Thebes

CHORAGOS:
God of many names [Strophe 2]

CHORUS:
Iacchos of Thebes
heavenly Child
of Semele bride of the Thunderer!
The shadow of plague is upon us:
come
with clement feet
oh come from Parnassos

down the long slopes
across the lamenting water

CHORAGOS:

Io Fire! Chorister of the throbbing stars!
O purest among the voices of the night!
Thou son of God, blaze for us!

[*Antistrophe 2*]

CHORUS:

Come with choric rapture of circling Maenads
Who cry Io Iacche! *God of many names!*

EXODOS

[*Enter Messenger, left.*]

MESSENGER:

Men of the line of Kadmos, you who live
Near Amphion's citadel:
I cannot say of any condition of human life, "This is fixed,
This is clearly good, or bad." Fate raises up,
And Fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike:
No man can foretell his Fate.
Take the case of Creon:
Creon was happy once, as I count happiness:
Victorious in battle, sole governor of the land,
Fortunate father of children nobly born.
And now it has all gone from him! Who can say
That a man is still alive when his life's joy fails?
He is a walking dead man. Grant him rich,
Let him live like a king in his great house:
If his pleasure is gone, he would not give
So much as the shadow of smoke for all he owns.

CHORAGOS:

Your words hint at sorrow: what is your news for us?

MESSENGER:

They are dead. The living are guilty of their death.

CHORAGOS:

Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!

MESSENGER:

Haimon.

Haimon is dead; and the hand that killed him
Is his own hand.

CHORAGOS:
His father's? or his own?

MESSENGER:
His own, driven mad by the murder his father had done.

CHORAGOS:
Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly you saw it all!

MESSENGER:
This is my news: you must draw what conclusions you can from it.

CHORAGOS:
But look: Eurydice, our Queen:
Has she overheard us?
[Enter EURYDICE from the Palace, center.]

EURYDICE:
I have heard something, friends:
As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas' shrine,
For I needed her help today, I heard a voice
Telling of some new sorrow. And I fainted
There at the temple with all my maidens about me.
But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it:
Grief and I are no strangers.

MESSENGER:
Dearest Lady,
I will tell you plainly all that I have seen.
I shall not try to comfort you: what is the use,
Since comfort could lie only in what is not true?
The truth is always best.
I went with Creon
To the outer plain where Polyneices was lying,
No friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs.
We made our prayers in that place to Hecate
And Pluto, that they would be merciful. And we bathed
The corpse with holy water, and we brought
Fresh-broken branches to burn what was left of it,
And upon the urn we heaped up a towering barrow
Of the earth of his own land.
When we are done, we ran
To the vault where Antigone lay on her couch of stone.
One of the servants had gone ahead,

And while he was yet far off he heard a voice
Grieving within the chamber, and he came back
And told Creon. And as the King went closer,
The air was full of wailing, the words lost,
And he begged us to make all haste. "Am I a prophet?"
He said, weeping, "And must I walk this road,
The saddest of all that I have gone before?
My son's voice calls me on. Oh quickly, quickly!
Look through the crevice there, and tell me
If it is Haimon, or some deception of the gods!"

We obeyed; and in the cavern's farthest corner
We saw her lying:
She had made a noose of her fine linen veil
And hanged herself. Haimon lay beside hers,
His arms about her waist, lamenting her,
His love lost underground, crying out
That his father has stolen her away from him.
When Creon saw him the tears rushed to his eyes
And he called to him: "What have you done, child? Speak to me.
What are you thinking that makes your eyes so strange?
O my son, my son, I come to you on my knees!"
But Haimon spat in his face. He said not a word,
Staring—
And suddenly drew his sword
And lunged. Creon shrank back, the blade missed; and the boy,
Desperate against himself, drove it half its length
Into his own side, and fell. And as he died
He gathered Antigone close in his arms again.
Choking, his blood bright red on her white cheek.

And now he lies dead with the dead, and she is his
At last, his bride in the houses of the dead.
[Exit EURYDICE into the Palace.]

CHORAGOS:

She has left us without a word. What can this mean?

MESSENGER:

It troubles me, too; yet she knows what is best,
Her grief is too great for public lamentation,
And doubtless she has gone to her chamber to weep
For dead son, leading her maidens in his dirge.

CHORAGOS:

It may be so: but I fear this deep silence.

MESSENGER:

[Pause.]

I will see what she is doing. I will go in.

[Exit MESSENGER into the Palace.]

[Enter CREON with attendants, bearing HAIMON'S body.]

CHORAGOS:

But here is the King himself: oh look at him,
Bearing his own damnation in his arms.

CREON:

Nothing you say can touch me anymore.
My own blind heart has brought me
From darkness to final darkness. Here you see
The father murdering, the murdered son—
And all my civic wisdom!
Haimon my son, so young, so young to die,
I was the fool, not you; and you died for me.

CHORAGOS:

That is the truth; but you were late in learning it.

CREON:

This truth is hard to bear. Surely a god
Has crushed me beneath the hugest weight of heaven,
And driven me headlong a barbaric way
To trample out the thing I held most dear.
The pains that men will take to come to pain!
[Enter MESSENGER from the Palace.]

MESSENGER:

The burden you carry in your hands is heavy,
But it is not all: you will find more in your house.

CREON:

What burden worse than this shall I find there?

MESSENGER:

The Queen is dead.

CREON:

O port of death, deaf world,
Is there no pity for me? And you, Angel of evil,
I was dead, and your words are death again.

Is it true, boy? Can it be true?
Is my wife dead? Has death bred death?

MESSENGER:
You can see for yourself.

*[The doors are opened, and the body
of EURYDICE is disclosed within.]*

CREON:
Oh pity!
All true, all true, and more than I can bear!
O my wife, my son!

MESSENGER:
She stood before the altar, and her heart
Welcome the knife her own hand guided.
And a great cry burst from her lips for Megareus dead,
And for Haimon dead, her sons; and her last breath
Was a curse for their father, the murdered of her sons.
And she fell, and the dark flowed in through her closing eyes.

CREON:
O God, I am sick with fear.
Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow for me?

MESSENGER:
Her curse is upon you for the deaths of both.

CREON:
It is right that it should be. I alone am guilty.
I know it, and I say it. Lead me in,
Quickly, friends.
I have neither life nor substance. Lead me in.

CHORAGOS:
You are right, if there can be right in so much wrong.
The briefest way is best in a world of sorrow.

CREON:
Let it come,
Let death come quickly, and be kind to me.
I would not ever see the sun again.

CHORAGOS:
All that will come when it will; but we, meanwhile,
Have much to do. Leave the future to itself.

CREON:

All my heart was in that prayer!

CHORAGOS:

Then do not pray any more: the sky is deaf.

CREON:

Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish.

I have killed my son and my wife.

I look for comfort; my comfort lies here dead.

Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing.

Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust.

CHORAGOS:

There is no happiness where there is no wisdom;

No wisdom but in submission to the gods.

Big words are always punished,

And proud men in old age learn to be wise.

Herodotus,
Histories

Born a Persian subject in Halicarnassus, a Dorian Greek colony south of Ionia on the western coast of modern-day Turkey, Herodotus (ca. 484-ca. 425 B.C.) was crowned the “father of history” by Cicero for having written the *Histories*, an account of the Greco-Persian Wars. After extensive travel from which he gathered a trove of oral traditions, Herodotus took up residence in Periclean Athens around 447 B.C. for a few years, where he supposedly became friends with Sophocles. The *Histories* has as its goal “to prevent the traces of human events from being erased by time, and to preserve the fame of the important and remarkable achievements produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks.” Here we see a continuation of the *Iliad*’s concern for *kleos* (fame, glory), though now in the context of a universal humanity. The book inquires into the causes of the struggle between the Greeks and the Persians and tries to understand how Greece could have defeated the world’s first superpower. It is organized according to the stages of formation of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, with each subjected land treated ethnographically.

Herodotus does not resort to the gods for explanations of events. A shift to a more secular approach to reality is indicated in his recourse to prose (then still a novelty for humanistic writing). Before his work, we have annals chronicling events, but these served politico-religious purposes. The power of the aristocracy was being eroded during the Archaic period by a rising merchant class and written law codes, which constrained traditional privileges. Prose belongs to a world in which not only the grandees (kings, priests, aristocrats) make history, in which persuasive speech in public assemblies has import. Though Herodotus includes large amounts of legendary material, he is the first to have attempted to sift facts from myth.

This was certainly progress, though as with other scientific inquiries, this project involves the danger of reducing reality to empirical data. Heir to the Ionian explosion of vigorous intellectual speculation in the previous century, Herodotus brought philosophy’s new “scientific” spirit of conducting research (Greek *historia*), or systematic questioning, into the causality of past events.

Consummating the successive Mesopotamian consolidations of power, the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire was the largest empire the world had seen up to that point, reaching from the Balkans and Egypt to India—an empire for the first time structured by something of a post-mythological monotheistic religion (Zoroastrianism). It was founded by Cyrus the Great, who would liberate the Jews from the Babylonian Exile with his conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. However, his appointment of tyrants to rule the Ionian city-states sowed the seeds of the Greco-Persian Wars. One of his successors, Darius I, invaded Greece, but the Persian advance was halted by their defeat at Marathon in 490 B.C. His son Xerxes I was defeated at Salamis and Plataea ten years later, and so Greek independence was preserved. The conflict traced by Herodotus between “Europe” and “Asia” or Greek and “barbarian” has been reconfigured as a contest of West and East, but such a construal obscures the fundamental continuity threading the civilizations of the Mediterranean and the Near East. Herodotus himself sees a struggle between liberty and autocracy, but that struggle is not between two different worlds. Rather, it is intrinsic to civilization as such—reflected in the tension between the political and the imperial, a life centered in the *polis* (often republican, that is, non-monarchical) versus the authoritarian centralization of empire. Surely such a politics was a Greek breakthrough—but that simply was truer to the logic of *civilization*, inherent in the human possibilities first opened up by the population density and networking of the cities of Sumer. Yet it must be noted that empire realizes in some way the unity of humanity, and helps humble those who monopolize power in a *polis*. Indeed, the glory of Athens was itself founded on slavery and imperialism, and a tyrant in a household, organization, or city is as destructive of human good as is a despotic emperor. Power at every level must be checked and balanced, if personality and communion are to flourish. Civilization must balance the goods of particularity and universality. For this, “East” and “West” must embrace.

Book 1

I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another.

The chroniclers among the Persians say that it was the Phoenicians who were the cause of the falling-out; for they came from what is called the Red Sea to our sea, and, having settled in the country in which they now live, they at once set about long voyages; and carrying Egyptian and Assyrian freights, they put into other lands, and among them Argos. At this time Argos excelled all others of what is now called Hellas. To Argos, then, came the Phoenicians, and there they put their cargo on display. On the fifth or sixth day after their arrival, when almost all their goods had been sold off, there came down to the sea, with many other women, the king's daughter; her name—it is the same in both the Greek and Persian accounts—was Io, and she was the daughter of Inachus. The women all stood by the stern of the ship and were buying from among the wares whatever they had most set their hearts on; as they did so, the Phoenicians let out a great shout and made for them. The most of the women, they say, escaped, but Io and some others were carried off. The Phoenicians loaded them into their ships and sailed away to Egypt.

That is how, the Persians say, Io came to Egypt (though that is not how the Greeks tell it), and that was the beginning of the wrongdoing. After that, say the Persians, certain Greeks, whose name they cannot declare, put into Tyre in Phoenician country and carried off the king's daughter, Europa. These must have been Cretans. So far, say the Persians, it was tit for tat, but after that the Greeks were guilty of the second piece of injustice; for they sailed with a long ship to Aea in Colchis and the river Phasis, and from there, when they had done the business on which they came, they carried off the king's daughter, Medea. The king of the Colchians sent a herald to Greece to ask for satisfaction for the carrying-off of his daughter and to demand her return. But the Greeks answered (this is still the Persian story) that the Persians, on their side, had not given satisfaction for the carrying-off of Argive Io, and so they themselves would give none to the Colchians.

It was in the next generation after this, as the story goes, that Alexander, the son of Priam, having heard of these deeds, wanted for himself, too, a wife from Greece by rape and robbery; for he was certain that

he would not have to give satisfaction for it, inasmuch as the Greeks had not. So he carried off Helen. The Greeks first resolved to demand her back, as well as satisfaction for her carrying-off. But when they did so, the Persians brought against them the rape of Medea, saying that the Greeks had given no satisfaction for that nor had surrendered her when asked. Did they now want satisfaction from others?

Up to this point it was only rape on both sides, one from the other; but from here on, say the Persians, the Greeks were greatly to blame. For the Greeks, say they, invaded Asia before ever the Persians invaded Europe: "It is the work of unjust men, we think, to carry off women at all; but once they have been carried off, to take seriously the avenging of them is the part of fools, as it is the part of sensible men to pay no heed to the matter: clearly, the women would not have been carried off had they no mind to be." The Persians say that they, for their part, made no account of the women carried off from Asia but that the Greeks, because of a Lacedaemonian woman, gathered a great army, came straight to Asia, and destroyed the power of Priam, and from that time forth the Persians regarded the Greek people as their foes. For the Persians claim, as their own, Asia and all the barbarian people who live in it, but Europe and the Greek people they regard as entirely separate.

That is how the Persians say it happened, and it is in the capture of Troy that they discover the beginning of their enmity toward the Greeks. But about Io herself the Phoenicians disagree with the Persians. For they say they brought her to Egypt, but not against her will; she lay, they say, with the ship's captain in Argos, and, when she found she was pregnant, in shame for her parents she sailed with the Phoenicians voluntarily, that she might not be discovered.

These are the stories of the Persians and the Phoenicians. For my part I am not going to say about these matters that they happened thus or thus, but I will set my mark upon that man that I myself know began unjust acts against the Greeks, and, having so marked him, I will go forward in my account, covering alike the small and great cities of mankind. For of those that were great in earlier times most have now become small, and those that were great in my time were small in the time before. Since, then, I know that man's good fortune never abides in the same place, I will make mention of both alike.

Croesus was a Lydian by birth, the son of Alyattes, and ruler of all the peoples west of the Halys, a river that flows from the south, between Syria and Paphlagonia, and northward goes out into the sea called Euxine. This Croesus was the first of the barbarians of whom we know

who subdued some of the Greeks to the payment of tribute and made friends of others. He subdued the Ionians, Aeolians, and Dorians who were in Asia, and he made the Lacedaemonians his friends. But before Croesus' rule all the Greeks were free. For the invasion of Ionia by the Cimmerians, which was elder than Croesus' day, was no subjugation of the cities but a matter of raid and plunder.

The sovereignty of Lydia belonged to the Heraclidae but had devolved upon the family of Croesus, who were called Mermnadae; and this is how it happened. There was one Candaules, whom the Greeks call Myrsilus, the ruler of Sardis and descended from Alcaeus, the son of Heracles. For Agron, the son of Ninus, the son of Belus, the son of Alcaeus, was the first of the Heraclidae to be king of Sardis, and Candaules, the son of Myrsus, was the last. Those who had been kings of this country before Agron were descendants of Lydus, the son of Atys, from whom this whole Lydian region takes its name; for earlier it was called the land of the Meii. It was by the Meii that the sons of Heracles were entrusted with the rule in accordance with an oracle; the Heraclidae were born of a slave girl, belonging to Iardanus, and Heracles. They held sway for two and twenty generations of men, or five hundred and five years, son succeeding father in the rule, until Candaules, son of Myrsus.

This Candaules fell in love with his own wife; and because he was so in love, he thought he had in her far the most beautiful of women. So he thought. Now, he had a bodyguard named Gyges, the son of Dascylus, who was his chief favorite among them. Candaules used to confide all his most serious concerns to this Gyges, and of course he was forever overpraising the beauty of his wife's body to him. Some time thereafter—for it was fated that Candaules should end ill—he spoke to Gyges thus: "Gyges, I do not think that you credit me when I tell you about the beauty of my wife; for indeed men's ears are duller agents of belief than their eyes. Contrive, then, that you see her naked." The other made outcry against him and said, "Master, what a sick word is this you have spoken, in bidding me look upon my mistress naked! With the laying-aside of her clothes, a woman lays aside the respect that is hers! Many are the fine things discovered by men of old, and among them this one, that each should look upon his own, only. Indeed I believe that your wife is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg of you not to demand of me what is unlawful."

With these words he would have fought him off, being in dread lest some evil should come to himself out of these things; but the other answered him and said: "Be of good heart, Gyges, and fear neither myself, lest I might suggest this as a trial of you, nor yet my wife, that

some hurt might befall you from her. For my own part I will contrive it entirely that she will not know she has been seen by you. For I will place you in the room where we sleep, behind the open door. After my coming-in, my wife too will come to her bed. There is a chair that stands near the entrance. On this she will lay her clothes, one by one, as she takes them off and so will give you full leisure to view her. But when she goes from the chair to the bed and you are behind her, let you heed then that she does not see you as you go through the door.”

Inasmuch, then, as Gyges was unable to avoid it, he was ready. Candaules, when he judged the hour to retire had come, led Gyges into his bedroom; and afterwards his wife, too, came in at once; and, as she came in and laid her clothes aside, Gyges viewed her. When she went to the bed and Gyges was behind her, he slipped out—but the woman saw him as he was going through the door. She understood then what had been done by her husband; and though she was so shamed, she raised no outcry nor let on to have understood, having in mind to take punishment on Candaules. For among the Lydians and indeed among the generality of the barbarians, for even a man to be seen naked is an occasion of great shame.

So for that time she showed nothing but held her peace. But when the day dawned, she made ready such of her household servants as she saw were most loyal to her and sent for Gyges. He gave never a thought to her knowing anything of what had happened and came on her summons, since he had been wont before this, also, to come in attendance whenever the queen should call him. As Gyges appeared, the woman said to him: “Gyges, there are two roads before you, and I give you your choice which you will travel. Either you kill Candaules and take me and the kingship of the Lydians, or you must yourself die straightway, as you are, that you may not, in days to come, obey Candaules in everything and look on what you ought not. For either he that contrived this must die or you, who have viewed me naked and done what is not lawful.” For a while Gyges was in amazement at her words; but then he besought her not to bind him in the necessity of such a choice. But he did not persuade her—only saw that necessity truly lay before him: either to kill his master or himself be killed by others. So he chose his own survival. Then he spoke to her and asked her further: “Since you force me to kill my master, all unwilling, let me hear from you in what way we shall attack him.” She answered and said: “The attack on him shall be made from the self-same place whence he showed me to you naked, and it is when he is sleeping that you shall attack him.”

So they prepared their plot, and, as night came on—for there was no going back for Gyges, nor any riddance of the matter but that either himself or Candaules must die—he followed the woman into the bedroom. She gave him a dagger and hid him behind the very door. And after that, as Candaules was taking his rest, Gyges slipped out and killed him, and so it was that he, Gyges, had the wife and the kingship of Lydia. Archilochus of Paros, who lived at the same time, made mention of him in a poem of iambic trimeters.

He had, indeed, the kingship, and it was strengthened by an oracle from Delphi. For when the Lydians made a great to-do about what had happened to Candaules and were in arms about it, the conspirators who were with Gyges came to an agreement with the rest of the Lydians that if the oracle should proclaim him king of Lydia, he should indeed be king; if it should not, he should hand back the power to the Heraclids. The oracle gave its answer, and so Gyges gained his kingship. But this much the Pythia said: that the Heraclids should yet have vengeance on a descendant of Gyges in the fifth generation. But of this word neither the Lydians nor their kings made any account until it was fulfilled.

Thus it was that the Mermnadae gained the sovereignty and despoiled the Heraclids, and Gyges, when he became king, sent off dedicatory offerings to Delphi, and not a few at that. For of all the dedications of silver, the most of them in Delphi are his; and apart from the silver he dedicated a vast deal of gold, including what is most worth remembering, six golden bowls. These stand in the treasure house of the Corinthians and weigh thirty talents. Though, truly spoken, it is not the treasure house of the commonalty of the Corinthians but that of Cypselus, the son of Eetion. This Gyges was the first of the barbarians of whom we know who dedicated objects at Delphi—the first, that is, after Midas, the son of Gordias, king of Phrygia. For Midas, too, dedicated his royal throne on which he sat and gave judgment, and this indeed is a marvel to see. The throne stands where Gyges' bowls stand. This gold and the silver that Gyges dedicated have been given the name Gygian by the Delphians, after him that dedicated them.

When Gyges became king, he, like others, invaded the country of Miletus and Smyrna, and he captured the city of Colophon. However, no other great deed was done by him, although he reigned thirty-eight years, and so we will pass him by with just such mention as we have made. But I will speak of Ardys, his son, who became king after him. This man captured Priene and invaded the country of Miletus, and it was when he held power over Sardis that the Cimmerians, who had

been driven out of their usual haunts by the nomad Scythians, came into Asia and took all of Sardis except the citadel.

When Ardys had reigned forty-nine years, his son Sadyattes succeeded him and reigned twelve, and then Alyattes, Sadyattes' son. It was Alyattes who made war upon Cyaxares, the descendant of Deioces, and the Medes, and he who chased the Cimmerians out of Asia and who took Smyrna, which had been colonized from Colophon, and who invaded Clazomenae. But from these last people he came back not at all as he would have chosen, for he suffered a great disaster there. Of all the other deeds in his reign, these that I will now tell you are the most worth recording.

He made war on the Milesians, having inherited this war from his father. He invaded and attacked Miletus in this way: as soon as the corn was ripe, he invaded the country; he would march in to the music of pipes and harps and flutes, treble and bass, and as often as he came into Milesian territory he would cast down no houses in the countryside, nor would he burn any or wrench the doors off, but let all stand in its place; but the trees and the crops of the land he would destroy and so home with him again. For the people of Miletus were in possession of the sea, and so there was no blockading them with his army. But the Lydian did not destroy the houses—and why was this? So that the people of Miletus might have somewhere as a base from which to sow their land and work it and he might have something of their working to destroy when he invaded.

In this manner he made war for eleven years, and in that time there happened to the people of Miletus two great reverses, one when they fought in their own country, at Limeneion, and one in the plain of the Maeander. For six of the eleven years of this war it was Sadyattes, the son of Ardys, who was king of Lydia, and it was he who invaded the country of Miletus. For it was Sadyattes who had begun the war. But for the five years that followed the six, it was Alyattes, the son of Sadyattes, who made the war, having, as I said before, inherited it. For having had it from his father, he carried it on very fiercely, and none of the Ionians, save only the Chians, lightened the burdens of the war by sharing it with the Milesians. By helping, the Chians were repaying like for like, for in former days the Milesians had helped them in their fight against the Erythraeans.

In the twelfth year, when the corn crop was being fired by his army, the following thing happened: as soon as the corn caught fire, the fire, driven hard by the wind, caught the temple of Athena called Athena of Assesos, and the temple, when it caught fire, burned to the ground.

At the time no account was taken of it, but afterwards, when the army came back to Sardis, Alyattes fell sick. As his sickness lasted somewhat long, Alyattes sent a delegation to Delphi, either through someone's counseling or because of some thought of his own, to inquire of the god about his illness. And when the messengers came to Delphi, the Pythia declared that she would give no oracle to them until they rebuilt the temple of Athena, which they had burned in that country of Miletus at Assesos.

So much I know, for I heard from the Delphians that this was how it was. But the Milesians add this besides, that Periander, the son of Cypselus, sent a messenger to Thrasybulus, who was then prince of Miletus and his very close friend, telling him of the oracle that he had heard had been given to Alyattes, so that with foreknowledge of it Thrasybulus might lay his plans with respect to whatever faced him.

That, then, is how the Milesians say it happened. Now Alyattes, as soon as he got his reply from Delphi, straightway sent a herald to Miletus, being wishful to make a truce with Thrasybulus and the people of Miletus for whatever length of time it would take to rebuild the temple. His envoy went his way to Miletus. But Thrasybulus knew exactly the whole story in advance and knew what Alyattes was going to do. So he contrived as follows: he collected into the marketplace all the corn there was in the city, both his own and that of private persons, and gave an order to the Milesians that at a sign from himself they should all drink and be merry in revelry one with another.

Thrasybulus did this and gave these orders with a purpose: that the herald from Sardis, seeing a great store of corn heaped up and all the people enjoying themselves, should so report of the matter to Alyattes; and this indeed was what happened. When the herald had seen, and had given Thrasybulus the message his Lydian master had bidden him give, he went back to Sardis; and, as I learn, it was because of this matter, and nothing else, that the reconciliation between Thrasybulus and Alyattes took place. For Alyattes had believed that the scantiness of corn was severe in Miletus and that the people were forced to the extremity of distress; but when the herald returned from Miletus, he heard a story the very opposite of what he had looked for. Therefore, the reconciliation was made on terms: that the two princes should be guest-friends and allies, one with the other; and Alyattes built not one but two temples to Athena of Assesos, and he himself recovered from his sickness. So this is the story of Alyattes' war against Thrasybulus and the people of Miletus.

The Periander who gave Thrasybulus notice of the oracle was the son of Cypselus and was himself prince of Corinth. It was to him, say the Corinthians (with the agreement of the people of Lesbos), that the greatest wonder in all his life happened—I mean, the safe carriage of Arion of Methymna on a dolphin's back to Taenarum. Arion was second to none of all the lyre-players of his time and was also the first man we know of to compose and name the dithyramb and produce it in Corinth.

Arion, they say, who was spending the greater part of his time at the court of Periander, was seized with a longing to sail to Italy and Sicily; but when he had made a great deal of money there, he wanted to come home to Corinth. So he set sail from Tarentum, and, as he trusted no people more than Corinthians, he hired a boat of men of Corinth. But when they were out to sea, those Corinthians plotted to throw Arion overboard and take his money. When he understood what they would be at, he begged for his life at the sacrifice of the money. However, he could not prevail on them, and they, who were his ferrymen, bade him either kill himself—that he might have a grave when he was landed—or straightway jump into the sea. So, penned in helplessness, Arion besought them, since they were so determined, to stand by and watch him while he sang, standing with all his gear on him on the poop deck of the ship; he promised, once he had sung, to make away with himself. They for their part thought what a pleasure it would be for them to hear the greatest singer in the world, and so they retreated from the stern of the boat to amidships. He put on all his gear, took his lyre in his hand, and taking his stance on the poop went through the High Shriill Song, and, when it was finished, cast himself into the sea, just as he was, with all his gear. Away they sailed to Corinth; but, says the tale, a dolphin picked Arion up on his back and brought him back to Taenarum. He disembarked from the dolphin and went to Corinth (with all his gear) and, on his coming, told all that had happened him. Periander—for he didn't believe him—held Arion under guard, suffering him to go nowhere else at all, and kept vigilant watch for his ferrymen. When they came, they were summoned to his presence and asked if they had any news of Arion. Yes, they said, he must be safe somewhere in Italy, since they had left him prospering in Tarentum. At that moment Arion appeared before them just as he was when he had leaped into the sea; whereupon they, in their utter confusion, were unable to deny what was brought home to them. This is what the Corinthians and Lesbians say, and there is at Taenerum a small dedicatory offering of Arion, made of bronze and figuring a man riding upon a dolphin.

So Alyattes the Lydian had carried on his war against the people of Miletus, and thereafter he died, having reigned fifty-seven years. The time he escaped from his sickness, he made a dedication at Delphi, being the second of his house to do so; this one was a large silver mixing bowl with a stand beneath it of welded iron—a thing well worth the seeing even among all the dedicatory gifts at Delphi; it was the work of Glaucus of Chios, who was the only man in the world by whom the welding of iron was discovered.

On Alyattes' death, Croesus, the son of Alyattes, succeeded to the kingdom, being then thirty-five years old; and the first of the Greeks he attacked were the people of Ephesus. Then the Ephesians, being besieged by him, dedicated their city to Artemis by fastening a rope from her temple to their city wall. The distance between the old city, which is what was then being besieged, and the temple was seven stades. The Ephesians were the first whom Croesus attacked, but afterwards he set upon each of the Ionian and Aeolian cities in turn, bringing different charges against them. When he was able to find greater grounds of complaint, he brought forward these, but against some of the cities, just the same, he advanced other offenses, though they were indeed very slight.

When, then, the Greeks in Asia had been subdued to the payment of tribute, Croesus thereafter designed to build ships for himself and attack the people of the islands; but when everything was ready for the shipbuilding, something happened; some say it was Bias of Priene who came to Sardis, others that it was Pittacus of Mitylene; but of one of these, on his coming to Sardis, Croesus made inquiry—"What news in Greece?"—and it was what this man said that stopped the shipbuilding. "Sir," he answered, "the islanders are buying up ten thousand horses, as they have in mind to make a campaign on Sardis and yourself." Croesus imagined that he spoke seriously and said, "Would that the gods would put this idea into their heads: that islanders should come against the sons of the Lydians with horses!" Whereat the other answered him, "Sir, you seem to me to pray very earnestly that you might catch the islanders riding horses on the mainland, and your hope in this matter is very reasonable. But do you believe that the islanders, since they have heard that you are to build ships against them, have any other matter for prayer than that they will catch the Lydians at sea and so take vengeance on yourself, in requital for the Greeks that live on the mainland, whom you have made slaves of and hold as such?" Croesus was extraordinarily pleased with the turn of the answer, and since he thought that the man spoke aptly, he hearkened to him and gave over his shipbuilding; and so Croesus made a

guest-friendship with the Ionians who live on the islands.

As time wore on, almost all were subdued who lived west of the river Halys; for except for the Cilicians and Lycians, Croesus subdued and held all the rest in his power. These were: Lydians, Phrygians, Mysians, Mariandynians, Chalybes, Paphlagonians, Thynians and Bithynians (these two are Thracians), Carians, Ionians, Dorians, Aeolians, and Pamphylians. All these were subjugated, and Croesus annexed them to his own Lydians. So Sardis was at the height of its wealth.

To Sardis, then, all the teachers of learning who lived at that time came from all over Greece; they came to Sardis on their several occasions; and, of course, there came also Solon of Athens. At the bidding of the Athenians he had made laws for them, and then he went abroad for ten years, saying, indeed, that he traveled for sight-seeing but really that he might not be forced to abrogate any of the laws he had laid down; of themselves, the Athenians could not do so, since they had bound themselves by great oaths that for ten years they would live under whatever laws Solon would enact.

This, then, was the reason—though of course there was also the sight-seeing—that brought Solon to Egypt to the court of Prince Amasis and eventually to Sardis to Croesus. When he came there, he was entertained by Croesus in his palace, and on the third or fourth day after his arrival the servants, on Croesus' orders, took Solon round the stores of treasures and showed them to him in all their greatness and richness. When he had seen them all and considered them, Croesus, as the opportunity came, put this question to Solon: "My friend from Athens, great talk of you has come to my ears, of your wisdom and your traveling; they say you have traveled over much of the world, for the sake of what you can see in it, in your pursuit of knowledge. So now, a longing overcomes me to ask you whether, of all men, there is one you have seen as the most blessed of all." He put this question never doubting but that he himself was the most blessed. But Solon flattered not a whit but in his answer followed the very truth. He said, "Sir, Tellus the Athenian." Croesus was bewildered at this but pursued his question with insistence. "And in virtue of what is it that you judge Tellus to be most blessed?" Solon said: "In the first place, Tellus' city was in good state when he had sons—good and beautiful they were—and he saw children in turn born to all of them, and all surviving. Secondly, when he himself had come prosperously to a moment of his life—that is, prosperously as it counts with us—he had, besides, an ending for it that was most glorious: in a battle between the Athenians and their neighbors in Eleusis he made a sally,

routed the enemy, and died splendidly, and the Athenians gave him a public funeral where he fell and so honored him greatly.”

Solon led on Croesus by what he said of Tellus when he spoke of his many blessings, so Croesus went further in his questioning and wanted to know whom Solon had seen as second most blessed after the first, for he certainly thought that he himself would win the second prize at least. But Solon answered him and said: “Cleobis and Biton. They were men of Argive race and had a sufficiency of livelihood and, besides, a strength of body such as I shall show; they were both of them prize-winning athletes, and the following story is told of them as well. There was a feast of Hera at hand for the Argives, and their mother needs must ride to the temple; but the oxen did not come from the fields at the right moment. The young men, being pressed by lack of time, harnessed themselves beneath the yoke and pulled the wagon with their mother riding on it; forty-five stades they completed on their journey and arrived at the temple. When they had done that and had been seen by all the assembly, there came upon them the best end of a life, and in them the god showed thoroughly how much better it is for a man to be dead than to be alive. For the Argive men came and stood around the young men, congratulating them on their strength, and the women congratulated the mother on the fine sons she had; and the mother, in her great joy at what was said and done, stood right in front of the statue and there prayed for Cleobis and Biton, her own sons, who had honored her so signally, that the goddess should give them whatsoever is best for a man to win. After that prayer the young men sacrificed and banqueted and laid them down to sleep in the temple where they were; they never rose more, but that was the end in which they were held. The Argives made statues of them and dedicated them at Delphi, as of two men who were the best of all.”

So Solon assigned his second prize in happiness to these men; but Croesus was sharply provoked and said, “My Athenian friend, is the happiness that is mine so entirely set at naught by you that you do not make me the equal of even private men?” Solon answered: “Croesus, you asked me, who know that the Divine is altogether jealous and prone to trouble us, and you asked me about human matters. In the whole length of time there is much to see that one would rather not see—and much to suffer likewise. I put the boundary of human life at seventy years. These seventy years have twenty-five thousand two hundred days, not counting the intercalary month; but if every other year be lengthened by a month so that the seasons come out right, these intercalary months in seventy years will be thirty-five, and the

days for these months ten hundred and fifty. So that all the days of a man's life are twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty; of all those days not one brings to him anything exactly the same as another. So, Croesus, man is entirely what befalls him. To me it is clear that you are very rich, and clear that you are the king of many men; but the thing that you asked me I cannot say of you yet, until I hear that you have brought your life to an end well. For he that is greatly rich is not more blessed than he that has enough for the day unless fortune so attend upon him that he ends his life well, having all those fine things still with him. Moreover, many very rich men are unblessed, and many who have a moderate competence are fortunate. Now he that is greatly rich but is unblessed has an advantage over the lucky man in two respects only; but the latter has an advantage over the rich and unblessed in many. The rich and unblessed man is better able to accomplish his every desire and to support such great visitation of evil as shall befall him. But the moderately rich and lucky man wins over the other in these ways: true, he is not equally able to support both the visitation of evil and and his own desire, but his good fortune turns these aside from him; he is uncrippled and healthy, without evils to afflict him, and with good children and good looks. If, in addition to all this, he shall end his life well, he is the man you seek, the one who is worthy to be called blessed; but wait till he is dead to call him so, and till then call him not blessed but lucky.

“Of course, it is impossible for one who is human to have all the good things together, just as there is no one country that is sufficient of itself to provide all good things for itself; but it has one thing and not another, and the country that has the most is best. So no single person is self-sufficient; he has one thing and lacks another. But whoso possesses most of them, continuously, and then ends his life gracefully, he, my lord, may justly win this name you seek—at least in my judgment. But one must look always at the end of everything—how it will come out finally. For to many the god has shown a glimpse of blessedness only to extirpate them in the end.”

That was what Solon said, and he did not please Croesus at all; so the prince sent him away, making no further account of him, thinking him assuredly a stupid man who would let by present goods and bid him look to the end of every matter.

After Solon was gone, a great visitation of evil from the god laid hold of Croesus, and one may guess that it was because he thought he was of all mankind the most blessed. Lo, as he lay sleeping, a dream stood over him and declared to him the very truth of the evils that were to befall his son. Croesus had two sons, the one of them quite undone,

inasmuch as he was deaf and dumb; but the other was far the first young man of his age; his name was Atys. It was concerning this Atys that the dream communicated with Croesus, namely, that he should have him stricken by an iron spearpoint. When Croesus woke up and considered with himself the dream's message, he was in terror of it and married his son to a wife, and besides, although the young man had been wont to captain the Lydians, he now would send him nowhere on any such business. And as for the javelins and spears and all such things as men use in war, he conveyed all these out of the men's halls and piled them in the chambers lest any of them, as they hung on the walls, might chance to fall on his son.

Now when Croesus had in hand the marriage of his son, there came to Sardis a man in the grip of calamity, his hands full of impurity. He was a Phrygian by race and of the royal family. This man came forward into the house of Croesus and begged to win purification of Croesus after the customs of that country. So Croesus purified him. (The manner of purification is the same for the Lydians and the Greeks.) After he had performed the due rites, Croesus asked him where he came from and who he was, in these words: "Sir, who are you? And from where in Phrygia have you come, that you have become a suppliant at my hearth? What man or woman have you killed?" He answered him: "King, I am the son of Gordias, the son of Midas, and men call me Adrastus; and it is my brother I have killed, and I did it unwittingly. I come before you having been driven out by my father and having had my all taken from me." Croesus answered him and said: "Friends are they from whom you spring, and it is to friends also that you have come. While you remain in my house, you will lack for nothing. As for your calamity, that you must bear as lightly as you may, for so it will be best for you."

So he had his daily living in Croesus' house. In that same time, on the Mysian Olympus, there appeared a boar, a great brute indeed. He made his headquarters in that mountain and would issue from it and ravage the tilled fields of the Mysians. Time and again the Mysians went against him but failed to do him hurt; rather, indeed, the suffering was on their side. So, at last, messengers of the Mysians came to Croesus and said: "King, the greatest brute of a wild boar has appeared in our country, and he is destroying our fields. We have sought to kill him, but we cannot. Now, therefore, we beg of you to send with us your son and bands of chosen young men and hounds, that we may drive the boar out of the land." That was what they asked. But Croesus, being mindful of the dream, spoke to them thus: "As to my son, speak of him no more. I will not send him with you.

He is but newly married, and that is all his present care. But for the chosen Lydians and all the hunt establishment, that I will send with you and straitly order those who go to show the utmost zeal in helping you drive the beast out of the land.”

Those were his words, and the Mysians were content with them. But just then there came in the son of Croesus, having heard what the Mysians requested. When Croesus refused to send the boy with them, he said to him: “Father, before this, the fairest and noblest achievements of our family were going to wars and to hunts and finding renown there. Now you have debarred me from both, though I am sure you cannot detect in me either cowardice or want of spirit. With what eyes can I show myself, going to and from the marketplace? What kind of man will I appear to be to my fellow countrymen? What to my newly married wife? What sort of man will she think she is living with? Either let me go to the hunt, or let your words convince me that this action of yours is for the best.”

Croesus answered him: “My son, it is not cowardice or anything ugly that I have spied in you that makes me do this but because of a dream vision, which stood by me and declared to me that you would be short-lived. You will die, it said, by an iron spear. So because of this vision I hastened your marriage and will not send you on this present business, guarding how I may possibly steal you through, for my lifetime at least. For you are the only son I have; as to the other, since his hearing is utterly destroyed, I count him as being no son to me.”

The young man answered and said: “Father, you are not at all to blame for guarding me, since you have seen such a vision. But it is just that I should tell you what you do not understand and how the dream has escaped you. You say the dream declares I shall die by an iron spearpoint. What hands has a boar? Where is there the iron spearpoint you fear? Now, if the dream had said I should die by a tooth or anything else that fits this beast, you might well do what you are doing. But no, it was a spearpoint. Since, then, our fight is not with men, let me go.”

Croesus answered: “My son, somehow you overcome my judgment in your reading of the dream, and being so overcome I yield to you and will change my resolve. I will send you on this hunt.”

Having said that, Croesus summoned to him the Phrygian, Adrastus; and when he came, he said to him: “Adrastus, I purified you when you were smitten by an ugly calamity; but I am not taunting you with that. I took you into my house and have supported you altogether.

Now then, since you owe me something—I mean the returning of good for my good to you—I would like to send you as my son’s guardian when he goes to this hunt, lest on the way some villains of robbers set upon you both, to your hurt. Besides, you yourself ought to go to where brave deeds will cover you with the brightness of glory. That is what comes to you from your own father, and, besides, you are yourself a strong young man.”

Adrastus answered: “King, were it not that you asked me, I would not go to any such sport. It is not fit that someone loaded with such a calamity as mine should go among his fellows who are fortunate. Nor have I any such wish myself, and on many grounds I would have refused. But since you are eager for it, and I should surely gratify you—for indeed I owe you good for good—I am ready to do this. As for your son, whom you so urgently would have me guard, you may look to see him come back scatheless as far as this guardian is concerned.”

Those were the words with which he answered Croesus. Thereafter they went their way, equipped with the chosen bands of young men and the hounds. Coming to the mountain of Olympus, they searched for the beast, and, having found him, they ringed him round and shot javelins at him. Then the guest-friend, he that had been purified of his bloodguilt, that was called Adrastus, cast his spear at the boar and missed him, but struck the son of Croesus. So the son died, struck by the point of the spear, fulfilling the declaration of the dream. And one ran to Croesus to tell him what had happened. This man came to Sardis and told him of the fight and the fate of his son.

Croesus was in agony for his son’s death and made the more of it because he that had killed him was the one whom he himself had purified of bloodguilt. In his great sorrow for what had befallen, he cried upon Zeus the Purifier, calling him to witness what he had suffered at the hands of his guest-friend. He called also on Zeus of the Hearth and Zeus of Comradeship (it was the same god he named as all of these): of the Hearth, because he had received this friend into his house and so had unknowingly given food to his son’s slayer, and as god of Comradeship because, having sent him to be the boy’s guard, he had found him his worst enemy.

After that, there came the Lydians, carrying the dead body, and behind the body followed the slayer. He came and stood in front of the body and surrendered himself to Croesus, stretching out his hands and bidding him cut his throat over the corpse. He spoke of his own former calamity and of how, on top of that, he had destroyed his purifier and should surely live no more. Now Croesus, when he heard this, took

pity on Adrastus, although he was in such calamity of his own, and said to him: "Sir, from you I have all justice, since you render sentence of death upon yourself. But you are not the cause of my misfortune, save insofar as you unwittingly did the deed. Some god is the cause, who long ago predicted to me what should be." So Croesus buried his son as was right. But Adrastus, the son of Gordias, the son of Midas, he who was the slayer of his own brother and had become the slayer of his purifier, who was, moreover, aware within himself that he was of all men he had ever known the heaviest-stricken by calamity, when there was a silence about the tomb and none was there, cut his throat over the grave.

For two years, then, Croesus sat in deep mourning for his son. But after that it was the loss of sovereignty by Astyages, son of Cyaxares, at the hands of Cyrus, son of Cambyses, that put him from his grief—that and the growth of the power of the Persians; and he began to reflect how, if he could at all, he might forestall this increase in power before the Persians had grown really great. After he had framed this thought, he at once made trial of oracles, both those in Greece and those in Libya, sending various messengers, these to Delphi, those to Abae in Phocis, and others still to Dodona. There were some, too, sent to Amphiaraus and Trophonius and some to Branchidae, in the country of Miletus. Such were the Greek oracles that Croesus sent to consult; but to Libya also he sent messengers, to inquire of Ammon. His several sendings were to find out what it was the oracles knew, so that, if they should be found to know the truth of what he asked them, he might then send to them a second time and inquire whether he should make war upon the Persians.

His instructions to his Lydian messengers were these: they should reckon the days from the one on which they left Sardis, and on the hundredth day they should consult the oracle and ask what it was at that moment that Croesus, king of Lydia, son of Alyattes, was doing. What each of the oracles gave as its prophetic answer they were to write down and bring it back to him. Now there is no report by anyone of the answers given by the rest of the oracles, but the moment the Lydians entered the great hall at Delphi to make their consultation of the god, and asked their question as they had been instructed, the Pythia spoke as follows, in hexameter verse:

Number of sand grains I know, and also the measures of ocean;
I understand him that is dumb and can hearken to the voiceless.
A smell steals over my senses, the smell of a hard-shelled
tortoise,
seethed in bronze with the meat of lambs, mingled together;

bronze is the base beneath, and bronze the vestment upon it.

This is what the Pythia gave as her answer, and the messengers, having written it down, departed and got them gone to Sardis. Then, as the various messengers who were sent round came in, bearing their oracles, Croesus unfolded each message and looked over what had been written down. Not one of them satisfied him. But the moment he heard the one that came from Delphi, he straightway did obeisance and acknowledged it with a prayer; he was convinced that only the oracle at Delphi was an oracle, because it had found out what he had been doing. For when he had sent his messengers to the oracles, he carefully kept track of the due day and contrived the following (setting his wits on something that was impossible to discover or to guess): he chopped up a tortoise and some lamb's meat and boiled them together in a bronze cauldron and put a bronze lid on it.

That, then, was the oracle that Delphi gave to Croesus. What answer the oracle of Amphiaraus gave to the Lydians when they performed the customary rites at his shrine, I cannot say, for there is no record of it—only that here, too, Croesus held that he had had a true oracle.

After that, Croesus set about propitiating the god at Delphi with great sacrifices; in all, of sacrificial animals he offered up three thousand of each kind, and couches overlaid with gold and silver, and golden goblets and purple cloaks and chitons—he made a great heap of all these and burned them, expecting that thereby he would be likelier to win the favor of the god; besides this, he bade all the Lydians sacrifice to the god whatever each could. When the sacrifice was over, he melted down a vast deal of gold and made out of it ingots, on the long side six palms' length, on the short side three, and in height one palm. The number of these ingots was one hundred seventeen, of which four were of refined gold, each weighing two and a half talents; the rest were of white gold, and each weighed two talents. He had made for him also an image of a lion, of refined gold, which weighed ten talents. This lion, when the temple at Delphi burned down, fell from the ingots on which it stood and now lies in the treasure house of the Corinthians; it now weighs only six and a half talents, for three and a half talents melted off it.

When Croesus had completed all these things, he sent them off to Delphi and other things with them: two immensely great mixing bowls, of gold and of silver, whereof the golden one stood to the right as you enter the temple, the silver one to the left. These also were moved about the time of the temple's burning. The gold one now rests in the treasure house of the people of Clazomenae, and it weighs eight

and a half talents and twelve minae. The silver one is in the corner of the forecourt of the temple; it can hold six hundred amphorae and is used as a mixing bowl by the Delphians at the Theophania. The Delphians say that it is the work of Theodorus of Samos, and I think it is; certainly it is not an everyday work of art. Croesus also sent four silver jars, which stand in the treasure house of the Corinthians, and he dedicated as well two sprinkling bowls, one of gold and one of silver. On the gold one is an inscription where the Lacedaemonians say that it is their dedicatory offering. But they lie; this, too, is the offering of Croesus, and it was one of the Delphians who put that inscription on it because he wanted to win the favor of the Lacedaemonians; I know his name but will not mention it. However, there is a statue of a boy, the water running through his hand, which is a gift of the Lacedaemonians, but neither of the sprinklers is. There were many other unsigned gifts that Croesus sent with these, including certain circular silver castings. There was also the image of a woman three cubits high, made of gold; the Delphians say it is the likeness of her that was Croesus' baker. And, in addition to all these, Croesus dedicated the necklaces from his wife's neck, and her girdles.

These are what Croesus sent to Delphi; but to Amphiarus, because he knew his virtue and what happened him, he made a dedication of a shield altogether of gold, and a spear of solid gold, the shaft and point alike made of gold. And till my day these were both still deposited at Thebes, in the Theban temple of Ismenian Apollo.

On those of the Lydians who were to bring these gifts to the shrines Croesus laid command that they should ask the oracles: "Shall Croesus make war on the Persians, and shall he take to himself any allied force?" When the Lydians came to where they were sent and dedicated the offerings, they consulted the oracles, saying: "Croesus, king of the Lydians and of other nations, inasmuch as he has come to think that these are the only oracles among mankind, has sent to you gifts worthy of your discoveries; so now it is you he asks if he should make war upon the Persians and if he should take to himself any allied force." That was their question; and the judgment of both oracles came out the same, declaring to Croesus that if he made war on the Persians he would destroy a mighty empire; and they advised him to find out which were the most powerful of the Greek peoples and make them his friends.

When Croesus heard the answers that were returned to him from the god, he was exceedingly pleased at the oracles, expecting of a certainty that he would destroy the kingdom of Cyrus; and he sent to Delphi and paid a fee to the Delphians at two gold staters a man (having

found out their number by inquiry). The Delphians in return gave Croesus and the Lydians the right of primacy of consultation of the oracle, remission of all charges, and the best seats at the festivals; and, moreover, anyone of the Lydians who chose to might become a Delphic citizen for all time to come.

So Croesus, having paid this fee to the Delphians, consulted them a third time; for since he had found very truth in the oracle, he was for using it to the fullest. His consultation was now the question: Would his monarchy last long? Whereupon the Pythia gave the following answer:

Whenever a mule shall become sovereign king of the Medians,
then, Lydian Delicate-Foot, flee by the stone-strewn Hermus,
flee, and think not to stand fast, nor shame to be chicken-
hearted.

When these words came to Croesus, he was most delighted of all; for he thought that a mule would surely never become king of the Medians instead of a man, and so neither he himself nor his issue would ever be deprived of the power. After that he took thought and inquired who were the most powerful of the Greeks that he should win, besides, to be his friends. And in his inquiry he found out that the Lacedaemonians and the Athenians were preeminent, the Lacedaemonians of the Doric race, the Athenians of the Ionic. For these had been the outstanding races from the olden time, the one Pelasgian and the other Hellenic. The Pelasgian has never yet moved out of its land, but the Hellenic has wandered exceedingly. For in the time of King Deucalion the Hellenes inhabited the land of Phthia, and in that of King Dorus, son of Hellen, they lived beneath Ossa and Olympus in what was then called Histiaean country; they were driven from there by the Cadmeans and then lived in Pindus, in the land called Macednus. Then again they resettled to Dryopis, and from Dryopis, you see, they came to the Peloponnesus and were called Dorians.

But what language the Pelasgians spoke I cannot say exactly. However, if I should speak on the evidence of those who are still Pelasgians and live in the city of Creston above the Etruscans, and who were once boundary neighbors of those now called Dorians but who at that time still lived in what is now called Thessaliotis, and from the evidence of the Pelasgians who once inhabited Placia and Scylace on the Helle-spont, who were fellow dwellers with the Athenians, and from the evidence of the other small Pelasgian towns that later changed their names: I say that—if I should speak on the evidence of all this—the Pelasgians originally spoke a non-Greek language. If all this stock was

truly Pelasgian, the Attic race, being itself Pelasgian, must also have changed its language when it became one with the Greeks [Hellenes]. For the people of Creston do not have a common language with any of their neighbors, nor do the people of Placia either; yet these two peoples share a language. It is clear, therefore, that they are retaining a fashion of speech that they brought with them when they moved into these parts.

But the Greek stock, since ever it was, has always used the Greek language, in my judgment. But though it was weak when it split off from the Pelasgians, it has grown from something small to be a multitude of peoples by the accretion chiefly of the Pelasgians but of many other barbarian peoples as well. But before that, it seems to me, the Pelasgian people, so long as it spoke a language other than Greek, never grew great anywhere.

Of these two peoples, then, the Attic, as Croesus learned, was being held subject and split up by Pisisstratus, the son of Hippocrates, this Pisisstratus being now sovereign lord of Athens. For when his father, Hippocrates, was but a private person and watched the Olympic games, a great wonder befell him. When he had sacrificed and the jars were standing there, full of meat and water, they bubbled of themselves, without fire, and overflowed. Chilon the Lacedaemonian, who chanced to be there and who saw the wonder, gave counsel to Hippocrates: "First and best," said he, "take no wife to your house who can bear children; or, if you have one, as second best, send her away; and if you have a son by her, disown him." This was Chilon's advice to Hippocrates, but Hippocrates would have none of it. After that, Pisisstratus was born to him. There was then among the Athenians a civil war between the faction of the Men of the Coast and those of the Plain. Megacles, son of Alcmaeon, was leader of the Coast, and, of those of the Plain, Lycurgus, son of Aristolaides. Now Pisisstratus, laying his plans for the sovereignty, gathered yet a third faction. He assembled factionaries, in name as champion of the Hill folk, and played the following trick. He wounded himself and his team of mules and drove his carriage into the marketplace as though he had just escaped his enemies, who indeed (he said) would have made away with him as he drove into the country; so he besought the commonalty for a guard, he having formerly won high repute when he was their general against the Megarians and captured Nisaea and achieved many other great deeds as well. The people of Athens were deceived and chose some of the citizens and gave them to Pisisstratus; yet these men did not become spear-bearers of Pisisstratus, but club-bearers, for they attended on him carrying wooden maces. These, joining Pisisstratus in

a revolution, seized the Acropolis. So Pisistratus took over the power in Athens; yet he in no way deranged the existing magistracies or the ordinances but governed the city well and truly according to the laws that were established.

But a short time after this, those who were factionaries of Megacles and those of Lycurgus made common cause and drove Pisistratus out. That was how Pisistratus took possession of Athens the first time and established his sovereignty there but had not rooted it firmly and so lost it. Now those who had, together, expelled him fell out anew among themselves, and Megacles, being hard put to it by the strife of the factions, sent a proposition to Pisistratus: would he be inclined to have Megacles' daughter in marriage in return for the sovereignty? Pisistratus accepted his offer and agreed on the terms, and then, in order to bring about the restoration, they contrived between them by far the most simple-minded thing, in my judgment, that has ever been; for the Greek stock from the most ancient times has been distinguished from the barbarians for its cleverness and for being free from such silly simple-mindedness, and, of the Greeks, the Athenians were reputed to be the very first in intelligence; yet these men perpetrated the following trick on the Athenians. There was in the deme of Paeania a woman called Phya, and in stature she was but three fingers short of four cubits, and beautiful besides. They fitted her with full armor, put her on a chariot, arranged her pose so that she would appear at her most striking, and drove her into the city. They had sent heralds to run ahead of them, and these, when they arrived, spoke as they had been ordered: "Men of Athens, receive with good will Pisistratus, whom Athena herself, having honored him above all mankind, is bringing back from exile to her own Acropolis." So the heralds went about, saying these things, and the word immediately spread through the demes that Athena was bringing Pisistratus back. The people in the city believed that this woman was the goddess herself and offered prayers to her, for all that she was only human, and they welcomed Pisistratus.

In the way described, Pisistratus recovered his sovereignty, and, according to the compact he had made with Megacles, he married his daughter. But inasmuch as he already had children who were young men, and because the Alcmaeonidae were under a curse, he did not want to have children by his newly wedded wife; and so he lay with her, but not after the customary manner. The wife concealed this at first, but then, perhaps under questioning, perhaps not, she told her mother, and the mother told her husband. Megacles was exceedingly angry and made up his quarrel with the other factionaries. Pisistra-

tus, learning of what was doing against himself, got out of the country at once, and, coming to Eretria, he took counsel with his children. The judgment of Hippias prevailed, that they should win back the sovereignty, and they thereupon gathered donations from whatever cities owed them any obligation. Though there were many who furnished large sums, the Thebans exceeded all in their giving of money. Afterwards, not to make a long story of it, there was an interval, and they made everything ready for the restoration. For Argive mercenaries came from the Peloponnesus, and a man from Naxos, whose name was Lygdamis, came as a volunteer and displayed the greatest zeal in collecting money and men.

They made Eretria their base and, after ten years, came home from there, and the first place in Attica they took and held was Marathon. There they camped; and there came to them factionaries from the city, and there was an influx, too, from the country villages, of people to whom the rule of one man was more welcome than freedom. These then assembled there; but the Athenians in the city paid no heed as long as Pisistratus was gathering money or even afterwards, when he had seized Marathon. But when they learned that he was marching from Marathon on the city, then and only then they sallied out against him and advanced with all their forces to confront the party of the restoration. Pisistratus' army set out from Marathon and came toward the city and made contact with the enemy at the temple of Pallenian Athena. There they encamped over against them. Then one Amphilytus, the Acarnanian—who was a soothsayer—was by god's guidance thereby. This man approached Pisistratus and delivered the following oracle in hexameter verse:

The cast has been thrown indeed, and the net has been truly
outstretched;
swoop, swoop will the tunny-fish through the moon-lighted night.

So he spoke, being inspired, and Pisistratus received the oracle and said, "I welcome it," and led his army on. The Athenians of the city had at the moment gone to their breakfast, and after breakfast some of them went to play dice and others to sleep. The followers of Pisistratus charged the Athenians and routed them. As they fled, Pisistratus employed an exceedingly clever device so that the Athenians should not rally again but remain scattered. He mounted his sons on horses and sent them on ahead, and to those of the fugitives they overtook they told what Pisistratus told them to tell, which was that each one of them should go to his own home and be of good cheer.

The Athenians obeyed them and so, for the third time, Pisistratus took Athens; and this time he rooted his power securely, with many mercenaries and revenues, drawn both from the people on the spot and from the districts about the river Strymon. Of the Athenians who had stood firm and had not fled immediately, he took their children as hostages and established them in Naxos. (Pisistratus had also captured this place and entrusted it to Lygdamis.) Besides, as a result of some oracles, he purified the island of Delos, and the manner of his purification was the following: as far as the view from the temple extended, from all that place he dug up the dead bodies and transferred them to another part of Delos. So Pisistratus became sovereign of Athens; and, of the Athenians, some had fallen in the fight, and some fled from their native land, along with the Alcmaeonidae themselves.

Such, then, was the condition of Athens as Croesus heard of it; but of the Lacedaemonians something else: that they had escaped out of great troubles and that, at this moment, they had proved themselves masters of the people of Tegea in a war. For when Leon and Hegesicles were kings at Sparta, the Lacedaemonians, for all that they were successful in other wars, whenever they encountered the people of Tegea would always fail. Moreover, before this the Spartans had been, in respect of the laws, the very worst of all the Greeks, one might say, and in their dealings with others, and also among themselves, the least free in communication. But then they changed over toward good laws, and this is how it happened. There was one Lycurgus, a Spartiate and a notable man, who went to Delphi to the oracle; and as soon as he entered the temple hall, the Pythia immediately spoke as follows:

Is it you, Lycurgus, that comes to my rich temple? Lycurgus,
dear to Zeus and to all that hold the halls of Olympus?
I ask myself whether, in prophecy, as a god or a man I shall
hail you.
Nay, but 'tis rather a god that I see in you, Lycurgus.

There are some, too, who declare that, in addition, the Pythia dictated to him the present constitution of Sparta; but what the Lacedaemonians themselves say is that Lycurgus brought this constitution from Crete when his nephew, Leobotes, was king at Sparta and Lycurgus became his guardian. For as soon as he took over the guardianship, he changed all the laws and took care that the new rules should not be transgressed. And afterwards it was Lycurgus who made all the institutions about war, the sworn companies, the regiments of thirty, and the communal meals, and, besides these, the ephors and the council of elders.

So they changed, and toward good laws, and when Lycurgus died, they erected a statue to him and now do him great reverence. And inasmuch as theirs was a good country and a populous, they soon grew and flourished, and it was no longer enough for them to keep at peace; they had come to despise the Arcadians, as being themselves the stronger, and so they were for consulting Delphi as to winning all of Arcadia. Whereupon the Pythia prophesied to them thus:

You ask Arcadia of me; 'tis a great thing; I'll not give it.
Many there are in Arcadia, many men, eaters of acorns,
who will prevent you. Still, it is not I that begrudge you.
Tegea will I give you, to beat with your feet in dancing,
and with a rope to measure, to your fill, her beautiful plainland.

When the Lacedaemonians heard this answer, they kept their hands off the rest of the Arcadians but made their assault on Tegea, carrying fetters along with them, trusting in that false-coin oracle that they would enslave Tegea. But they were worsted in their attack; and those of them who were taken prisoner worked the plain of Tegea wearing the fetters they had brought with them and measuring the land with a rope. And those fetters wherewith they were bound were still in my day preserved in Tegea and hung round the shrine of Athena Alea.

So in all that former war the Lacedaemonians had steadily wrestled in vain against the people of Tegea; but in the time of Croesus and the kingship of Anaxandrides and Ariston in Lacedaemon the Spartans won the upper hand in war, and this is how they did so. As they were being constantly beaten by the people of Tegea, they sent a delegation to Delphi and asked what god they should propitiate that they might win against Tegea. The Pythia bade them bring home the bones of Orestes, son of Agamemnon. When they were not able to find the burial place of Orestes, they sent again to the god, to ask in what place Orestes lay. In answer to the question of the delegation the Pythia said:

Somewhere there is Tegea, in Arcadia's level plainland,
where two winds are a-blowing, under dire stress of compulsion;
blow rings answer to blow, and evil is piled upon evil.
There Agamemnon's son is held by the life-giving earth.
And you, when once you bring him, shall then be Tegea's
master.

When the Lacedaemonians heard this, they were as far as ever from the discovery, despite all their searching, until Lichas, one of those men among the Spartiates who are called Doers-of-Good-Deeds, found it out. (These Doers-of-Good-Deeds are those five of the citizens who

pass out each year, as the eldest, from the ranks of the knights; and during the year that they pass out from the knights they are kept very busy, being sent hither and yon on errands for the commonalty of Sparta.)

Lichas, then, being one of these men, found what he sought in Tegea, thanks both to good luck and to his own cleverness. There was at this time free intercourse with Tegea, and Lichas, coming to a smithy, watched the welding of iron and was lost in wonder at what he saw being done. The smith, having marked his wonder, stopped his work and said to Lichas, "My friend from Laconia, if you had seen what I have, I am sure you would wonder in very truth, inasmuch as now you show such wonder for the welding of iron. For here, in this courtyard, I wanted to make a well, and as I dug, I happened upon a coffin seven cubits long. As I mistrusted that men had ever been larger than those of today, I opened it and found a corpse no whit less big than the coffin; I measured it before I dug it back in again." So he told what he had seen; but the other, when he gave thought to what the man had said, compared it with the oracle and judged that this must be Orestes; for in his comparison he discovered that the bellows of the smith before his eyes must be the two blasts of wind, and the anvil and the hammer were the blow and counterblow, and the iron being welded on iron was the evil laid upon evil, the image being that it was to man's mischief that iron was invented. So he compared it, and he went away to Sparta and told the whole business to the Lacedaemonians. They made a pretense of bringing a charge against him and banishing him. So he came to Tegea and spoke of his personal misfortune to the smith and tried to rent the courtyard of him, but the smith would not; at last, however, the smith was overpersuaded, and Lichas settled in to live there, and he dug up the grave and collected the bones, and away he went, bringing them with him to Sparta. And from that time, whenever the two peoples made trial of one another in war, the Lacedaemonians had much the better of it, and indeed, by now, the most of the Peloponnesus was subject to them.

All of this, then, Croesus learned, and he sent messengers to Sparta with gifts, to ask for an alliance; and he himself instructed them what to say. The messengers came and said, "Croesus, king of the Lydians and other nations, sent us. What he says is: 'Men of Lacedaemon, the god gave me his oracle that I should win to myself, as a friend, the Greek; now as I understand that you are the chief power in Greece, I invite you, according to the oracle; and I wish to be your friend and ally, without fraud or deceit.'" This was the invitation that Croesus delivered through his messengers. The Lacedaemonians, who had al-

ready heard of the oracle that had been given to Croesus, were very glad at the coming of the Lydians, and they made a sworn compact with him for guest-friendship and alliance. Indeed, certain kindnesses done them before this by Croesus bound them to him already. For the Lacedaemonians had sent to Sardis to buy gold there, intending to use it for the statue of Apollo that has now been set up in Thornax in Laconia; but when they offered to buy the gold, Croesus gave it to them as a free gift.

Because of that, and because he had given them precedence, in his choice for friendship, over all the rest of the Greeks, the Lacedaemonians accepted the alliance. So when he made the offer, they were ready; and, moreover, they made a bronze mixing bowl, filling it on the outside, around the rim, with little figures (the mixing bowl itself was of a capacity of three hundred amphorae) and sent it on its way to Croesus, wishing to match Croesus' gift to them with one of their own to him. But this mixing bowl never did reach Sardis, for which two reasons are given. The Lacedaemonians say that when, in its transport toward Sardis, it came near Samos, the Samians found out about it, sailed out with their long ships, and captured it; but the Samians themselves say that the Lacedaemonians who were bringing it came too late, heard that Sardis and Croesus had been captured, and sold the mixing bowl in Samos, and that some private persons bought it and dedicated it in the temple of Hera. And probably also those who sold it, when they arrived in Sparta, would say that it had been taken from them by the Samians. That, then, is the story of the bowl.

Croesus missed the meaning of the oracle and so made the campaign into Cappadocia, being convinced that he would destroy Cyrus and the power of the Persians. While he was making his preparations, one of the Lydians gave him some advice. This man had before been thought wise, but from this present counsel of his he won a great name among the Lydians. He was called Sandanis, and what he said was this: "My lord, you are making ready to campaign against men of a sort that wear leather—leather breeches and the rest of their clothing, too, made of leather—and who eat not what they want but what they have, for the country they live in is full of rocks. Besides, they use no wine, but are water-drinkers, have no figs to nibble on, nor any other good thing. Now, sir, if you conquer, what will you take from them—since they have nothing? But if you are the one who is conquered, note how many good things you will lose. For once they have tasted of our good things, they will cling to them and will not be cast off. For my part, I give my thanks to the gods, who have not put it into the Persians' heads to make war upon Lydia." This is what

he said, but he did not convince Croesus; indeed, the Persians before they conquered the Lydians had nothing of delicate luxury nor any good thing at all.

The Cappadocians are called Syrians by the Greeks. These Syrians were, before they were ruled by Persians, the subjects of the Medes and were at this time the subjects of Cyrus. For the dividing boundary of the Median and Lydian empires was the river Halys, which flows from the Armenian mountains through Cilicia and afterwards flows with the Matieni on the right and Phrygians on the left. When it has passed their territories, it flows north and divides the Syrian Cappadocians on the right from the Paphlagonians on the left. So the Halys cuts off almost the whole of the lower part of Asia, from the Mediterranean opposite Cyprus to the Euxine. This is the neck of all this land, and it is, in length of journeying, five days of travel for an active man.

So Croesus advanced into Cappadocia, for these reasons: because he longed for additional territory to that which was his portion but, mostly, because he trusted in the oracle and because he wanted to take vengeance on Cyrus, son of Cambyses, on behalf of Astyages, son of Cyaxares, who was his, Croesus', brother-in-law and king of Media and had been subjugated by Cyrus. Croesus had become brother-in-law to Astyages in the following way. A troop of nomad Scythians, having split off from the rest, stole away into Media. At that time the ruler of Media was Cyaxares, son of Phraortes, son of Deioces. These Scythians King Cyaxares at first treated well, as being his suppliants—so well, indeed, that he entrusted to them some boys, to learn their language and their mastery of the bow. As time went on, the Scythians went constantly to the hunt for the king and constantly brought something home. But one day it so fell out that they took nothing. When they returned empty-handed, Cyaxares, who, as he proved herein, was extreme in his temper, treated them very harshly—and shamefully as well. In so suffering from Cyaxares the Scythians thought they had suffered something that was a personal degradation, and they formed a plot, which was to chop up one of the boys who were their pupils and, having dressed him as they were wont to do their wild game, to bring it to Cyaxares as though it were indeed such and, after that, to betake themselves with all speed to the court of Alyattes, the son of Sadyattes, at Sardis. This is exactly what happened. Cyaxares and those who were dining with him tasted of this meat, and the Scythians, having done as they planned, became suppliants of Alyattes.

After this, inasmuch as Alyattes refused to give up the Scythians to Cyaxares when he demanded them, war broke out between the Lydians and the Medes and lasted for five years, and during this period

sometimes the Medes won and sometimes the Lydians; there was also one night battle. As the war was proving to be a draw between the two peoples, in the sixth year it happened that during a fight, when the combatants were already closely engaged, suddenly day became night. The occurrence of this eclipse of daylight had already been predicted to the Ionians by Thales of Miletus, and he had set as his limiting date the year in which the eclipse actually took place. But the Lydians and the Medes, when they saw night instead of day before their eyes, gave over the fight, and both were more eager on their own behalf to make peace. Those who brought the two sides together were Syennesis the Cilician and Labynetus of Babylon. It was these who exerted themselves to bring about a sworn pact and an exchange of marriages; for their decision was that Alyattes should give his daughter, Aryenis, to Astyages, son of Cyaxares; without such strong ties, they said, agreements are not wont to be strong and to persist. These peoples make their sworn agreements as the Greeks do; and besides, when they cut the skin of their arms, they lick one another's blood.

This was the Astyages whom Cyrus had subjugated, and, although he was Cyrus' own grandfather on his mother's side, Cyrus held him in captivity on a charge that I shall declare later in my history. Croesus had this ground for blame against Cyrus when he consulted the oracle as to whether he should attack the Persians, and when that false-coin answer came his way, Croesus, supposing that it was truly in his favor, invaded Persian territory. When he came to the river Halys, he brought his army across—over existing bridges, in my opinion, though the general report of the Greeks is different. They say that Thales of Miletus brought the army across for him, and their story is this: Croesus was in perplexity as to how his army should cross the river, for (they will have it so) the bridges had not yet been built, and Thales was in Croesus' camp, and it was he who contrived that the river, which flowed on the left hand of the army, should flow on the right hand also. This (they say) is how he did it: he began by digging a deep ditch above the camp, and, making it moon-shaped, he led the stream away from its old course so that it would flow into the trench behind the army and, passing the camp, again issue into its old channel; as soon as it was split, the river would become fordable at both places. There are, indeed, still others who say that the old stream was entirely dried up. I personally do not accept this; for how, then, on their homeward course, did they cross it again?

Croesus, when he had crossed with his army, came in Cappadocian territory to what is called Pteria. Pteria is the strongest part of all that country and lies on a line with the city of Sinope, on the Euxine

Sea. There he encamped, destroying the farms of the Syrians, and he captured the city of the Pterians and made slaves of the people, and he captured all the neighboring towns; moreover, he drove the Syrians from their homes, though they had done him no manner of harm. Cyrus, on his side, gathered his own army and took on, as well, all the peoples who lived between him and Croesus, and he then confronted Croesus. (Before he set out to march at all, he sent heralds to the Ionians and tried to make them desert Croesus. But the Ionians would not listen to him.) So when Cyrus came and encamped over against Croesus, then and there in that land of Pteria they fought against one another with might and main. The battle was fierce, and many fell on both sides. At last they broke off, at the onset of night, without either having the victory; so hard did the two armies fight.

Now Croesus blamed the size of his army—and indeed, the army that had fought for him was far smaller than that of Cyrus—and, because it was the numbers he blamed, on the day following the battle, when Cyrus made no further attack, Croesus moved away to Sardis, intending to summon the Egyptians to help him in accordance with the sworn treaty he had made with Amasis, king of Egypt—a treaty he had made even before the one with the Lacedaemonians. He also sent for the Babylonians, since with them, too, he had made an alliance (the king of the Babylonians at the time being Labynetus), and he sent messages to the Lacedaemonians that they should be with him by a fixed date. His plan was that, when he had assembled all these and collected his own army, he would wait the winter out and, at the very beginning of spring, invade Persia. Such were his thoughts when he came to Sardis; and he sent off heralds, forewarning all that, in accordance with their alliance, they should assemble in Sardis by the fifth month from then. As for the army that he had on foot, which had fought the Persians, he dispersed the mercenary part altogether; for he never expected that Cyrus, after so equal an engagement as they had fought, would drive on to Sardis.

As Croesus thus reflected, lo! the whole of the outer part of his city was filled with snakes. When these appeared, the horses gave over their grazing on their pastures and came and ate up the snakes. To Croesus, seeing this, it seemed a portent—as indeed it was—and he sent straightway to the Telmessian diviners. The embassy arrived and learned from the Telmessians what the portent meant to signify, but matters did not so fall out that they could bring the message back to Croesus. For before they could sail back to Sardis, Croesus was captured. But this was the judgment that the Telmessians passed: that Croesus might look for a host, of alien speech, coming upon his

land and that, when it came, it would overcome those who were native there; for, they said, "The serpent is a child of the land, and the horse an enemy and a newcomer." This was the answer given by the Telmessians to Croesus when he was already a prisoner, though when they gave it they had no knowledge of what had befallen Sardis or Croesus himself.

Now the moment Croesus moved away after the battle of Pteria, Cyrus, understanding very well that Croesus, once he had gone away, would disband his army, took counsel. What he found was that it would surely be to his advantage to march on Sardis as quickly as he might, before the power of the Lydians was rallied a second time. As he resolved the matter, so he put it into execution quickly; for he drove with his army into Lydia and came himself to Croesus as his own messenger. Croesus was in sore straits, as things had turned out so differently from what he had looked for; yet he led his Lydians out to battle. There was at this time no people in all Asia who were braver or more valiant soldiers than the Lydians. Their fighting was from horseback, where they carried great lances, and they were themselves excellent horsemen.

So the two sides met in the plain, the great treeless plain in front of Sardis. Through it there are rivers flowing, among others the Hyllus, and these break together into the biggest of all, called the Hermus, which, flowing from the mountain sacred to Mother Dindymene, issues into the sea at the city of Phocaea. Now when Cyrus saw the Lydians forming here for battle, because he was afraid of their cavalry he took the following measures on the suggestion of a man, Harpagus, who was a Mede. Cyrus had a number of camels that followed his army to transport the grain and the gear. All these he assembled, stripped them of their loads, and mounted men on them with gear appropriate to cavalrymen; and having so equipped them, he bade them charge Croesus' cavalry, in advance of the rest of the army. He ordered his infantry to follow the camels, and behind the infantry he stationed all his own cavalry. When they had all formed their ranks, he ordered his men to spare no Lydian and kill all before them, save only Croesus. Him they should not kill, even if he fought against them to resist capture. These were his instructions; and he arranged his camels opposite the horse for this reason: the horse fears the camel and cannot abide the sight or the smell of it. Cyrus' stratagem was designed to render the cavalry useless to Croesus, and it was the cavalry by which the Lydian hoped to win glory. Indeed, as soon as the battle was joined, the very moment the horses smelled the camels and saw them, they bolted back; and down went all the hopes for Croesus. Not that, for

the rest, the Lydians proved cowards; for as soon as they saw how it was, they jumped down from their horses and joined battle with the Persians on foot. But at last, when very many had fallen on both sides, the Lydians were routed; and being penned within the city walls, they were beleaguered by the Persians.

So, then, the siege had set in. Croesus, thinking that it would last a long time, sent from his fortress other messengers to his allies. The former messengers had gone about to warn them to gather in Sardis after five months' space, but these went to request them to come with all possible speed to the help of Croesus, for he was already beleaguered.

Among the other allies, he sent, of course, to Lacedaemon. Now it happened that at this very time the Spartans themselves were engaged in a quarrel with the Argives about a place called Thyrae; Thyrae was a part of Argive territory that the Lacedaemonians had cut off and occupied. (At this time the land to the west, as far as Malea, both the mainland and Cythera and the rest of the islands, all belonged to the Argives.) The Argives came against the Spartans, in defense of their own territory as it was being cut off; but then the two sides came to an agreement that three hundred of each should fight and, whichever prevailed, theirs the country should be, the mass of each army to go away to their own land and not remain to watch as the champions fought, for fear that the armies, if present, and seeing their own side being defeated, might rally to their help. They made the agreement and went away, and the chosen champions on each side, being left behind, engaged. So they fought and, as they were so equally matched, there were left out of the six hundred only three—two on the Argive side, Alcenor and Chromios, and, of the Lacedaemonians, Othryades. These were the survivors at nightfall. The two Argives, assuming that they were the victors, made off to Argos; but the Lacedaemonian, Othryades, having despoiled the Argive dead and carried their arms into his own army's camp, stood at his station. Next day both sides came to find out the news. For a while each of the two parties claimed the victory, the one because more of their men had survived, the other claiming that their opponents had left the field while their man had stood his ground and spoiled the enemy dead. Finally, from disputing, they fell to and fought. Though the losses on both sides were heavy, the Lacedaemonians won. (It is from this time that the Argives, who had formerly, of fixed custom, worn their hair long, now shaved their heads close and made a rule of it, with a curse to back it, that no Argive man should grow his hair long, and no woman among them wear gold, until they should recover Thyrae. The Lacedaemonians introduced a rule that was the contrary; for they, before this, had never worn

their hair long, but after this they did so.) The story goes that the single survivor of the three hundred, Othryades, put to shame that he alone should come back to Sparta when all his comrades-at-arms had perished, made away with himself right there in Thyreae.

Such was the condition of the Spartans when the envoy from Sardis arrived to beg them to send help to the beleaguered Croesus. Despite their own difficulties, the Spartans, on hearing the herald, were minded to help. But hardly were their preparations made and their ships ready when there came another message, that the Lydian fortress had fallen and that Croesus himself was made prisoner. So the Spartans, though they were very sorry for it, gave over their aid.

This is how Sardis was captured. When the fourteenth day came upon the beleaguered Croesus, Cyrus sent horsemen throughout his army and proclaimed the gifts he would give to the first man who should mount the wall of the fortress. After this the army made trial of it but had no success. When all the rest had given over the attempt, a Mardian named Hyroeades tried the approach at that part of the citadel where no guard had been set; for there was no fear that the citadel would be taken at this point, as the approach was sheer and impossible of attack. This was the only place where the former king of Sardis, Meles, had not carried round the lion cub that his concubine had borne him. The Telmessians had given their judgment that, once the lion cub had been carried round the walls, Sardis would be impregnable. Meles carried the beast around the rest of the fortress, where it was assailable, but he neglected this place, as being too sheer and impossible of attack. This is the side of the city that faces Mount Tmolus. Now this Mardian, Hyroeades, on the day before had seen one of the Lydian soldiers come down this part of the acropolis after his helmet, which had rolled down from above, and he retrieved it. The Mardian noticed that and reflected on it. Then, at the same spot, he climbed up, and other Persians with him; and as more and more of them joined the others, Sardis was captured, like that, and the whole town sacked.

But as for Croesus himself, this is what happened. He had a son, of whom I have spoken before, who was in other respects a handsome lad but was dumb. In the days of his former well-being, Croesus had taken all measures on the boy's behalf and, besides his other care for him, he had sent to consult the oracle at Delphi concerning him. The Pythia answered as follows:

Lydian by breed, king of many, still are you a great fool,
Croesus:

Wish not to hear, in your halls, the voice so much prayed for,
the voice
Of your son as he speaks. Nay, for you, far better it were to go
wanting;
For the first day he speaks it shall be a day of luckless
destruction.

Now, when the fortress was being taken, there came upon Croesus, to kill him, one of the Persians who did not know him. Croesus saw the man coming at him, but in his misfortune he was past caring; it was all one to him that he should be stricken and die. But the son who was dumb, when he saw the Persian approaching, his voice broke from him through his fear and the disaster, and he called out, "Sir, it is Croesus; do not kill him." This is the first time the boy spoke, and directly after that he spoke all the rest of his life.

So the Persians held Sardis and made Croesus their prisoner. Fourteen years he had reigned and fourteen days been besieged, and he had indeed fulfilled the oracle, in that he had destroyed a mighty empire—his own. The Persians took him and brought him to Cyrus. Cyrus heaped a huge pyre and set Croesus on the top of it, fettered in chains, with fourteen of the children of the Lydians along with him. He had in his mind either to offer these firstfruits to some god or other, or perhaps he wished to fulfill some vow he had made, or perhaps even, since he had heard that Croesus was a god-fearing man, he set him on the pyre to know whether some one of Those-that-are-Divine would rescue him from being burned alive. This, anyway, they say, is what he did. Now as Croesus stood upon the pyre, there came into his head, for all that he was in such calamity, that word of Solon: "No one of them that are living is blessed." How that word had been uttered with god to back it! As this came to him, he heaved a great sigh and broke into lamentation. He had till then held his peace a great while, but now three times he called out the name "Solon!" Cyrus heard him and told his interpreters to ask Croesus whom it was he called on. They approached Croesus and asked. For a while Croesus was silent, but they forced him to answer, and he said, "One whom I would have every ruler meet; more than a fortune I would have it so." His answer was so obscure that they asked him again what it was he said. And, as they were instant and bore hard on him, he told the story: of how at the beginning there had come to him this Solon, the Athenian, and how he had surveyed all the blessings that he, Croesus, had and had made little of them all ("Thus and thus it was," he said), and how it had all befallen himself as the man had said. "But it concerns me," said Croesus, "no more than every man in the world, and especially those

who are in their own eyes blessed.” So Croesus told his story, and, as he did so, the fire had been lit and the edges of it were burning. Cyrus listened to the interpreters telling him what Croesus said, and his mind was changed; he recognized that he too was a man and that it was another man, no whit less in great fortune than himself, whom he was giving alive to the fire; besides, he was afraid of what he must pay in retribution and thought again how nothing of all that is in the world of men could be secure. He bade them quench the fire, even as it burned, with all the speed they could, and bring Croesus down and those that were with him. The men tried to do so but could gain no mastery of the fire.

Then, as the Lydians tell the story, Croesus became aware of Cyrus’ change of heart, and when he saw every man striving to quench the fire and no longer able to do so, he called in a loud voice to Apollo, bidding him, if ever he had received any gift of his that was pleasing, to come to his rescue and deliver him out of his present evil. With tears he called upon the god, and suddenly, out of a clear sky, with no wind in it, there gathered clouds, and a storm burst and a violent rain with it; and the fire was quenched. So Cyrus knew for certain that Croesus was loved of god and a good man, and he had him down from the pyre and asked him, “Croesus, who of all mankind persuaded you to make war upon my land and to be my enemy rather than my friend?” The other answered, “My lord, I myself did—to your good fortune and to my ill fortune; but the cause of it was the god of the Greeks, who incited me to fight. For no one is, of himself, so foolish as to prefer war to peace; in the one, children bury their fathers; in the other, fathers their children. I suppose, however, it was the will of the gods that this should have happened so.”

These were his words, and Cyrus freed him of his chains and set him beside himself and took much thought for him; as he gazed, he admired him, and so did all the courtiers. But Croesus was in the grip of his own thoughts and was silent. After a while he turned and, as he saw the Persians ravaging the city of the Lydians, he said: “My lord, shall I tell you a thought I have just had, or should I, for now, hold my peace?” Cyrus bade him say cheerfully whatever he liked. At which Croesus asked this question: “What is this great concourse of people doing with such eagerness?” “Plundering and sacking your city and your possessions,” said Cyrus. But Croesus answered, “It is no city of mine, and there is no property of mine for them to ravage. I have no share at all any more in any of these things. What they are sacking and pillaging is yours.”

What Croesus said made an impression on Cyrus, and bidding the rest of the people about him to be gone, he asked Croesus what it was that was so particular that he saw being done there. Said Croesus: "Since the gods have given me to you as your slave, I think it right that, if I see somewhat further into any matter than the others, I should signify it to you. The Persians are by nature arrogant—and they are poor. If now you stand by and watch these men plunder and capture so much property, this is what you must look for from them: the one who wins most of the plunder you may expect next to see as a rebel against yourself. If what I say finds favor with you, do this: from among your own bodyguards take sentries and place them at all the gates. These shall take the stuff from all the men that are carrying it out, telling them that the property must be tithed—that one tenth of it must be dedicated to Zeus. Thus you will not be hated by them for taking away their property violently; they will confess that what you do is done justly and so give you willingly what you ask."

Cyrus was delighted at these words, for he thought it was good advice. After praising Croesus warmly and instructing his bodyguards to do what Croesus had suggested, he said to Croesus, "Croesus, since as man and king you are prepared to do so well, both in word and deed, ask of me whatever gift you please, to be yours at once." Croesus said, "Master mine, you will give me most pleasure if you suffer me to send these chains to that god of the Greeks whom I especially honored and to ask of him whether it is a rule with him to cheat those that do him good." Cyrus asked him what complaint against the god lay behind the request, and Croesus repeated the story to him, of all his own intentions, and of the answers of the oracles, and chiefly of the dedicatory gifts, and how it was that, incited by the oracle, he had made war on Persia. As he told the tale, he came back again to his request that he might be given the chance to insult the god in this matter. At this Cyrus laughed and said, "Croesus, this you shall obtain of me, and anything else that at any time you shall need." When Croesus heard that, he sent some of his Lydians to Delphi and ordered them to set the fetters on the threshold of the temple there and ask the god if he were not ashamed of having incited Croesus by his oracles to make war on Persia with the story that he would destroy Cyrus' power. "Here," they should say, "are the firstfruits of that conquest," and at that should show the chains. That was to be their question of the god and, besides this, another: whether it was the rule for the Greek gods to be ungrateful.

It is said that when the Lydians came and said what they had been instructed, the Pythia answered as follows: "Fate that is decreed, no

one can escape, not even a god. Croesus has paid for the offense of his ancestor in the fifth generation, who, being a bodyguard of the Heraclidae, following the lead of a treacherous woman, slew his master and took his honor, which in no way befit himself. Loxias was eager that the destruction of Sardis should fall in the time of Croesus' children rather than in his own, but he proved unable to turn aside the Fates. Yet what little they allowed him, he accomplished and did Croesus service; for he postponed the capture of Sardis by three years. So let Croesus know that his fall is three years later than the destined moment. Secondly, the god came to his rescue when he was burning. As for the oracle that was given, Croesus does not rightly find fault. For the prophecy given by Loxias ran: if Croesus made war upon Persia, he would destroy a mighty empire. Now, in the face of that, if he was going to be well advised, he should have sent and inquired again, whether it was his own empire or that of Cyrus that was spoken of. But Croesus did not understand what was said, nor did he make question again, and so he has no one to blame but himself. Furthermore, when he put his last question to the god, and Loxias spoke of the mule, not even that did Croesus comprehend. Truly, Cyrus was that mule. He was born of two parents of different races, whereof his mother was of the higher, his father of the lower, breed. For the mother was a Mede and Astyages' daughter, who was king of Media; but the father was a Persian and a subject of the Medes, and, being in every way beneath her, he cohabited with her that was his sovereign mistress." Such was the answer that the Pythia gave to the Lydians, and they brought it back to Sardis and told it to Croesus. When he heard it, he acknowledged that the fault had been none of the god's but his own. Such is the story of Croesus' empire and of the first conquest of Ionia.

There are many other dedications of Croesus throughout Greece besides those of which I have spoken. In Thebes, in Boeotia, there is a golden tripod, which he dedicated to Ismenian Apollo, and in Ephesus there are cows, all of gold, and many of the pillars there; and in the temple of Athena Pronaia at Delphi there is a great shield of gold. These were still surviving till my time, but others of the dedications had disappeared. There are also dedications of Croesus at Branchidae in Miletus that are, as I learn, equal in weight and alike to those at Delphi. Those at Delphi and those that he dedicated at the temple of Amphiaras were of his own estate and firstfruits of what he received from his father's wealth. But the rest of the dedications came from the property of one who was an enemy and had led a faction against Croesus before he was yet a king, a conspirator indeed, in the interest of Pantaleon, that this Pantaleon might become king of Lydia instead

of Croesus. Now Pantaleon was the son of Alyattes, and Croesus was therefore his brother, though not of the same mother; for Croesus was born to Alyattes of a Carian woman, but Pantaleon of an Ionian. When his father gave Croesus the rule and he had become master, Croesus killed the man who had conspired against him by drawing him across a carding comb. As for his estate, Croesus had already declared it sacred to the god, and afterwards he dedicated it as I have said and in the places I have said. That, then, is enough of Croesus' dedications.

Plato,
Apology of Socrates

Athens stands as one of the most consequential cities in the history of the world. Its course displays the promise and peril of democracy and the potencies of the Greek *polis*. During the Archaic period, the

Greek innovation of a true alphabet, with vowels, made general literacy a possibility. (Glyphs and cuneiform were too complicated for use beyond a clerical class.) General literacy makes more egalitarian social existence possible, as it enables public transparency, including the promulgation of law codes—which hedge aristocratic caprice and self-assertion. Commerce created new social opportunities. And money (in the form of coinage) helped “rationalize” social life, eroding the solidity of traditional privileges. These forces, which would contribute to the Ionian awakening in philosophy, were at the same time the forces behind an increasing democratization. Philosophy and democracy do not leave immemorial traditions unquestioned. The spirit of inquiry, a sense of wonder before reality and realities, gives rise to philosophy, and can also inspire democracy when it turns a critical eye on what have been considered unquestionable social facts.

Paradoxically, the way of warfare advanced democratization in Greece. Homer recalls a world of hero-kings and their warrior bands, but he lived during the Dark Ages when a new way of fighting developed: the phalanx of the hoplite infantry, in which the citizen body of a Greek *polis* was deployed in a compact formation of heavily armored, and mutually dependent, soldiers.

This mass deployment came with political power. These citizen armies would have served as general assemblies for public deliberation. The Mycenaean civilization had king and council (aristocracy): now the assembly, or “the people,” were adding their voice. As the Archaic period wore on, many Greek *poleis* got rid of their kings. From aristocracy towards increasing egalitarianism: this was the true Herodotean “Western” dynamic. The hoplite victory at Marathon was part of this trend, and the trireme rowers, members of the proletariat, who won the day at Salamis, made the logical completion of the arc irresistible. Athens realized a radical democracy in 462/1. But this was also the regime that would destroy itself in the Peloponnesian War—a regime dependent on slavery and imperialism.

The impact of Socrates (ca. 470-399 B.C.) on the human spirit is incalculable. He felt the Delphic injunction to “know thyself” at the ground of his being. Carrying out a divine mandate to examine every person he encountered (especially in that most characteristic space of the Greek *polis*, the *agora*) so as to inspire them to care for nothing more than the perfection of their souls, Socrates became the great martyr of philosophy as a way of life. After Sparta (with Persian help) defeated Athens in 404 B.C., it set up an oligarchic regime that came to be known as the Thirty Tyrants, who would carry out a reign of terror, executing hundreds. Socrates directly refused to be an instrument in one of these executions. He had distinguished himself in service to the democracy as a hoplite in three campaigns during the Peloponnesian War. His student Plato (ca. 427-ca. 347 B.C.) wrote the *Apology of Socrates* as an account of the trial of his teacher, who was executed by a restored democracy traumatized by tyranny. It seemed to the many that Socrates was destabilizing the social order in questioning traditional religion and accustomed ambitions. Socrates decisively shifted the emphasis in philosophy from science to ethics and politics. His obedience to an inner divine voice (*daimonion*) opened up a completely new horizon for humanity.

The executions of Socrates and Jesus blazed trails transcending the ways of the world. Plato’s luminous and unsurpassed philosophical corpus stems from the existential witness of Socrates. Plato never married or had children; instead, he founded the first school of philosophy at a gymnasium called the Academy, during the tumultuous fourth century B.C., when the independence of the Greek *poleis* was on the verge of extinction at the hands of imperial power. Plato challenged the poets (Homer and the tragedians), as well as the sophists (proto-lawyers) and argued for the importance of expertise (and for the reality of a philosophical expertise in being human), in the competition for the soul of democratic Athens. He did so, provocatively, by employing a highly literary writing style, forging a new partnership of *mythos* and *logos*. Plato dramatizes an attention to the divine source that personalizes and communalizes at the same time: truth creates a cosmos by civilizing the soul.

How you, men of Athens, have been affected by my accusers, I do not know. For my part, even I nearly forgot myself because of them, so persuasively did they speak. And yet they have said, so to speak, nothing true. I wondered most at one of the many falsehoods they told, when they said that you should beware that you are not deceived by me, since I am a clever speaker. They are not ashamed that they will immediately be refuted by me in deed, as soon as it becomes apparent that I am not a clever speaker at all; this seemed to me to be most shameless of them—unless of course they call a clever speaker the one who speaks the truth. For if this is what they are saying, then I too would agree that I am an orator—but not of their sort. So they, as I say, have said little or nothing true, while from me you will hear the whole truth—but by Zeus, men of Athens, not beautifully spoken speeches like theirs, adorned with phrases and words; rather, what you hear will be spoken at random in the words that I happen upon—for I trust that the things I say are just—and let none of you expect otherwise. For surely it would not be becoming, men, for someone of my age to come before you fabricating speeches like a youth. And, men of Athens, I do very much beg and beseech this of you: if you hear me speaking in my defense with the same speeches I am accustomed to speak both in the marketplace at the money-tables, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, do not wonder or make a disturbance because of this. For this is how it is: now is the first time I have come before a law court, at the age of seventy; hence I am simply foreign to the manner of speech here. So just as, if I really did happen to be a foreigner, you would surely sympathize with me if I spoke in the dialect and way in which I was raised, so also I do beg this of you now (and it is just, at least as it seems to me): leave aside the manner of my speech—for perhaps it may be worse, but perhaps better—and instead consider this very thing and apply your mind to this: whether the things I say are just or not. For this is the virtue of a judge, while that of an orator is to speak the truth.

So first, men of Athens, it is just for me to speak in defense against the first false charges against me and the first accusers, and next against the later charges and the later accusers. For many have accused me to you, even long ago, talking now for many years and saying nothing true; and I fear them more than Anytus and those around him, although they too are dangerous. But the others are more dangerous, men. They got hold of the many of you from childhood, and they accused me and persuaded you—although it is no more true than the present charge—that there is a certain Socrates, a wise man a thinker on the things aloft, who has investigated all things under the earth, and who makes the weaker speech the stronger. Those, men of Athens,

who have scattered this report about, are my dangerous accusers. For their listeners hold that investigators of these things also do not believe in gods. Besides, there are many of these accusers, and they have been accusing for a long time now. Moreover, they spoke to you at the age when you were most trusting, when some of you were children and youths, and they accused me in a case that simply went by default, for no one spoke in my defense. And the most unreasonable thing of all is that it is not even possible to know and to say their names, unless a certain one happens to be a comic poet. Those who persuaded you by using envy and slander—and those who persuaded others, after being convinced themselves—all of these are most difficult to get at. For it is also not possible to have any of them come forward here and to refute him, but it is necessary for me simply to speak in my defense as though fighting with shadows and refuting with no one to answer. So you too must deem it to be as I say: that there have been two groups of accusers, the ones accusing me now, and the others long ago of whom I speak: and you must also suppose that I should first speak in defense against the latter, for you heard them accusing me earlier and much more than these later ones here.

Well, then, a defense speech must be made, men of Athens, and an attempt must be made in this short time to take away from you this slander, which you acquired over a long time. Now I would wish that it may turn out like this, if it is in any way better both for you and for me, and that I may accomplish something by making a defense speech. But I suppose this is hard, and I am not at all unaware of what sort of thing it is. Nevertheless, let this proceed in whatever way is dear to the god, but the law must be obeyed and a defense speech must be made.

So let us take up from the beginning what the accusation is, from which has arisen the slander against me—which, in fact, is what Meletus trusted in when he brought this indictment against me. Well, then. What did the slanderers say to slander me? Their sworn statement, just as though they were accusers, must be read: “Socrates does injustice and is meddlesome, by investigating the things under the earth and the heavenly things, and by making the weaker speech the stronger, and by teaching others these same things.” It is something like this. For you yourselves also used to see these things in the comedy of Aristophanes: a certain Socrates was carried around there, claiming that he was treading on air and spouting much other drivel about which I have no expertise, either much or little. And I do not say this to dishonor this sort of knowledge, if anyone is wise in such things (may I never be prosecuted with such great lawsuits by

Meletus!); but in fact I, men of Athens, have no share in these things. Again, I offer the many of you as witnesses, and I maintain that you should teach and tell each other, those of you who have ever heard me conversing and there are many such among you—tell each other, then, if any of you ever heard me conversing about such things, either much or little, and from this you will recognize that the same holds also for the other things that the many say about me.

But in fact none of these things is so; and if you have heard from anyone that I attempt to educate human beings and make money from it, that is not true either. Though this too seems to me to be noble, if one should be able to educate human beings, like Gorgias of Leontini, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis. For each of them, men, is able, going into each of the cities, to persuade the young—who can associate with whomever of their own citizens they wish to for free - they persuade these young men to leave off their associations with the latter, and to associate with themselves instead, and to give them money and acknowledge gratitude besides.

And as for that, there is another man here, from Paros, a wise man, who I perceived was in town; for I happened to meet a man who has paid more money to sophists than all the others, Callias, the son of Hipponicus. So I questioned him (for he has two sons):

“Callias,” I said, “if your two sons had been born colts or calves, we would have been able to get and hire an overseer for them who could make the two of them noble and good in their appropriate virtue, and he would have been someone from among those skilled with horses or skilled in farming. But as it is, since they are two human beings, whom do you have in mind to get as an overseer for the two of them? Who is knowledgeable in such virtue, that of human being and citizen? For I suppose you have considered it, since you possess sons. Is there someone,” I said, “or not?”

“Quite so,” he said.

“Who,” I said, “and where is he from, and for how much does he teach?” “Evenus,” he said, “Socrates, from Paros: five minae.” And I regarded Evenus as blessed if he should truly have this art and teaches at such a modest rate. As for myself, I would be pluming and priding myself on it if I had knowledge of these things. But I do not have knowledge of them, men of Athens. Perhaps, then, one of you might retort, “Well, Socrates, what is your affair? Where have these slanders against you come from? For surely if you were in fact practicing nothing more uncommon than others, such a report and account would not then have arisen, unless you were doing something different from

the many. So tell us what it is, so that we do not deal unadvisedly with you." In this, it seems to me, what the speaker says is just, and I will try to demonstrate to you what ever it is that has brought me this name and slander. So listen. Now perhaps I will seem to some of you to be joking. Know well, however, that I will tell you the whole truth. For I, men of Athens, have gotten this name through nothing but a certain wisdom. Just what sort of wisdom is this? That which is perhaps human wisdom; for probably I really am wise in this. But those of whom I just spoke might perhaps be wise in some wisdom greater than human, or else I cannot say what it is. For I, at least, do not have knowledge of it, but whoever asserts that I do lies and speaks in order to slander me.

Now please, men of Athens, do not make a disturbance, not even if I seem to you to be boasting somewhat. For "not mine is the story" that I will tell; rather, I will refer it to a speaker trustworthy to you. Of my wisdom, if indeed it is wisdom of any kind, and what sort of thing it is, I will offer for you as witness the god in Delphi. Now you know Chaerephon, no doubt. He was my comrade from youth as well as a comrade of your multitude, and he shared in your recent exile and returned with you. You do know what sort of man Chaerephon was, how vehement he was in whatever he would set out to do. And in particular he once even went to Delphi and dared to consult the oracle about this—now as I say, do not make disturbances, men—and he asked whether there was anyone wiser than I. The Pythia replied that no one was wiser. And concerning these things his brother here will be a witness for you, since he himself has met his end.

Now consider why I say these things: I am going to teach you where the slander against me has come from. When I heard these things, I pondered them like this: "What ever is the god saying, and what riddle is he posing? For I am conscious that I am not at all wise, either much or little. So what ever is he saying when he claims that I am wisest? Surely he is not saying something false, at least; for that is not sanctioned for him." And for a long time I was at a loss about what ever he was saying, but then very reluctantly I turned to something like the following investigation of it. I went to one of those reputed to be wise, on the ground that there, if anywhere, I would refute the divination and show the oracle, "This man is wiser than I, but you declared that I was wisest." So I considered him thoroughly—I need not speak of him by name, but he was one of the politicians—and when I considered him and conversed with him, men of Athens, I was affected something like this: it seemed to me that this man seemed to be wise, both to many other human beings and most of all to himself,

but that he was not. And then I tried to show him that he supposed he was wise, but was not. So from this I became hateful both to him and to many of those present.

For my part, as I went away, I reasoned with regard to myself: "I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not know, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I am likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know."

From there I went to someone else, to one of those reputed to be wiser than he, and these things seemed to me to be the same. And there I became hateful both to him and to many others. After this, then, I kept going to one after another, all the while perceiving with pain and fear that I was becoming hated. Nevertheless it seemed to be necessary to regard the matter of the god as most important. So I had to go, in considering what the oracle was saying, to all those reputed to know something. And by the dog, men of Athens—for it is necessary to speak the truth before you—I swear I was affected something like this: those with the best reputations seemed to me nearly the most deficient, in my investigation in accordance with the god, while others with more paltry reputations seemed to be men more fit in regard to being prudent. Indeed, I must display my wandering to you as a performing of certain labors so that the divination would turn out to be unrefuted. After the politicians I went to the poets, those of tragedies and dithyrambs, and the others, in order that there I would catch myself in the act of being more ignorant than they. So I would take up those poems of theirs which it seemed to me they had worked on the most, and I would ask them thoroughly what they meant, so that I might also learn something from them at the same time. I am ashamed to tell you the truth, men; nevertheless, it must be said. Almost everyone present, so to speak, would have spoken better than the poets did about the poetry that they themselves had made. So again, also concerning the poets, I soon recognized that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired, like the diviners and those who deliver oracles. For they too say many noble things, but they know nothing of what they speak. It was apparent to me that the poets are also affected in the same sort of way. At the same time, I perceived that they supposed, on account of their poetry, that they were the wisest of human beings also in the other things, in which they were not. So I went away from there too supposing that I had turned out to be superior to them in the very same thing in which I was to the politicians.

Finally, then, I went to the manual artisans. For I was conscious that I had knowledge of nothing, so to speak, but I knew that I would discover that they, at least, had knowledge of many noble things. And I was not played false about this: they did have knowledge of things which I did not have knowledge of, and in this way they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen also seemed to me to go wrong in the same way as the poets: because he performed his art nobly, each one deemed himself wisest also in the other things, the greatest things—and this discordant note of theirs seemed to hide that wisdom. So I asked myself on behalf of the oracle whether I would prefer to be as I am, being in no way wise in their wisdom or ignorant in their ignorance, or to have both things that they have. I answered myself and the oracle that it profits me to be just as I am.

This is the examination, men of Athens, from which I have incurred many hatreds, the sort that are harshest and gravest, so that many slanders have arisen from them, and I got this name of being “wise.” For those present on each occasion suppose that I myself am wise in the things concerning which I refute someone else, whereas it is probable, men, that really the god is wise, and that in this oracle he is saying that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. And he appears to say this of Socrates and to have made use of my name in order to make me a pattern, as if he would say, “That one of you, human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, has become cognizant that in truth he is worth nothing with respect to wisdom.”

That is why even now I still go around seeking and investigating in accordance with the god any townsman or foreigner I suppose to be wise. And whenever someone does not seem so to me, I come to the god’s aid and show that he is not wise. And because of this occupation, I have had no leisure, either to do any of the things of the city worth speaking of or any of the things of my family. Instead, I am in ten-thousandfold poverty because of my devotion to the god.

In addition to these things, the young who follow me of their own accord—those who have the most leisure, the sons of the wealthiest—enjoy hearing human beings examined. And they themselves often imitate me, and in turn they attempt to examine others. And then, I suppose, they discover a great abundance of human beings who suppose they know something, but know little or nothing. Thereupon, those examined by them are angry at me, not at themselves, and they say that Socrates is someone most disgusting and that he corrupts the young. And whenever someone asks them, “By doing what and teaching what?” they have nothing to say, but are ignorant. So in order not to seem to be at a loss, they say the things that are ready

at hand against all who philosophize: “the things aloft and under the earth” and “not believing in gods” and “making the weaker speech the stronger.” For I do not suppose they would be willing to speak the truth, that it becomes quite clear that they pretend to know, but know nothing. So since they are, I suppose, ambitious and vehement and many, and since they speak about me in an organized and persuasive way, they have filled up your ears, slandering me vehemently for a long time.

From among these men, Meletus attacked me, and Anytus and Lycon, Meletus being vexed on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and the politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators. Therefore, as I said when I began, it would be a wonder to me if I should be able in this short time to take away from you this slander which has become so great. This is the truth for you, men of Athens; I am hiding nothing from you either great or small in my speech, nor am I holding anything back. And yet I know rather well that I incur hatred by these very things; which is also a proof that I speak the truth, and that this is the slander against me, and that these are its causes. Whether you investigate these things now or later, you will discover that this is so. So about the things which the first accusers accused me of, let this be a sufficient defense speech before you. But against Meletus, the “good and patriotic,” as he says, and the later accusers, I will try to speak next in my defense. Now again, just as though these were other accusers, let us take up their sworn statement. It is something like this: it asserts that Socrates does injustice by corrupting the young, and by not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other daimonia that are novel. The charge is of this sort. But let us examine each one of the parts of this charge. Now he asserts that I do injustice by corrupting the young. But I, men of Athens, assert that Meletus does injustice, in that he jests in a serious matter, easily bringing human beings to trial, pretending to be serious and concerned about things for which he never cared at all. That this is so, I will try to display to you as well. Now come here, Meletus, tell me: do you not regard it as most important how the youth will be the best possible?

[MELETUS] I do.

[SOCRATES] Come now, tell these men, who makes them better? For it is clear that you know, since you care, at least. For since you have discovered the one who corrupts them, as you say, namely me, you are bringing me before these men and accusing me. But the one who makes them better—come, tell them and reveal to them who it is.

Do you see, Meletus, that you are silent and have nothing to say? And yet does it not seem to be shameful to you, and a sufficient proof of just what I say, that you have never cared? But tell, my good man, who makes them better?

[MELETUS] The laws.

[SOCRATES] But I am not asking this, best of men, but rather what human being is it who knows first of all this very thing, the laws?

[MELETUS] These men, Socrates, the judges.

[SOCRATES] What are you saying, Meletus? Are these men here able to educate the young, and do they make them better?

[MELETUS] Very much so.

[SOCRATES] All of them, or some of them, and some not?

[MELETUS] All of them.

[SOCRATES] Well said, by Hera, and you speak of a great abundance of beneficers. What then? Do the listeners here make them better or not?

[MELETUS] These too.

[SOCRATES] And what about the Councilmen?

[MELETUS] The Councilmen too.

[SOCRATES] Well, Meletus, then surely those in the Assembly, the Assemblymen, do not corrupt the youth? Or do all those too make them better?

[MELETUS] Those too.

[SOCRATES] Then all the Athenians, as it appears, make them noble and good except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is this what you are saying?

[MELETUS] I do say this, most vehemently.

[SOCRATES] You have charged me with great misfortune. Now answer me. Does it seem to you to be so also concerning horses? That all human beings make them better, while one certain one is the corrupter? Or is it wholly opposite to this, that one certain one is able to make them better—or very few, those skilled with horses—while the many, if they ever associate with horses and use them, corrupt them? Is this not so, Meletus, both concerning horses, and all the other animals?

Of course it is, altogether so, whether you and Anytus deny or affirm it. For it would be a great happiness for the young if one alone corrupts them, while the others benefit them. But in fact, Meletus, you have sufficiently displayed that you never yet gave a thought to the young. And you are making your own lack of care plainly apparent, since you have cared nothing about the things for which you bring me in here.

But tell us further, Meletus, before Zeus, whether it is better to dwell among upright citizens or villainous ones?

Sir, answer. For surely I am asking nothing hard. Do not the villainous do something bad to whoever are nearest to them, while the good do something good?

[MELETUS] Quite so.

[SOCRATES] Is there anyone, then, who wishes to be harmed by those he associates with, rather than to be benefited? Keep answering, my good man. For the law orders you to answer. Is there anyone who wishes to be harmed?

[MELETUS] Of course not.

[SOCRATES] Come then, do you bring me in here saying that I voluntarily corrupt the young and make them more villainous, or involuntarily?

[MELETUS] Voluntarily, I say.

[SOCRATES] What then, Meletus? Are you so much wiser at your age than I at mine, that you have become cognizant that the bad always do something bad to those who are closest to them, and the good do something good; whereas I have come into so much ignorance that I am not even cognizant that if I ever do something wretched to any of my associates, I will risk getting back something bad from him? So that I do so much bad voluntarily, as you assert? Of this I am not convinced by you, Meletus, nor, do I suppose, is any other human being. But either I do not corrupt, or if I do corrupt, I do it involuntarily, so in both cases what you say is false.

And if I corrupt involuntarily, the law is not that you bring me in here for such involuntary wrongs, but that you take me aside in private to teach and admonish me. For it is clear that if I learn, I will at least stop doing what I do involuntarily. But you avoided associating with me and teaching me, and you were not willing to, but instead you brought me in here, where the law is to bring in those in need of punishment, not learning.

But in fact, men of Athens, what I was saying is already clear, that Meletus never cared about these things either much or little. Nevertheless, speak to us, how do you say that I corrupt the youth, Meletus? Or is it clear, according to the indictment that you brought, that it is by teaching them not to believe in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other daimonia that are novel? Do you not say that it is by teaching these things that I corrupt them?

[MELETUS] I certainly do say this, most vehemently!

[SOCRATES] Then before these very gods, Meletus, about whom our speech now is, speak to me and to these men still more plainly. For I am not able to understand whether you are saying that I teach them to believe that there are gods of some sort—and so I myself do believe that there are gods and am not completely atheistic and do not do injustice in this way—but that I do not believe in those in whom the city believes, but in others, and this is what you charge me with, that I believe in others. Or do you assert that I myself do not believe in gods at all and that I teach this to others?

[MELETUS] This is what I say, that you do not believe in gods at all.

[SOCRATES] Wondrous Meletus, why do you say this? Do I not even believe, then, that sun and moon are gods, as other human beings do?

[MELETUS] No, by Zeus, judges, since he declares that the sun is stone and the moon is earth.

[SOCRATES] Do you suppose you are accusing Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus? And do you so much despise these men here and suppose that they are so inexperienced in letters that they do not know that the books of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of these speeches? Moreover, do the young learn these things from me, when it is sometimes possible for them to buy them in the orchestra for a drachma, if the price is very high, and then to laugh at Socrates if he pretends that they are his own, especially since they are so strange? But before Zeus, is this how I seem to you? Do I believe there is no god?

[MELETUS] You certainly do not, by Zeus, not in any way at all!

[SOCRATES] You are unbelievable, Meletus, even, as you seem to me, to yourself. This man seems to me, men of Athens, to be very hubristic and unrestrained, and simply to have brought this indictment with a certain hubris and unrestraint and youthful rashness. He is like someone testing me by putting together a riddle: “Will Socrates the ‘wise’ recognize that I am jesting and contradicting myself, or will I deceive him and the rest of the listeners?” For he himself appears

to me to be contradicting himself in the indictment, as if he were to say, "Socrates does injustice by not believing in gods, but believing in gods." And yet this is the conduct of one who jokes.

Now consider with me, men, how he appears to me to be saying this. And you answer us, Meletus. But you others, as I begged of you from the beginning, please remember not to make disturbances if I make the speeches in my accustomed way.

Is there any human being, Meletus, who believes that there are human matters, but does not believe in human beings?

Let him keep answering, men, and let him not make disturbances again and again. Is there anyone who does not believe in horses, but believes in horse-matters? Or anyone who does not believe in flute-players, but believes in flute-matters?

There is not, best of men. If you do not wish to answer, I say it for you and for these others. But at least answer what comes next. Is there anyone who believes that there are daimonic matters, but does not believe in daimons?

[MELETUS] There is not.

[SOCRATES] How helpful you were by answering reluctantly when compelled by these men! Now then, you say that I believe in and teach daimonia; so whether they are novel or ancient, at any rate I do believe in daimonia according to your speech, and you also swore to this in the indictment. But if I believe in daimonia, then surely there is also a great necessity that I believe in daimons. Is this not so?

Of course it is. I set you down as agreeing, since you do not answer. And do we not believe that daimons are either gods or children of gods? Do you affirm this or not?

[MELETUS] Quite so.

[SOCRATES] Therefore if I do believe in daimons, as you say, and if, on the one hand, daimons are gods of some sort, then this would be what I say you are riddling and jesting about, when you say that I do not believe in gods, and again that I believe in gods, since in fact I do believe in daimons.

On the other hand, if daimons are certain bastard children of gods, whether from nymphs or from certain others of whom it is also said they are born, then what human being would believe that there are children of gods, but not gods? It would be as strange as if someone believed in children of horses or asses—mules—but did not believe

that there are horses and asses. But, Meletus, there is no way that you did not bring this indictment either to test us in these things, or else because you were at a loss about what true injustice you might charge me with. There is no device by which you could persuade any human being who is even slightly intelligent, that it is not the part of the same man to believe in both daimonia and divine things, and further that this same man believes in neither daimons nor gods nor heroes.

But in fact, men of Athens, that I do not do injustice according to Meletus' indictment, does not seem to me to require much of a defense speech, but even this is sufficient. But what I was saying earlier—that I have incurred much hatred, and among many men—know well that this is true. And this is what will convict me, if it does convict me: not Meletus or Anytus, but the slander and envy of the many. This has convicted many other good men too, and I suppose it will also convict me. And there is no danger that it will stop with me.

Perhaps, then, someone might say, “Then are you not ashamed, Socrates, of having followed the sort of pursuit from which you now run the risk of dying?”

I would respond to him with a just speech: “What you say is ignoble, fellow, if you suppose that a man who is of even a little benefit should take into account the danger of living or dying, but not rather consider this alone whenever he acts: whether his actions are just or unjust, and the deeds of a good man or a bad. For according to your speech, those of the demigods who met their end at Troy would be paltry, especially the son of Thetis. Rather than endure anything shameful, he despised danger so much that when his mother (a goddess) spoke to him as he was eager to kill Hector—something like this, as I suppose: ‘Son, if you avenge the murder of your comrade Patroclus and kill Hector, you yourself will die; for straightway,’ she says, ‘after Hector, your fate is ready at hand’—he, upon hearing this, belittled death and danger, fearing much more to live as a bad man and not to avenge his friends. ‘Straightway,’ he says, ‘may I die, after I inflict a penalty on the doer of injustice, so that I do not stay here ridiculous beside the curved ships, a burden on the land.’ Surely you do not suppose that he gave any thought to death and danger?”

This is the way it is, men of Athens, in truth. Wherever someone stations himself, holding that it is best, or wherever he is stationed by a ruler, there he must stay and run the risk, as it seems to me, and not take into account death or anything else compared to what is shameful. So I would have done terrible deeds, men of Athens, if,

when the rulers whom you elected to rule me stationed me in Potidaea and Amphipolis and at Delium, I stayed then where they stationed me and ran the risk of dying like anyone else, but when the god stationed me, as I supposed and assumed, ordering me to live philosophizing and examining myself and others, I had then left my station because I feared death or any other matter whatever.

Terrible that would be, and truly then someone might justly bring me into a law court, saying that I do not believe that there are gods, since I would be disobeying the divination, and fearing death, and supposing that I am wise when I am not. For to fear death, men, is in fact nothing other than to seem to be wise, but not to be so. For it is to seem to know what one does not know: no one knows whether death does not even happen to be the greatest of all goods for the human being; but people fear it as though they knew well that it is the greatest of evils. And how is this not that reproachable ignorance of supposing that one knows what one does not know? But I, men, am perhaps distinguished from the many human beings also here in this, and if I were to say that I am wiser than anyone in anything, it would be in this: that since I do not know sufficiently about the things in Hades, so also I suppose that I do not know. But I do know that it is bad and shameful to do injustice and to disobey one's better, whether god or human being. So compared to the bad things which I know are bad, I will never fear or flee the things about which I do not know whether they even happen to be good.

So that not even if you let me go now and if you disobey Anytus—who said that either I should not have been brought in here at the beginning, or, since I was brought in, that it is not possible not to kill me (he said before you that if I am acquitted, soon your sons, pursuing what Socrates teaches, will all be completely corrupted—if you would say to me with regard to this, “Socrates, for now we will not obey Anytus; we will let you go, but on this condition: that you no longer spend time in this investigation or philosophize; and if you are caught still doing this, you will die—if you would let me go, then, as I said, on these conditions, I would say to you, “I, men of Athens, salute you and love you, but I will obey the god rather than you; and as long as I breathe and am able to, I will certainly not stop philosophizing, and I will exhort you and explain this to whomever of you I happen to meet, and I will speak just the sorts of things I am accustomed to: Best of men, you are an Athenian, from the city that is greatest and best reputed for wisdom and strength: are you not ashamed that you care for having as much money as possible, and reputation, and honor, but that you neither care for nor give thought to prudence, and

truth, and how your soul will be the best possible?’ And if one of you disputes it and asserts that he does care, I will not immediately let him go, nor will I go away, but I will speak to him and examine and test him. And if he does not seem to me to possess virtue, but only says he does, I will reproach him, saying that he regards the things worth the most as the least important, and the paltrier things as more important. I will do this to whomever, younger or older, I happen to meet, both foreigner and townsman, but more so to the townsmen, inasmuch as you are closer to me in kin.

“Know well, then, that the god orders this. And I suppose that until now no greater good has arisen for you in the city than my service to the god. For I go around and do nothing but persuade you, both younger and older, not to care for bodies and money before, nor as vehemently as, how your soul will be the best possible. I say: ‘Not from money does virtue come, but from virtue comes money and all of the other good things for human beings both privately and publicly.’ If, then, I corrupt the young by saying these things, they may be harmful. But if someone asserts that what I say is other than this, he speaks nonsense. With a view to these things, men of Athens,” I would say, “either obey Anytus or not, and either let me go or not, since I would not do otherwise, not even if I were going to die many times.”

Do not make disturbances, men of Athens, but abide by what I begged of you, not to make disturbances at the things I say, but to listen. For, as I suppose, you will even be helped by listening. For in fact I am going to tell you certain other things at which you will perhaps cry out; but do not do this in any way. For know well that if you kill me, since I am the sort of man that I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourselves. For Meletus or Anytus would not harm me—he would not even be able to—for I do not suppose it is sanctioned that a better man be harmed by a worse. Perhaps, however, he might kill or banish or dishonor me. But this man no doubt supposes, and others too, that these are great evils, while I do not suppose that these are, but much rather doing what this man here is now doing: attempting to kill a man unjustly.

So I, men of Athens, am now far from making a defense speech on my own behalf, as someone might suppose. I do it rather on your behalf, so that you do not do something wrong concerning the gift of the god to you by voting to condemn me. For if you kill me, you will not easily discover another of my sort, who—even if it is rather ridiculous to say—has simply been set upon the city by the god, as though upon a great and well-born horse who is rather sluggish because of his great size and needs to be awakened by some gadfly. Just so, in fact, the

god seems to me to have set me upon the city as someone of this sort: I awaken and persuade and reproach each one of you, and I do not stop settling down everywhere upon you the whole day. Someone else of this sort will certainly not easily arise for you, men. Well, if you obey me, you will spare me. But perhaps you may be vexed, like the drowsy when they are awakened, and if you obey Anytus and slap me, you would easily kill me. Then you would spend the rest of your lives asleep, unless the god sends you someone else in his concern for you.

That I happen to be someone of this sort, given to the city by the god, you might apprehend from this: it does not seem human, on the one hand, that I have been careless of all my own things and that for so many years now I have endured that the things of my family be uncared for; and on the other hand, that I always do your business, going to each of you privately, as a father or an older brother might do, persuading you to care for virtue. If I was getting something out of this, and if I was receiving pay while I exhorted you to these things, it would be somewhat reasonable. But as it is, even you yourselves see that the accusers, who accused me so shamelessly in everything else, in this have not been able to become so utterly shameless as to offer a witness to assert that I ever took any pay or asked for it. For, I suppose, I offer a sufficient witness that I speak the truth: my poverty.

Perhaps, then, it might seem to be strange that I do go around counseling these things and being a busybody in private, but that in public I do not dare to go up before your multitude to counsel the city. The cause of this is what you have heard me speak of many times and in many places, that something divine and daimonic comes to me, a voice—which, of course, is also what Meletus wrote about in the indictment, making a comedy over it. This is something which began for me in childhood: a sort of voice comes, and whenever it comes, it always turns me away from whatever I am about to do, but never turns me forward.

This is what opposes my political activity, and its opposition seems to me altogether noble. For know well, men of Athens, if I had long ago attempted to be politically active, I would long ago have perished, and I would have benefited neither you nor myself. Now do not be vexed with me when I speak the truth. For there is no human being who will preserve his life if he genuinely opposes either you or any other multitude and prevents many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city. Rather, if someone who really fights for the just is going to preserve himself even for a short time, it is necessary for him to lead a private rather than a public life.

I for my part will offer great proofs of these things for you—not speeches, but what you honor, deeds. Do listen to what happened to me, so that you may see that I would not yield even to one man against the just because of a fear of death, even if I were to perish by refusing to yield. I will tell you vulgar things, typical of the law courts, but true. I, men of Athens, never held any office in the city except for being once on the Council. And it happened that our tribe, Antiochis, held the prytany when you wished to judge the ten generals (the ones who did not pick up the men from the naval battle) as a group—unlawfully, as it seemed to all of you in the time afterwards. I alone of the prytanes opposed your doing anything against the laws then, and I voted against it. And although the orators were ready to indict me and arrest me, and you were ordering and shouting, I supposed that I should run the risk with the law and the just rather than side with you because of fear of prison or death when you were counseling unjust things.

Now this was when the city was still under the democracy. But again, when the oligarchy came to be, the Thirty summoned five of us into the Tholos, and they ordered us to arrest Leon the Salaminian and bring him from Salamis to die. They ordered many others to do many things of this sort, wishing that as many as possible would be implicated in the responsibility. Then, however, I showed again, not in speech but in deed, that I do not even care about death in any way at all—if it is not too crude to say so—but that my whole care is to commit no unjust or impious deed. That government, as strong as it was, did not shock me into doing anything unjust. When we came out of the Tholos, the other four went to Salamis and arrested Leon, but I departed and went home. And perhaps I would have died because of this, if that government had not been quickly overthrown. And you will have many witnesses of these things.

Do you suppose, then, that I would have survived so many years if I had been publicly active and had acted in a manner worthy of a good man, coming to the aid of the just things and, as one ought, regarding this as most important? Far from it, men of Athens; nor would any other human being.

But through all my life, if I was ever active in public at all, it is apparent that I was the sort of man (and in private I was the same) who never conceded anything to anyone contrary to the just—neither to anyone else, nor to any of those who my slanderers say are my students. I have never been anyone’s teacher; but if anyone, whether younger or older, desired to hear me speaking and doing my own things, I never begrudged it to him. And I do not converse only when I receive money,

and not when I do not receive it: rather, I offer myself to both rich and poor alike for questioning, and if anyone wishes to hear what I say, he may answer me. And whether any of them becomes an upright man or not, I would not justly be held responsible, since I have never promised or taught any instruction to any of them. If someone says that he has ever learned from me or heard privately anything that everyone else did not, know well that he does not speak the truth. But why, then, do some enjoy spending so much time with me? You have heard, men of Athens; I told you the whole truth. It is because cause they enjoy hearing men examined who suppose they are wise, but are not. For it is not unpleasant.

I have been ordered to practice this by the god, as I affirm, from divinations, and from dreams, and in every way that any divine allotment ever ordered a human being to practice anything at all. These things, men of Athens, are both true and easy to test. Now if I for my part am corrupting some of the young, and have already corrupted others, and if any of them, when they became older, had recognized that I ever counseled them badly in anything while they were young, then now, no doubt, they should have come forward to accuse me and take their vengeance. If they themselves were not willing to, then some of their families—fathers and brothers and their other relatives—should now have remembered it and taken their vengeance if their families had suffered anything bad from me.

In any event, there are present here many of them whom I see: first of all Crito here, of my age and deme, the father of Critobulus here; next, Lysanias the Sphettian, the father of Aeschines here; further, here is Antiphon the Cephisean, the father of Epigenes. Moreover, here are others whose brothers have spent time in this way: Theozotides' son Nicostratus, the brother of Theodotus (and Theodotus has met his end, so that he, at least, would not beg him not to), and Demodocus' son Paralus, whose brother was Theages. And here is Ariston's son Adeimantus, whose brother is Plato here, and Aeantodorus, whose brother is Apollodorus here.

And I can tell you of many others, from among whom Meletus should particularly have offered someone as a witness during his own speech. If he forgot then, let him offer one now—I will yield—and let him say if he has anyone of this sort at all. But you will discover that it is wholly opposite to this, men; that everyone is ready to come to aid me, the corrupter, the one who does evil to their families, as Meletus and Anytus say. Now the corrupted ones themselves would perhaps have a reason to come to my aid. But the uncorrupted ones, their relatives, are now older men, so what other reason would they have to come to

my aid except the correct and just one, that they are conscious that Meletus speaks falsely, while I am being truthful?

Well then, men. These, and perhaps other such things, are about all I would have to say in my defense. Perhaps someone among you may be indignant when he recalls himself, if, in contesting a trial even smaller than this trial, he begged and supplicated the judges with many tears, bringing forward his own children and many others of his family and friends, so as to be pitied as much as possible, while I will do none of these things, although in this too I am risking, as I might seem, the extreme danger. Perhaps, then, someone thinking about this may be rather stubborn toward me, and, angered by this very thing, he may set down his vote in anger. If there is someone among you like this—for I, at least, do not deem that there is, but if there is—to me it seems decent for me to say to this man, “I, best of men, surely do have some family; for this is also just what Homer says: not even I have grown up ‘from an oak or a rock but from human beings.’” So that I do have a family, and sons too, men of Athens, three of them, one already a youth, and two still children. Nevertheless I will bring none of them forward here in order to beg you to vote to acquit me.

Why, then, will I do none of these things? Not because I am stubborn, men of Athens, nor because I dishonor you. Whether I am daring with regard to death or not is another story; but at any rate as to reputation, mine and yours and the whole city’s, to me it does not seem to be noble for me to do any of these things. For I am old and have this name; and whether it is true or false, it is reputed at least that Socrates is distinguished from the many human beings in some way. If, then, those of you who are reputed to be distinguished, whether in wisdom or courage or any other virtue at all, will act in this way, it would be shameful. I have often seen some who are just like this when they are judged: although they are reputed to be something, they do wondrous deeds, since they suppose that they will suffer something terrible if they die—as though they would be immortal if you did not kill them. They seem to me to attach shame to the city, so that a foreigner might take it that those Athenians who are distinguished in virtue—the ones whom they pick out from among themselves for their offices and other honors—are not at all distinguished from women. For those of you, men of Athens, who are reputed to be something in any way at all, should not do these things; nor, whenever we do them, should you allow it. Instead, you should show that you would much rather vote to convict the one who brings in these piteous dramas and makes the city ridiculous than the one who keeps quiet.

Apart from reputation, men, to me it also does not seem to be just to

beg the judge, nor to be acquitted by begging, but rather to teach and to persuade. For the judge is not seated to give away the just things as a gratification, but to judge them. For he has not sworn to gratify whoever seems favorable to him, but to give judgement according to the laws. Therefore we should not accustom you to swear falsely, nor should you become accustomed to it. For neither of us would be pious.

So do not deem that I, men of Athens, should practice such things before you which I hold to be neither noble nor just nor pious, and certainly, by Zeus, above all not when I am being prosecuted for impiety by Meletus here. For plainly, if I should persuade and force you by begging, after you have sworn an oath, I would be teaching you not to hold that there are gods, and in making my defense speech I would simply be accusing myself of not believing in gods. But that is far from being so. For I believe, men of Athens, as none of my accusers does. And I turn it over to you and to the god to judge me in whatever way it is going to be best both for me and for you.

The jury votes on Socrates' innocence or guilt, and a majority finds him guilty as charged. Meletus then makes a speech proposing the death penalty, and Socrates must offer a counterproposal.

Many things contribute to my not being indignant, men of Athens, at what has happened—that you voted to convict me and one of them is that what has happened was not unexpected by me. But I wonder much more at the number of the votes on each side. For I at least did not suppose it would be by so little, but by much. But as it is, as is Rely, if only thirty of the votes had fallen differently, I would have been acquitted. So as it seems to me, I have even now been acquitted as far as Meletus is concerned; and not only have I been acquitted, but it is clear to everyone that if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me, he would have had to pay a fine of a thousand drachmae, since he would not have gotten a fifth of the votes.

At any rate, the man proposes death as my desert. Well, then. What counterproposal shall I make to you, men of Athens? Or is it not clear that it should be whatever I am worthy of? What then? What am I worthy to suffer or to pay because I did not keep quiet during my life and did not care for the things that the many do—moneymaking and household management, and generalships, and popular oratory, and the other offices, and conspiracies and factions that come to be in the city—since I held that I myself was really too decent to survive if I went into these things? I did not go into matters where, if I did go, I was going to be of no benefit either to you or to myself; instead, I went to each of you privately to perform the greatest benefaction,

as I affirm, and I attempted to persuade each of you not to care for any of his own things until he cares for himself, how he will be the best and most prudent possible, nor to care for the things of the city until he cares for the city itself, and so to care for the other things in the same way. What, then, am I worthy to suffer, being such as this? Something good, men of Athens, at least if you give me what I deserve according to my worth in truth—and besides, a good of a sort that would be fitting for me. What, then, is fitting for a poor man, a benefactor, who needs to have leisure to exhort you? There is nothing more fitting, men of Athens, than for such a man to be given his meals in the Prytaneum, much more so than if any of you has won a victory at Olympia with a horse or a two- or four-horse chariot. For he makes you seem to be happy, while I make you be so; and he is not in need of sustenance, while I am in need of it. So if I must propose what I am worthy of in accordance with the just, I propose this: to be given my meals in the Prytaneum.

Perhaps then, when I say this, I seem to you to speak in nearly the same way as when I spoke about lament and supplication—quite stubbornly. It is not like that, men of Athens, but rather like this, I am convinced that I do not do injustice to any human being voluntarily, but I am not persuading you of this. For we have conversed with each other a short time. Since, as I suppose, if you had a law like any other human beings, not to judge anyone in a matter of death in one day alone, but over many, you would be persuaded. But, as it is, it is not easy in a short time to do away with any great slanders.

I, being convinced indeed that I do not do injustice to anyone, am far from doing injustice to myself, and from saying against myself that I myself am worthy of something bad, and from proposing this sort of thing as my desert. What would I fear? That I might suffer what Meletus proposes for me, about which I say that I do not know whether it is good or bad? Or instead of this, should I choose something from among the things that I know well are bad and propose that? Should it be prison? And why should I live in jail, enslaved to the authority that is regularly established there, the Eleven? Or money, and imprisonment until I pay? But for me this is the same as what I was saying just now, for I have no money to pay.

Well, should I propose exile, then? For perhaps you would grant me this as my desert. I would certainly be possessed by much love of soul, men of Athens, if I were so unreasonable that I were not able to reason that you who are my fellow citizens were not able to bear my ways of spending time and my speeches, but that instead they have become quite grave and hateful to you, so that you are now seeking

to be released from them: will others, then, bear them easily? Far from it, men of Athens. Noble indeed would life be for me, a human being of my age, to go into exile and to live exchanging one city for another, always being driven out! For I know well that wherever I go, the young will listen to me when I speak, just as they do here. And if I drive them away, they themselves will drive me out by persuading their elders. But if I do not drive them away, their fathers and families will drive me out because of these same ones.

Perhaps, then, someone might say, “By being silent and keeping quiet, Socrates, won’t you be able to live in exile for us?” It is hardest of all to persuade some of you about this. For if I say that this is to disobey the god and that because of this it is impossible to keep quiet, you will not be persuaded by me, on the ground that I am being ironic. And on the other hand, if I say that this even happens to be a very great good for a human being—to make speeches every day about virtue and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be persuaded by me still less when I say these things. This is the way it is, as I affirm, men; but to persuade you is not easy.

And at the same time, I am not accustomed to deem myself worthy of anything bad. For if I had money, I would have proposed as much money as I could pay, for that would not harm me. But as it is, I do not have any—unless, of course, you wish me to propose as much money as I am able to pay. Perhaps I would be able to pay you, say, a mina of silver. So I propose that much. But Plato here, men of Athens, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus bid me to propose thirty minae and they will stand as guarantors. So I propose that much, and they will be trustworthy guarantors of the money for you.

Voting between the penalties proposed by the accuser and the accused, the jury condemns Socrates to death. He has time to make some further remarks before he is taken away to prison to await execution.

For the sake of a little time, men of Athens, you will get a name and be charged with the responsibility, by those wishing to revile the city, for having killed Socrates, a wise man. For those wishing to reproach you will assert that I am wise, even if I am not. At any rate, if you had waited a short time, this would have come about for you of its own accord. For you see that my age is already far advanced in life and close to death. I say this not to all of you, but to those who voted to condemn me to death.

I also say the following to these same ones. Perhaps you suppose, men

of Athens, that I have been convicted because I was at a loss for the sort of speeches that would have persuaded you, if I had supposed that I should do and say anything at all to escape the penalty. Far from it. Rather, I have been convicted because I was at a loss, not however for speeches, but for daring and shamelessness and willingness to say the sorts of things to you that you would have been most pleased to hear: me wailing and lamenting, and doing and saying many other things unworthy of me, as I affirm—such things as you have been accustomed to hear from others. But neither did I then suppose that I should do anything unsuitable to a free man because of the danger, nor do I now regret that I made my defense speech like this: I much prefer to die having made my defense speech in this way than to live in that way.

For neither in a court case nor in war should I or anyone else devise a way to escape death by doing anything at all. In battles it often becomes clear that one might escape death, at least, by letting go of his arms and turning around to supplicate his pursuers. And there are many other devices to escape death in each of the dangers, if one dares to do and say anything at all. But I suspect it is not hard, men, to escape death, but it is much harder to escape villainy. For it runs faster than death. And now I, since I am slow and old, am caught by the slower, while my accusers, since they are clever and sharp, are caught by the faster, by evil. And now I go away, condemned by you to pay the penalty of death, while they have been convicted by the truth of wretchedness and injustice. And I abide by my penalty, and so do they. Perhaps these things even had to be so, and I suppose there is due measure in them.

After this, I desire to deliver oracles to you, you who voted to condemn me. For in fact I am now where human beings particularly deliver oracles: when they are about to die. I affirm, you men who condemned me to death, that vengeance will come upon you right after my death, and much harsher, by Zeus, than the sort you give me by killing me. For you have now done this deed supposing that you will be released from giving an account of your life, but it will turn out much the opposite for you, as I affirm. There will be more who will refute you, whom I have now been holding back; you did not perceive them. And they will be harsher, inasmuch as they are younger, and you will be more indignant. For if you suppose that by killing human beings you will prevent someone from reproaching you for not living correctly, you do not think nobly. For that kind of release is not at all possible or noble; rather, the kind that is both noblest and easiest is not to restrain others, but to equip oneself to be the best possible. So, having divined these things for you who voted against me, I am released.

But with those who voted for me I would be pleased to converse on behalf of this affair which has happened, while the officials are occupied and I do not yet go to the place where, when I do go, I must die. Please stay with me, men, for this much time; nothing prevents our telling tales to one another as long as it is possible. For I am willing to display to you, as to friends, what ever this thing means which has occurred to me just now. For to me, judges—for by calling you judges I would address you correctly—something wondrous has happened. For my customary divination from the daimonion was always very frequent in all former time, opposing me even in quite small matters if I were about to do something incorrectly. Now, you yourselves see what has occurred to me, these very things which someone might suppose to be, and are believed to be, extreme evils. But the sign of the god did not oppose me when I left my house this morning, nor when I came up here to the law court, nor anywhere in the speech when I was about to say anything, although in other speeches it has often stopped me in the middle while I was speaking. But as it is, it has nowhere opposed me either in any deed or speech, concerning this action. What, then, do I take to be the cause of this? I will tell you. Probably what has occurred to me has turned out to be good, and there is no way that those of us take it correctly who suppose that being dead is bad. In my view, a great proof of this has happened. For there is no way that the accustomed sign would not have opposed me unless I were about to do something good.

Let us also think in the following way how great a hope there is that it is good. Now being dead is either of two things. For either it is like being nothing and the dead man has no perception of anything, or else, in accordance with the things that are said, it happens to be a sort of change and migration of the soul from the place here to another place.

And if in fact there is no perception, but it is like a sleep in which the sleeper has no dream at all, death would be a wondrous gain. For I suppose that if someone had to select that night in which he slept so soundly that he did not even dream and had to compare the other nights and days of his own life with that night, and then had to say on consideration how many days and nights in his own life he has lived better and more pleasantly than that night, then I suppose that the Great King himself, not to mention some private man, would discover that they are easy to count in comparison with the other days and nights. So if death is something like this, I at least say it is a gain. For all time appears in this way indeed to be nothing more than one night.

On the other hand, if death is like a journey from here to another place, and if the things that are said are true, that in fact all the dead are there, then what greater good could there be than this, judges? For if one who arrives in Hades, released from those here who claim to be judges, will find those who are judges in truth—the very ones who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus, and Triptolemus, and those of the other demigods who turned out to be just in their own lives—would this journey be a paltry one? Or again, to associate with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer, how much would any of you give? For I am willing to die many times if these things are true, since especially for myself spending time there would be wondrous: whenever I happened to meet Palamedes and Telemonian Ajax, or anyone else of the ancients who died because of an unjust judgment, I would compare my own experiences with theirs. As I suppose, it would not be unpleasant. And certainly the greatest thing is that I would pass my time examining and searching out among those there—just as I do to those here—who among them is wise, and who supposes he is, but is not. How much would one give, judges, to examine him who led the great army against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus, or the thousand others whom one might mention, both men and women? To converse and to associate with them and to examine them there would be inconceivable happiness. Certainly those there surely do not kill on this account. For those there are happier than those here not only in other things but also in that they are immortal henceforth for the rest of time, at least if the things that are said are in fact true.

But you too, judges, should be of good hope toward death, and you should think this one thing to be true: that there is nothing bad for a good man, whether living or dead, and that the gods are not without care for his troubles. Nor have my present troubles arisen of their own accord, but it is clear to me that it is now better, after all, for me to be dead and to have been released from troubles. This is also why the sign did not turn me away anywhere, and I at least am not at all angry at those who voted to condemn me and at my accusers. And yet it was not with this thought in mind that they voted to condemn me and accused me: rather, they supposed they would harm me. For this they are worthy of blame.

This much, however, I beg of them: when my sons grow up, punish them, men, and pain them in the very same way I pained you, if they seem to you to care for money or anything else before virtue. And if they are reputed to be something when they are nothing, reproach them just as I did you: tell them that they do not care for the things

they should, and that they suppose they are something when they are worth nothing. And if you do these things, we will have been treated justly by you, both I myself and my sons.

But now it is time to go away, I to die and you to live. Which of us goes to a better thing is unclear to everyone except to the god.

Aristotle,
Nicomachean Ethics

Born in Stagira, a Greek colony in Thracian Chalcidice, adjacent to Macedon, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) systematized the philosophical revolution begun in Ionia, existentially radicalized in Socrates, and amplified in the transfigured political mythology of Plato's dialogues—in which something more democratic than democracy shines forth: the address of truth, goodness, and beauty to each soul.

Aristotle's non-literary approach to philosophy (in his surviving works)—proceeding in treatises, grounded in a biological methodology, and less obviously mystical than previous philosophy—allows him to communicate a school system that would enable a secular, "Western," approach to the world but which, paradoxically, would also be met with vigorous opposition from such founders of philosophical modernity as Hobbes and Francis Bacon.

After the Socratic turn in philosophy from science to human affairs, Aristotle reintegrates science into the philosophical project—without sacrificing ethics and politics.

Aristotle had been trained for twenty years (from when he was about eighteen) in the institution Plato had established, the Academy, which at first did not communicate an orthodox doctrine, but rather preserved the original Socratic dynamism of restless questioning pursued through argument (dialectic). Aristotle would go on to form his own school of philosophy (called Peripatetic) at the Lyceum, a temple dedicated to Apollo. But before that he was given a momentous mission. His love for the natural sciences no doubt had its roots in the medical tradition of his family. The symbiosis of medicine and philosophical inquiry might already be discerned in the work of Herodotus, as Halicarnassus was just across the strait from the island of Cos, where Hippocrates, "the father of medicine," was active. Aristotle's father, Nicomachus, was court physician to a king of Macedon. Around 343, Aristotle was charged by another king of Macedon, Philip II, with the education of his thirteen-year-old son: none other than the one who would become Alexander the Great. Aristotle seems to have carried out this duty for seven years, that is, until Alexander's accession to the throne in 336 B.C. Philip had sought to "unite" the Greek city-states and take war to the old enemy of the Greeks: the Persian Empire. Not long after subjugating the *poleis* of Greece, he was assassinated.

Philip's son would forge an empire with even greater reach than the Persian, indeed one of the greatest in the history of the world.

Alexander sought to synthesize "East" and "West," indicating he understood something of the bond joining the Mediterranean with the civilization that had arisen in Mesopotamia. However, this merging of horizons came at the cost of human liberty: it was a work of imperial arms, built on the destruction of the independent life of the *polis*. (How could the Greek city-states have responded to the imperial threat?) Alexander would even come to accept a Persian obeisance to himself. Aristotle's death occurs the year after that of his most famous student. Alexander's passing in 323 B.C. marks the end of the Classical period, and the beginning of the Hellenistic.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* begins by asking what is the that-for-the-sake-of-which we desire the goods we desire. Do we want power, pleasure, wealth, honor for their own sakes? Or for something else?

That something else would be happiness (or, more precisely, *eudaimonia*, having a good divinity or spirit, a term that might call Socrates back to mind), which Aristotle defines as "an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue throughout the whole of life." The inquiry focuses on virtue, which for Aristotle is excellence at being human. What kind of life is that? One lived according to *logos* or "reason." The mystical overtones of ancient "reason" should not be suppressed. This would be a life of true knowing and true choosing, achieved through the proper formation of the powers of the soul, including virtues of character and virtues of mind. For Aristotle, the whole project of ethical inquiry belongs to politics, the science of the proper way to arrange communal life.

Book 1

Chapter One

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action as well as choice, is held to aim at some good. Hence people have nobly declared that the good is that at which all things aim. But there appears to be a certain difference among the ends: some ends are activities, others are certain works apart from the activities themselves, and in those cases in which there are certain ends apart from the actions, the works are naturally better than the activities.

Now, since there are many actions, arts, and sciences, the ends too are many: of medicine, the end is health; of shipbuilding, a ship; of generalship, victory; of household management, wealth. And in all things of this sort that fall under some one capacity—for just as bridle making and such other arts as concern equestrian gear fall under horsemanship, while this art and every action related to warfare fall under generalship, so in the same manner, some arts fall under one capacity, others under another—in all of them, the ends of the architectonic ones are more choiceworthy than all those that fall under them, for these latter are pursued for the sake of the former. And it makes no difference at all whether the ends of the actions are the activities themselves or something else apart from these, as in the sciences mentioned.

Chapter Two

If, therefore, there is some end of our actions that we wish for on account of itself, the rest being things we wish for on account of this end, and if we do not choose all things on account of something else—for in this way the process will go on infinitely such that the longing involved is empty and pointless—clearly this would be the good, that is, the best. And with a view to our life, then, is not the knowledge of this good of great weight, and would we not, like archers in possession of a target, better hit on what is needed? If this is so, then one must try to grasp, in outline at least, whatever it is and to which of the sciences or capacities it belongs.

But it might be held to belong to the most authoritative and most architectonic one, and such appears to be the political art. For it ordains what sciences there must be in cities and what kinds each person in turn must learn and up to what point. We also see that even the most honored capacities—for example, generalship, household management, rhetoric—fall under the political art. Because it makes

use of the remaining sciences and, further, because it legislates what one ought to do and what to abstain from, its end would encompass those of the others, with the result that this would be the human good. For even if this is the same thing for an individual and a city, to secure and preserve the good of the city appears to be something greater and more complete: the good of the individual by himself is certainly desirable enough, but that of a nation and of cities is nobler and more divine.

The inquiry, then, aims at these things, since it is a sort of political inquiry.

Chapter Three

The inquiry would be adequately made if it should attain the clarity that accords with the subject matter. For one should not seek out precision in all arguments alike, just as one should not do so in the products of craftsmanship either. The noble things and the just things, which the political art examines, admit of much dispute and variability, such that they are held to exist by law alone and not by nature. And even the good things admit of some such variability on account of the harm that befalls many people as a result of them: it has happened that some have been destroyed on account of their wealth, others on account of their courage.

It would certainly be desirable enough, then, if one who speaks about and on the basis of such things demonstrate the truth roughly and in outline, and if in speaking about and on the basis of things that are for the most part so, one draw conclusions of that sort as well. Indeed, in the same manner one must also accept each of the points being made. For it belongs to an educated person to seek out precision in each genus to the extent that the nature of the matter allows: to accept persuasive speech from a skilled mathematician appears comparable to demanding demonstrations from a skilled rhetorician. Each person judges nobly the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. He is a good judge of a particular thing, therefore, if he has been educated with a view to it, but is a good judge simply if he has been educated about everything. Hence of the political art, a young person is not an appropriate student, for he is inexperienced in the actions pertaining to life, and the arguments are based on these actions and concern them.

Further, because he is disposed to follow the passions, he will listen pointlessly and unprofitably, since the end involved is not knowledge but action. And it makes no difference at all whether he is young in

age or immature in character: the deficiency is not related to time but instead arises on account of living in accord with passion and pursuing each passion in turn. For to people of that sort, just as to those lacking self-restraint, knowledge is without benefit. But to those who fashion their longings in accord with reason and act accordingly, knowing about these things would be of great profit. About the student, and how one ought to accept [what is being said], and what it is that we propose, let these things stand as a prelude.

Chapter Four

Now, let us pick up again and—since all knowledge and every choice have some good as the object of their longing—let us state what it is that we say the political art aims at and what the highest of all the goods related to action is. As for its name, then, it is pretty much agreed on by most people; for both the many and the refined say that it is happiness, and they suppose that living well and acting well are the same thing as being happy. But as for what happiness is, they disagree, and the many do not give a response similar to that of the wise. The former respond that it is something obvious and manifest, such as pleasure or wealth or honor, some saying it is one thing, others another. Often one and the same person responds differently, for when he is sick, it is health; when poor, wealth. And when they are aware of their own ignorance, they wonder at those who say something that is great and beyond them. Certain others, in addition, used to suppose that the good is something else, by itself, apart from these many good things, which is also the cause of their all being good.

Now, to examine thoroughly all these opinions is perhaps rather pointless; those opinions that are especially prevalent or are held to have a certain reason to them will suffice. But let it not escape our notice that there is a difference between the arguments that proceed from the principles and those that proceed to the principles. For Plato too used to raise this perplexity well and investigate it, whether the path is going from the principles or to the principles, just as on a racecourse one can proceed from the judges to the finish line or back again. One must begin from what is known, but this has a twofold meaning: there are things known to us, on the one hand, and things known simply, on the other. Perhaps it is necessary for us, at least, to begin from the things known to us. Hence he who will listen adequately to the noble things and the just things, and to the political things generally, must be brought up nobly by means of habituation. For the “that” is a principle, and if this should be sufficiently apparent, there will be no need of the “why” in addition, and a person of the sort indicated has

or would easily get hold of principles. As for him to whom neither of these is available, let him listen to the words of Hesiod:

This one is altogether best who himself understands all things

...

But good in his turn too is he who obeys one who speaks well.

But he who neither himself understands nor, in listening to another,
Takes this to heart, he is a useless man.

Chapter Five

Let us speak from the point where we digressed. For on the basis of the lives they lead, the many and crudest seem to suppose, not unreasonably, that the good and happiness are pleasure. And thus they cherish the life of enjoyment. For the especially prominent ways of life are three: the one just mentioned, the political, and, third, the contemplative.

Now, in choosing a life of fatted cattle, the many appear altogether slavish; but they attain a hearing, because many people in positions of authority experience passions like those of Sardanapallus. The refined and active, on the other hand, choose honor, for this is pretty much the end of the political life. But it appears to be more superficial than what is being sought, for honor seems to reside more with those who bestow it than with him who receives it; and we divine that the good is something of one's own and a thing not easily taken away. Further, people seem to pursue honor so that they may be convinced that they themselves are good; at any rate, they seek to be honored by the prudent, among those to whom they are known, and for their virtue. It is clear, then, that in the case of these people at least, virtue is superior.

And perhaps someone might in fact suppose that virtue is to a greater degree the end of the political life. Yet it too appears to be rather incomplete. For it seems to be possible for someone to possess virtue even while asleep or while being inactive throughout life and, in addition to these, while suffering badly and undergoing the greatest misfortunes. But no one would deem happy somebody living in this way, unless he were defending a thesis. But enough about these things: they have been spoken about adequately also in the circulated writings.

Third is the contemplative life, about which we will make an investigation in what will follow.

The moneymaking life is characterized by a certain constraint, and it is clear that wealth is not the good being sought, for it is a useful thing

and for the sake of something else. Thus someone might suppose that the previously mentioned things are ends to a greater degree than is money, for at least they are cherished for their own sakes. But they do not appear to be ends either, and many arguments have been widely distributed in opposition to them. So let these things be dismissed.

Chapter Seven

Let us go back again to the good being sought, whatever it might be. For it appears to be one thing in one action or art, another in another: it is a different thing in medicine and in generalship, and so on with the rest. What, then, is the good in each of these? Or is it that for the sake of which everything else is done? In medicine, this is health; in generalship, victory; in house building, a house; and in another, it would be something else. But in every action and choice, it is the end involved, since it is for the sake of this that all people do everything else. As a result, if there is some end of all actions, this would be the good related to action; and if there are several, then it would be these. So as the argument proceeds, it arrives at the same point. But one ought to try to make this clearer still.

Since the ends appear to be several, and some of these we choose on account of something else—for example, wealth, an aulos, and the instrumental things generally—it is clear that not all ends are complete but what is the best appears to be something complete. As a result, if there is some one thing that is complete in itself, this would be what is being sought, and if there are several, then the most complete of these. We say that what is sought out for itself is more complete than what is sought out on account of something else, and that what is never chosen on account of something else is more complete than those things chosen both for themselves and on account of this [further end]. The simply complete thing, then, is that which is always chosen for itself and never on account of something else.

Happiness above all seems to be of this character, for we always choose it on account of itself and never on account of something else. Yet honor, pleasure, intellect, and every virtue we choose on their own account—for even if nothing resulted from them, we would choose each of them—but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, because we suppose that, through them, we will be happy. But nobody chooses happiness for the sake of these things, or, more generally, on account of anything else.

The same thing appears to result also on the basis of self-sufficiency, for the complete good is held to be self-sufficient. We do not mean

by self-sufficient what suffices for someone by himself, living a solitary life, but what is sufficient also with respect to parents, offspring, a wife, and, in general, one's friends and fellow citizens, since by nature a human being is political. But it is necessary to grasp a certain limit to these; for if one extends these to include the parents [of parents], and descendants, and the friends of friends, it will go on infinitely. But this must be examined further later on. As for the self-sufficient, we posit it as that which by itself makes life choiceworthy and in need of nothing, and such is what we suppose happiness to be.

Further, happiness is the most choiceworthy of all things because it is not just one among them—and it is clear that, were it included as one among many things, it would be more choiceworthy with the least addition of the good things; for the good that is added to it results in a superabundance of goods, and the greater number of goods is always more choiceworthy. So happiness appears to be something complete and self-sufficient, it being an end of our actions.

But perhaps saying that “happiness is best” is something manifestly agreed on, whereas what it is still needs to be said more distinctly. Now, perhaps this would come to pass if the work of the human being should be grasped. For just as in the case of an aulos player, sculptor, and every expert, and in general with those who have a certain work and action, the relevant good and the doing of something well seem to reside in the work, so too the same might be held to be the case with a human being, if in fact there is a certain work that is a human being's. Are there, then, certain works and actions of a carpenter and shoemaker, but none of a human being: would he, by contrast, be naturally “without a work”? Or just as there appears to be a certain work of the eye, hand, and foot, and in fact of each of the parts in general, so also might one posit a certain work of a human being apart from all these?

So whatever, then, would this work be? For living appears to be something common even to plants, but what is peculiar [to human beings] is being sought. One must set aside, then, the life characterized by nutrition as well as growth. A certain life characterized by sense perception would be next, but it too appears to be common to a horse and cow and in fact to every animal. So there remains a certain active life of that which possesses reason; and what possesses reason includes what is obedient to reason, on the one hand, and what possesses it and thinks, on the other. But since this [life of reason in the second sense] also is spoken of in a twofold way, one must posit the life [of that which possesses reason] in accord with an activity, for this seems to be its more authoritative meaning. And if the work of a human being is

an activity of soul in accord with reason, or not without reason, and we assert that the work of a given person is the same in kind as that of a serious person, just as it would be in the case of a cithara player and a serious cithara player, and this would be so in all cases simply when the superiority in accord with the virtue is added to the work; for it belongs to a cithara player to play the cithara, but to a serious one to do so well. But if this is so—and we posit the work of a human being as a certain life, and this is an activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason, the work of a serious man being to do these things well and nobly, and each thing is brought to completion well in accord with the virtue proper to it—if this is so, then the human good becomes an activity of soul in accord with virtue, and if there are several virtues, then in accord with the best and most complete one.

But, in addition, in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day. And in this way, one day or a short time does not make someone blessed and happy either.

Let the good have been sketched in this way, then, for perhaps one ought to outline it first and then fill it in later. It might seem to belong to everyone to advance and fully articulate things whose sketch is in a noble condition, and time is a good discoverer of or contributor to such things: from this have arisen the advances in the arts too, for it belongs to everyone to add what is lacking.

But one must remember the points mentioned previously as well, to the effect that one must not seek out precision in all matters alike but rather in each thing in turn as accords with the subject matter in question and insofar as is appropriate to the inquiry. For both carpenter and geometer seek out the right angle but in different ways: the former seeks it insofar as it is useful to his work; the latter seeks out what it is or what sort of a thing it is, for he is one who contemplates the truth. One ought to act in the same manner also in other cases, so that things extraneous to the works involved not multiply. And one should not demand the cause in all things alike either; rather, it is enough in some cases to have nobly pointed out the “that” —such is the case in what concerns the principles—and the “that” is the first thing and a principle. Some principles are observed by means of induction, some by perception, some by a certain habituation, and others in other ways. One ought to try to go in search of each in turn in the manner natural to them and to be serious about their being nobly defined. For they are of great weight in what follows from them: the beginning seems to be more than half of the whole, and many of the points being sought seem to become manifest on account of it.

Chapter Eight

One must examine what concerns it, not only on the basis of the conclusion and the premises on which the argument rests, but also on the basis of things said about it. For with the truth, all the given facts harmonize; but with what is false, the truth soon hits a wrong note.

Now, although the good things have been distributed in a threefold manner—both those goods said to be external, on the one hand, and those pertaining to soul and to body, on the other—we say that those pertaining to soul are the most authoritative and especially good. And we posit as those “goods pertaining to soul,” the soul’s actions and activities. As a result, the argument would be stated nobly, at least according to this opinion, which is ancient and agreed to by those who philosophize. It would be correct too to say that certain actions and activities are the end, for in this way the end belongs among the goods related to soul, not among the external ones.

And that the happy person both lives well and acts well harmonizes with the argument, for [happiness] was pretty much said to be a certain kind of living well and good action. It also appears that all the things being sought pertaining to happiness are included in what was said: in the opinion of some, happiness is virtue; of others, prudence; of others, a certain wisdom; in the opinion of still others, it is these or some of these things, together with pleasure or not without pleasure. And others include alongside these the prosperity related to external goods as well. Many of the ancients say some of these things, a few men of high repute say others of them; and it is reasonable that neither of these two groups be wholly in error, but rather that they be correct in some one respect, at least, or even in most respects.

The argument, then, is in harmony with those who say that [happiness] is virtue or a certain virtue, for the activity in accord with virtue belongs to virtue. But perhaps it makes no small difference whether one supposes the best thing to reside in possession or use, that is, in a characteristic or an activity. For it is possible that, although the characteristic is present, it accomplishes nothing good—for example, in the case of someone who is asleep or has been otherwise hindered. But this is not possible when it comes to the activity: of necessity, a person will act, and he will act well. For just as it is not the noblest and strongest who are crowned with the victory wreath in the Olympic Games but rather the competitors (for it is certain of these who win), so also it is those who act correctly who attain the noble and good things in life.

But their life is also pleasant in itself; for feeling pleasure is among the things related to the soul, and there is pleasure for each person in connection with whatever he is said to be a lover of—for example, a horse is pleasant to the horse lover, a play to the theater lover. In the same manner too, the just things are pleasant to the lover of justice, and in general, things in accord with virtue are pleasant to the lover of virtue. Now, things pleasant to the many do battle with one another, because such things are not pleasant by nature; but to the lovers of what is noble, the things pleasant by nature are pleasant. Such too are the actions in accord with virtue, with the result that they are pleasant both to such people and in themselves. Indeed, the life [of those who love what is noble] has no need of additional pleasure, like a sort of added charm, but possesses pleasure in itself. For, in addition to the points mentioned, he who takes no delight in noble actions is not good either; for no one would say that somebody who does not delight in acting justly is just or who does not delight in liberal actions is liberal, and similarly in the other cases as well. And if this is so, then the actions in accord with virtue would, in themselves, be pleasant. But certainly these actions are good as well as noble; and they will be each of these especially, if in fact the serious person judges nobly about them—and he judges as we said.

Happiness, therefore, is the best, noblest, and most pleasant thing; and these are not separated, as the inscription at Delos has it:

Noblest is what is most just, but best is to be healthy;
And most pleasant by nature is for someone to attain what he
passionately desires.

For all these are present in the best activities, and we assert that happiness is these activities—or the best one among them. Nonetheless, it manifestly requires external goods in addition, just as we said. For it is impossible or not easy for someone without equipment to do what is noble: many things are done through instruments, as it were—through friends, wealth, and political power. Those who are bereft of some of these (for example, good birth, good children, or beauty) disfigure their blessedness, for a person who is altogether ugly in appearance, or of poor birth, or solitary and childless cannot really be characterized as happy; and he is perhaps still less happy, if he should have altogether bad children or friends or, though he did have good ones, they are dead. Just as we said, then, [happiness] seems to require some such external prosperity in addition. This is why some make good fortune equivalent to happiness, and others, virtue.

Chapter Nine

This is also why the perplexity arises as to whether happiness is something that can be gained through learning or habituation or through some other practice, or whether it comes to be present in accord with a sort of divine allotment or even through chance.

Now, if there is in fact anything that is a gift of the gods to human beings, it is reasonable that happiness is god given, and it especially among the human concerns insofar as it is the best of them. But perhaps this would be more appropriate to another examination—yet it appears that even if happiness is not god sent but comes to be present through virtue and a certain learning or practice, it is among the most divine things. For the prize of virtue or its end appears to be best and to be something divine and blessed. It would also be something common to many people, for it is possible for it to be available, through a certain learning and care, to all who have not been rendered defective in point of virtue. And if it is better to be happy in this way rather than through chance, it is reasonable that this is how [happiness is acquired]—if in fact what accords with nature is naturally in the noblest possible state, and similar too is what accords with art and with cause as a whole, and especially the best [art or cause]. To entrust the greatest and noblest thing to chance would be excessively discordant.

What is being sought is manifest also on the basis of the argument [or definition], for happiness was said to be a certain sort of activity of soul in accord with virtue. Now, of the remaining goods, some must necessarily be present, others are coworkers and by nature useful in an instrumental way. And these points would be in agreement also with those made at the beginning: we posited the end of the political art as best, and it exercises a very great care to make the citizens of a specific sort—namely, good and apt to do the noble things. It is to be expected, then, that we do not say that either a cow or a horse or any other animal is at all happy, for none of them are able to share in such an activity. It is because of this too that a child is not happy either: he is not yet apt to do such things, on account of his age, though some children are spoken of as blessed on account of the expectation involved in their case. For, as we said, both complete virtue and a complete life are required: many reversals and all manner of fortune arise in the course of life, and it is possible for someone who is particularly thriving to encounter great disasters in old age, just as the myth is told about Priam in the Trojan tales. Nobody deems happy someone who deals with fortunes of that sort and comes to a wretched end.

Chapter Ten

Should one, then, not deem happy any human being for so long as he is alive; but must one look instead, as Solon has it, to his end? But if indeed it is necessary to posit such a thesis, then is in fact a person happy when he is dead? Or is this, at least, altogether strange, especially for us who say that happiness is a certain activity? But if we do not say that the dead person is happy—and this is not what Solon means either—but say rather that someone might safely deem a human being blessed only once he is already at a remove from bad things and misfortunes, this too admits of some dispute. For it is held that both something bad and something good can befall the dead person, if in fact they can befall the living person who does not perceive it—for example, honors and dishonors, and the faring well or the misfortunes of his offspring and descendants generally.

But these things too are perplexing: for someone who has lived blessedly until old age and come to his end accordingly, it is possible that many reversals may occur involving his descendants, just as some of these descendants may be good and attain the life that accords with their merit, but others the contrary. Yet it is clear that it is possible for these descendants to be of varying degrees of remove from their ancestors. Indeed, it would be strange if even the dead person should share in reversals and become now happy, now wretched again. But it would be strange too if nothing of the affairs of the descendants should reach the ancestors, not even for a certain time.

But one must return to the perplexity previously mentioned, for perhaps what is now being sought might also be contemplated on the basis of it. If indeed one does have to see a person's end and at that time deem each person blessed, not as being blessed [now] but as having been such previously—how is this not strange if, when he is happy, what belongs to him will not be truly attributed to him? [This strange consequence arises] on account of our wish not to call the living happy, given the reversals that may happen, and of our supposition that happiness is something lasting and by no means easily subject to reversals, while fortunes often revolve for the same people. For it is clear that if we should follow someone's fortunes, we will often say that the same person is happy and then again wretched, declaring that the happy person is a sort of chameleon and on unsound footing.

Or is it not at all correct to follow someone's fortunes? For it is not in these that doing well or badly consists. Rather, human life requires these fortunes in addition, just as we said; yet it is the activities in accord with virtue that have authoritative control over happiness, and

the contrary activities over the contrary. The perplexity just now raised also bears witness to the argument, since in none of the human works is anything so secure as what pertains to the activities that accord with virtue. For such activities seem to be more lasting than even the sciences; and the most honored of them seem to be more lasting, because those who are blessed live out their lives engaged, to the greatest degree and most continuously, in these activities. This seems to be the cause of our not forgetting such activities. Indeed, what is being sought will be available to the happy person, and he will be such throughout life. For he will always or most of all act on and contemplate what accords with virtue, and he—at least he who is truly good and “four-square, without blame”—he will bear fortunes altogether nobly and suitably in every way.

Now, many things occur by chance, and they differ in how great or small they are. The small instances of good fortune, and similarly of its opposite, clearly do not tip the balance of one’s life, whereas the great and numerous ones that occur will make life more blessed (since these naturally help adorn life, and dealing with them is noble and serious). But those fortunes that turn out in the contrary way restrict and even ruin one’s blessedness, for they both inflict pains and impede many activities. Nevertheless, even in the midst of these, nobility shines through, whenever someone bears up calmly under many great misfortunes, not because of any insensitivity to pain but because he is wellborn and great souled.

And if the activities have authoritative control over life, just as we said, then no one who is blessed would become wretched, since he will never do things that are hateful and base. For we suppose that someone who is truly good and sensible bears up under all fortunes in a becoming way and always does what is noblest given the circumstances, just as a good general makes use, with the greatest military skill, of the army he has and a shoemaker makes the most beautiful shoe out of the leather given him. It holds in the same manner with all the other experts as well. And if this is so, the happy person would never become wretched—nor indeed would he be blessed, if it is true, if he encounters the fortunes of Priam. He would not be unstable and subject to reversals either, for he will not be easily moved from happiness, and then not by any random misfortunes but only by great and numerous ones. And as a result of such things he would not become happy again in a short time; but, if in fact he does, he will do so in the completion of some lengthy time during which he comes to attain great and noble things.

What, then, prevents one from calling happy someone who is active in accord with complete virtue and who is adequately equipped with

external goods, not for any chance time but in a complete life? Or must one posit in addition that he will both live in this way and meet his end accordingly—since the future is immanifest to us, and we posit happiness, wholly and in every way, as an end and as complete? And if this is so, we will say that those among the living who have and will have available to them the things stated are blessed—but blessed human beings.

Let what pertains to these things too be defined up to this point.

Chapter Eleven

But that the fortunes of a person's descendants and all his friends contribute nothing whatsoever [to his happiness] appears to be excessively opposed to what is dear and contrary to the opinions held. And because the things that may befall us are many and differ in various respects—some hitting closer to home, other less so—thoroughly distinguishing each appears to be a long and even endless task. But perhaps for the matter to be stated generally and in outline would be adequate.

Just as some of the misfortunes that concern a person himself have a certain gravity and weight as regards his life but others seem lighter, so also the misfortunes that concern all his friends are similar; and if, concerning each thing suffered, it makes a difference whether the friends are alive or have met their end, far more than if the unlawful and terrible things in tragic plays occur before the action of the play or during it, then one must indeed take this difference into account—and even more, perhaps, when it comes to the perplexity raised concerning those who have passed away, that is, whether they share in something good or in the opposite. For it seems, on the basis of these points, that even if anything at all does get through to them, whether good or its contrary, it is something faint and small, either simply so or to them. And if this is not so, then what gets through to them is, at any rate, of such a degree and kind that it does not make happy those who are not such or deprive those who are happy of their blessedness. The friends' faring well, then, appears to make some contribution to the condition of those who have passed away, as does, similarly, their faring ill—but a contribution of such a kind and degree as not to make the happy unhappy or anything else of that sort.

Chapter Twelve

With these things defined, let us examine closely whether happiness

is something praised or rather honored, for it is clear that it does not belong among the capacities, at any rate. Now, everything praised appears to be praised for its being of a certain sort and for its condition relative to something: we praise the just person, the courageous person, and, in general, the good person as well as virtue itself, on account of the actions and works involved; and we praise the strong man and the swift runner and each of the rest for their being, by nature, of a certain sort and for their condition in relation to something good and serious. This is clear also on the basis of the praises offered to the gods, since it is manifestly laughable for them to be compared to us; but this happens because praise arises through comparison, as we said. And if praise is of things of that sort, it is clear that not praise but something greater and better than praise applies to the best things, as in fact appears to be the case: the gods we deem blessed and happy, and the most divine of men we deem blessed.

The case is similar with the good things too: none praise happiness the way they praise justice; rather, people deem happiness a blessed thing, on the grounds that it is something more divine and better. And Eudoxus too seems to have nobly pleaded his case that the first prize belongs to pleasure. For the fact that it is not praised as being among the good things reveals, he supposed, that it is superior to the things praised; and such, he supposed, is the god and the good. For it is to these that all else is compared. Indeed, praise belongs to virtue: people are apt to do noble things as a result of virtue, whereas encomiums belong to the works of both body and soul alike. But perhaps being very precise about these things is more appropriate to those who have labored over encomiums; to us it is clear, on the basis of what has been said, that happiness belongs among the things that are honored and complete. This seems to be the case also on account of its being a principle: it is for the sake of this that we all do everything else, and we posit the principle and the cause of the good things as being something honorable and divine.

Chapter Thirteen

Now, since happiness is a certain activity of soul in accord with complete virtue, what concerns virtue would have to be examined. For perhaps in this way we might better contemplate happiness as well. And the politician in the true sense seems to have labored over this especially, for he wishes to make the citizens good and obedient to the laws. We have as models of these the lawgivers of the Cretans and Lacedaimonians, and any others of that sort there might have been. And if this examination is a part of the political art, it is clear

that the investigation would be in accord with the choice made at the beginning.

But that we must examine the virtue distinctive of a human being is clear, for we were seeking both the human good and human happiness. We mean by “virtue distinctive of a human being” not that of the body but that of the soul, and by “happiness” we mean an activity of soul. But if these things are so, then it is clear that the politician ought to know in some way about the soul, just as also someone who is going to treat the eye must know the whole body as well—and even more so inasmuch as the political art is more honorable and better than medicine. Those physicians who are refined take very seriously what pertains to knowledge of the body, and the politician too ought to contemplate the soul; but he ought to contemplate it for the sake of these things and up to the point that is adequate for what is being sought: to be more precise is perhaps too difficult given the tasks set forth. But some points concerning the soul are stated sufficiently even in the exoteric arguments, and one ought to make use of them—for example, that one part of it is nonrational, another possesses reason. Yet whether these things are divided, like the parts of the body and every divisible thing, or whether they are two in speech but naturally inseparable, like the convex and the concave in the circumference of a circle, makes no difference with a view to the present task.

Of the nonrational, one part seems to be that which is held in common and vegetative—I mean that which causes nutrition and growth. For someone could posit that such a capacity of the soul is in all things that are nourished and in embryos, and that this same capacity is present in the completed things as well, for this is more rational than positing some other capacity. A certain virtue belonging to this capacity, then, appears to be common and not distinctive of a human being. For this part and its capacity seem particularly active in sleep, but the good person and the bad would be least distinct in sleep. (So it is that people assert that for half of life, the happy do not differ at all from the wretched, and this is to be expected: sleep is an idleness of that in reference to which the soul is said to be serious or base.) Unless, that is, certain motions do reach them to a small degree, and in this way the dreams of the decent are better than those of people at random. But enough about these things: let the nutritive part be, since it does not naturally share in human virtue.

Yet there seems to be also a certain other nature of the soul that is nonrational, although it does share in reason in a way. For in the case of the self-restrained person and of the one lacking self-restraint, we praise their reason and that part of their soul possessing reason, since

it correctly exhorts them toward the best things. But there appears to be something else in them that is by nature contrary to reason, which does battle with and strains against reason. For just as when we choose to move paralyzed parts of the body to the right and they are, to the contrary, borne off to the left, so also with the soul: the impulses of those lacking self-restraint are toward things contrary [to their reason]. Yet whereas in the case of bodies, we see the thing being borne off, in the case of the soul we do not see it. But perhaps one must hold there to be, no less in the case of the soul too, something contrary to reason that opposes and blocks it. How it is different does not matter at all; it too appears to share in reason, as we said. In the case of the self-restrained person, at any rate, it is obedient to the commands of reason—and perhaps it heeds those commands still more readily in the case of the moderate or courageous person, since then it is in all respects in harmony with reason.

It appears, therefore, that the nonrational part is twofold, for the vegetative part has nothing in common with reason; but that part characterized by desire, and by longing in general, shares somehow in reason inasmuch as it heeds it and is apt to be obedient to its commands. Thus we assert that [he who is in this way obedient to the commands] of his father and friends in some manner possesses reason—and not that he does so in the manner of [someone knowledgeable in] mathematics. That the nonrational part is somehow persuaded by reason is indicated both by admonition and by all criticism as well as exhortation. But if we must assert that this part too possesses reason, then that which possesses reason will be twofold as well: what possesses it in the authoritative sense and in itself, on the one hand, and, on the other, what has it in the sense of being apt to listen as one does to one's father.

Virtue too is defined in accord with this distinction, for we say that some of the virtues are intellectual, others moral: wisdom, comprehension, and prudence being intellectual, liberality and moderation being moral. For in speaking about someone's character, we do not say that he is wise or comprehending but that he is gentle or moderate. Yet we praise the wise person too with respect to the characteristic that is his, and we say that of the characteristics, the praiseworthy ones are virtues.

Book 8

Chapter One

It would follow, after these matters, to go through what concerns friendship. For friendship is a certain virtue or is accompanied by virtue; and, further, it is most necessary with a view to life: without friends, no one would choose to live, even if he possessed all other goods; and indeed those who are wealthy or have acquired political offices and power seem to be in need of friends most of all. What benefit would there be in such prosperity if one were deprived of [the opportunity to perform] a good deed, which arises and is most praiseworthy in relation to friends especially? Or how could one's prosperity be guarded and preserved without friends? For the more prosperity one has, the more precarious it is. In poverty as well as in other misfortunes, people suppose that friends are their only refuge. And friendship is a help to the young, in saving them from error, just as it is also to the old, with a view to the care they require and their diminished capacity or actions stemming from their weakness; it is a help also to those in their prime in performing noble actions, for "two going together" are better able both to think and to act.

By nature, friendship seems to be inherent in a parent for offspring and in offspring for a parent, not only in human beings but also in birds and most animals; it is inherent too in those that are alike in kind to one another, and especially in human beings, which is why we praise people who are "lovers of humankind." One might see in one's travels too that every human being is kindred to every other human being and a friend to him.

It seems too that friendship holds cities together and that lawgivers are more serious about it than about justice. For like-mindedness seems to resemble friendship, and lawgivers aim at this especially and drive out discord because it especially produces hatred. When people are friends, they have no need of justice, but when they are just, they do need friendship in addition; and in the realm of the just things, the most just seems to be what involves friendship. Yet friendship is not only necessary but also noble, for we praise those who love their friends, and an abundance of friends is held to be a noble thing. Further, people suppose good men and their friends to be one and the same.

But not a few things about friendship are in dispute. For some set it down as a certain likeness and friends as those who are alike, which is why they assert that "like is to like," "jackdaw to jackdaw," and

such things. Others, to the contrary, assert that all such persons are “potters” to one another. And concerning these very points, people seek out something higher and pertaining more to nature, Euripides claiming that “the parched earth loves the rain” and that “the august heaven, when full of rain, loves to fall to earth,” Heraclitus that “opposition is advantageous,” that “the noblest harmony comes from things that differ,” and “all things come into being in accord with strife.” Contrary to these are still others, including Empedocles, who claim that like aims at like.

Now, let us leave aside those perplexing questions bound up with matters of nature (for they are not proper to the present examination), and let us examine instead those that are bound up with what is distinctively human and that involve characters and passions: for example, whether friendship arises in all people or whether it is impossible for the wicked to be friends; and whether there is one form of friendship or more. Those who suppose that there is only one form, because it admits of degrees, the more and the less, have trusted in an insufficient indication, for things different in form also admit of more and less. But what pertains to them was spoken of before.

Chapter Two

Perhaps what concerns these matters would become apparent if what is lovable should become known. For not everything seems to be loved but only what is lovable, and this seems to be what is good, pleasant, or useful. But what is useful would seem to be that through which something good or pleasant arises, with the result that what is good as well as what is pleasant would be lovable as ends. Is it the good, then, that people love or is it the good for themselves? For sometimes these conflict, as is the case also with the pleasant. For it seems that each person loves what is good for himself and that, while in an unqualified sense the good is what is lovable, what is lovable to each is what is good for each. Yet each in fact loves not what is good for him but what appears so. Yet this will make no difference at all, since it will be what appears lovable [that each will in fact regard as good and so love].

While there are three things on account of which people love, friendship is not spoken of when it comes to loving inanimate objects, since in that case there is no reciprocated love or wish for the good of the inanimate thing: it is perhaps laughable to wish for good things for the wine, but, if anything, one wishes that it be preserved so that one may have it. But people assert that a friend ought to wish for good

things for his friend for that friend's sake. Yet people speak of those who do wish for the good things in this way as having "goodwill," if the other person involved does not return that same wish, for they say that goodwill in those who reciprocate it is friendship. Or perhaps we must set down in addition "good will that does not go unnoticed": for many people have goodwill toward those they have not seen but whom they assume to be decent or useful, and one of the latter might feel this same thing toward the former. These people, then, appear to have goodwill toward each other—but how could one say that they are friends when they are unaware that they each have this feeling for the other? Friends must, therefore, have goodwill toward each other and not go unnoticed in their wishing for the good things for the other, on account of some one of the [lovable] things mentioned.

Chapter Three

These things differ in form from one another; so, therefore, do both the kinds of friendly love and the friendships that result. The forms of friendship, then, are three, equal in number to the things that are lovable; in accord with each is a reciprocal love that does not go unnoticed, and those who love each other wish for the good things for each other in that respect in which they love each other.

Those who love each other on account of utility, then, do not love each other in themselves, but only insofar as they come to have something good from the other. Similar too is the case of those who love on account of pleasure, for people are fond of those who are witty, not because they are of a certain sort, but because they are pleasant to them. Therefore, those who love on account of utility feel affection for the sake of their own good, just as those who love on account of pleasure feel affection for the sake of their own pleasure. He who is loved in each case is not loved for himself but only insofar as he is useful or pleasant. And these, then, are friendships incidentally; for it is not for being what he is that the person loved is loved, but only insofar as he provides (in the one case) something good or (in the other) pleasure.

These sorts of friendships, then, are easily dissolved when the people involved do not remain the same as they were. For if they are no longer pleasant or useful, those who love them will cease to do so. And what is useful does not remain constant but is different at different times. When that on the basis of which they were friends is nullified, then so too the friendship is dissolved, since the friendship exists with a view to the thing in question. This sort of friendship seems to arise

especially among the old (for those of such an age pursue not what is pleasant but what is beneficial to them) as well as among all those in their prime, or the young, who pursue what is advantageous. And such people do not frequently live with each other either, for sometimes they are not even pleasant to each other. They therefore have no additional need of this sort of association if they supply no benefit to the other, for they are pleasant to each other only insofar as they foster hopes of obtaining something good from the other. It is also among these sorts of friendships that people place the kind connected with foreigners.

But the friendship of the young seems to be based on pleasure, for they live according to passion and most of all pursue what is pleasant to them and at hand. But since this time of life is prone to undergoing change, the pleasures too come to be different. Hence the young swiftly become friends and cease being so: the friendship changes together with what they find pleasant, and change in this sort of pleasure is swift. The young are given to erotic love as well. For the greater part of erotic love is bound up with passion and is based on pleasure, which is why they love and swiftly cease loving, often changing in the course of the same day. But the young do wish to pass their days together and live together, for in this way they attain what friendship for them involves.

But complete friendship is the friendship of those who are good and alike in point of virtue. For such people wish in similar fashion for the good things for each other insofar as they are good, and they are good in themselves. But those who wish for the good things for their friends, for their friends' sake, are friends most of all, since they are disposed in this way in themselves and not incidentally. Their friendship continues, then, while they are good, and virtue is a stable thing. Each person involved is good simply and for the friend, since good people are good simply and beneficial to one another. So too are they pleasant, for the good are both pleasant simply and pleasant to one another. To each person, his own actions and those like them accord with his pleasure, and the actions of those who are good are the same or similar.

It is with good reason that this sort of friendship is stable, since it combines in itself all those things that ought to belong to friends. For every friendship exists on account of a good or pleasure, either simply or for the person who loves, and in accord with the likeness involved. And in this complete friendship, all that has been spoken of is present in the friends themselves, since in this respect the friends are alike and the remaining [reasons for forming friendship] are present as well—both the good simply and the pleasant simply—and these things are lovable

most of all. So it is among these people that both loving and friendship are especially prevalent and best. Yet friendships of this sort are likely to be rare, since people of this sort are few. Further, there is also need of the passage of time and the habits formed by living together; for as the adage has it, it is not possible for people to know each other until they have eaten together the proverbial salt, nor is it possible, before this occurs, for them to accept each other and to be friends until each appears to each as lovable and is trusted. Those who swiftly make proofs of friendship to each other wish to be friends but are not such unless they are also lovable and know this about each other. For a wish for friendship arises swiftly, but friendship itself does not.

Chapter Four

This friendship, then, is complete, in regard to both time and the remaining considerations [namely, the good and pleasure]; and in every respect each friend comes to possess from the other the same or similar things, which is just what ought to be the case with friends. Friendship based on what is pleasant bears a resemblance to this one, for in fact the good are pleasant to one another as well. Similar too is the case of friendship based on utility, for the good are also useful to one another. But among those who seek pleasure or utility, friendships endure especially whenever each attains the same thing from the other—for example, pleasure—and not only this but whenever it comes from the same type, as in, for example, those who are witty, and not as in the case of lover and beloved. For lover and beloved are not pleased by the same things; rather, the lover is pleased by seeing the beloved, the beloved by being attended to by his lover. And sometimes when the bloom of youth fades, so too the friendship fades (since for the lover, the sight of the other is not pleasant, and for the beloved, the attention of the lover is no more). Many in turn do remain friends, however, whenever, as a result of their living together, they feel affection for their characters, if they are of the same character. But in the case of lovers whose mutual exchange is not for pleasure but utility, they are and remain friends to a lesser degree. And those who are friends on account of utility dissolve the friendship at the same time as the advantage ceases, for they were friends not to each other but to the profit involved.

In the case of pleasure and utility, then, it is possible even for the base to be friends with one another and for the decent to be friends with the base, as well as for those who are neither [base nor decent] to be friends with any sort whatever. Yet it is clear that only the good can be friends on account of who they themselves are. For those who are

bad do not delight in one another, unless some benefit should accrue to them. Moreover, only the friendship of the good is secure against slander, for it is not easy to trust anyone when it comes to slander about someone who has been tested by oneself over a long time; and in the case of these people, one finds such statements as "I trust him," "he would never commit injustice," and all those other things deemed worthy of true friendship. In the case of the other sorts of friendships, there is nothing to prevent such bad things from arising.

Now, since human beings call friends both those who are friendly on account of the utility involved (as in the case of cities, for alliances struck by cities seem to be for the sake of what is advantageous), and those who feel affection for one another on account of pleasure (as in the case of children), perhaps we too ought to say that these sorts of people are friends, but that there is more than one form of friendship; and that the friendship of good human beings, insofar as they are good, is friendship in the primary and authoritative sense, the remaining friendships being such only by way of a resemblance. For insofar as there is some good involved and some likeness, they are friends. And in fact what is pleasant is a good for the lovers of pleasure. But these kinds of friendship do not often go together, and those who become friends on account of utility are not the same as those who do so on account of pleasure, for incidental things are not often yoked together.

Given that these are the forms into which friendship has been divided, base people will be friends on account of what is pleasant or useful to them, since it is in this respect that they are alike, whereas the good will be friends on account of who they themselves are, in that they are good. The latter, then, are friends simply, whereas the former are friends incidentally and only by resembling the latter.

Chapter Five

Just as in the virtues, so too in friendship: some people are spoken of as good in reference to the characteristic they possess, others as good in reference to the activity they engage in. For those who live together delight in and provide good things to one another, whereas those who are asleep or separated by location are not active, though they are so disposed as to be active as a friend. For location dissolves not friendship in the unqualified sense but rather its activity. Yet if the absence lasts a long time, it seems to make even the friendship forgotten, which is why it has been said that "indeed, many friendships the lack of contact dissolves."

But neither the old nor the sour types appear disposed to form friendships, for there is little that is pleasant in them, and no one is able to pass the day together with someone who causes him pain or who is not pleasant: nature appears to avoid most of all what is painful and to aim at what is pleasant. But those who approve of one another without living together are more like those with goodwill than like friends. For nothing so much belongs to friends as living together (those in need long to be benefited, and even the blessed long to spend their days together with others, since it belongs to them least of all to be solitary). But it is not possible to go through life with one another when people are not pleasant or do not delight in the same things, which is in fact what seems to characterize the friendship between comrades.

The friendship of those who are good, then, is friendship most of all, just as has been said many times. For what is good or pleasant in an unqualified sense seems to be lovable and choiceworthy, whereas what is good or pleasant to each individual seems to be such only to that person. But a good person is lovable and choiceworthy to a good person on both accounts.

Friendly affection is also like a passion, whereas friendship is like a characteristic: friendly affection exists no less toward inanimate things, whereas people reciprocate love as a matter of choice, and choice stems from one's characteristic. People also wish for good things for those who are loved, for the sake of the loved ones themselves, not in reference to a passion but in accord with a characteristic. And in loving their friend, they love what is good for themselves, since the good person who becomes a friend becomes a good for the person to whom he is a friend. Each one, then, both loves what is good for himself and repays in equal measure what they wish for the other and what is pleasant. For it is said, "friendship is equality," and these things belong most of all to the friendship of those who are good.

Chapter Six

Friendship arises less among those who are sour or old, inasmuch as they are surlier than others and delight less in their associations. For being without surliness and delighting in one's associations seem especially to be marks of friendship and productive of friendship. Hence the young become friends swiftly, but the old do not, since people do not become friends with those in whom they do not delight, and neither, similarly, do those who are sour. But such people do have goodwill toward one another, for they wish for good things for one

another and meet one another's needs. Yet they are still not quite friends, because they do not pass their days together or delight in one another, the very things that especially seem to be marks of friendship.

It is also not possible to be a friend to many, at least not when it comes to complete friendship, just as it is not possible to be in love with many at the same time either (since such love is akin to an excess, and such a thing naturally arises in relation to one person). It is also not easy for many people to be very pleasing to the same person at the same time or, perhaps, for many to be good. Also, one must acquire experience of the other person and be in the habit of living together, which is altogether difficult. But when it comes to what is useful or pleasant, it is possible to be pleasing to many, since people of that sort are many and their services are rendered in a short time.

Of these friendships, the one based on what is pleasant is more like friendship properly speaking, whenever the same things come from both parties and they delight in each other or in the same things; such are the friendships of the young, since they have more of what is liberal in them. But friendship based on utility belongs to those who frequent the marketplace. And although the blessed have no need of useful people, they do of pleasant ones: they wish to live with certain people, and although they might bear what is painful for a short time, no one could endure it continuously—not even the good itself, should it be painful to him. Hence they seek out friends who are pleasant. Yet perhaps they ought to seek out the sorts of people who are good as well, and, further, good for them themselves: in this way all that ought to belong to friends will be theirs.

But people in positions of authority appear to make use of friends who are divided into two groups: some are useful to them and others pleasant, though the same people are not often both. For those in authority seek out neither those who are pleasant and have virtue, nor those who are useful with a view to noble things. Rather, they seek out the witty, when they aim at pleasure, and the clever to do their bidding, and these qualities do not frequently arise in the same person. It has been said that the serious person is at once pleasant and useful; yet such a person does not become a friend to someone who exceeds him [in power], unless [the person in power] is also exceeded [by the serious person] in virtue. But if this does not occur, [the serious person] is not rendered equal [to the person of greater power], since he is exceeded in the relevant proportion. Yet [those in positions of authority] are not much accustomed to becoming these sorts [of friends to the virtuous].

The friendships that have been spoken of, then, involve equality. For the same things come from both people involved, and they wish for the same things for each other, or they exchange one thing for another—for example, pleasure in exchange for a benefit. That these latter are friendships to a lesser degree and endure less has also been stated. Yet on account of their likeness and unlikeness to the same thing, they seem both to be and not to be friendships: given their likeness to the friendship that accords with virtue, they appear to be friendships (for they involve either pleasure or utility, and these belong also to the friendship that accords with virtue); but insofar as the friendship of the virtuous is secure against slander and is stable, whereas these friendships change quickly and differ in many other ways, they appear not to be friendships, given their unlikeness to this friendship.

Chapter Seven

A different form of friendship is that which is based on a superiority—for example, the friendship of a father for a son, and, in general, an older man for a younger, a husband for a wife, and every ruler for one who is ruled. These friendships differ from one another as well: the friendship of parents for their children is not the same as that of rulers for the ruled. Yet the friendship of a father for a son is not even the same as that of the son for the father, nor is that of a husband for a wife the same as that of a wife for a husband. For in each case there is a different virtue and work involved, and different too are the reasons why they love each other. Both the feelings of friendly affection and the friendships, then, are different.

Each person, therefore, does not come to possess the same things from the other, nor ought each to seek the same things. But whenever children render to their parents what they owe to those who have begotten them, and parents [to their sons] what they owe to their children, the friendship of such people will be stable and equitable. And in all friendships based on a superiority, the feelings of friendly affection too ought to be proportional—for example, the better person ought to be loved more than he loves, and so also with the more beneficial person, and similarly with each of the others. For whenever the friendly affection accords with merit, at that point equality somehow arises, which of course is held to belong to friendship.

But what is equal in matters of justice does not appear to hold similarly in the case of friendship. For in matters of justice, what is equal is, first, what accords with merit, and, second, what accords with a

certain quantity; in the case of friendship, however, what accords with a certain quantity is first, what accords with merit second. And this is clear whenever a great difference arises between the friends in point of virtue, vice, resources, or some other thing; for not only are the parties involved no longer friends, but they do not even deem themselves worthy to be. This is most apparent in the case of the gods, for they exceed [human beings] in all good things to the greatest degree. But it is clear too in the case of kings. For those who are much inferior to kings do not deem themselves worthy to be friends with them, and neither do those who are worthy of nothing, with the best or the wisest.

In these sorts of cases, then, there is no precise definition regarding the point up to which friends remain friends. For although many things may be taken away, the friendship still endures; but when someone is separated from the other to a great degree, as is the god, then the friendship no longer endures. This is also why the perplexity arises as to whether friends perhaps never wish for the greatest goods for their friends—for example, for them to be gods—since then they will no longer be friends to them, and neither will they therefore be goods, for friends are goods. So if it has been nobly said that a friend wishes for the good things for the friend for his friend's sake, the friend would need to remain as whatever sort he is. For the one friend will wish for the greatest goods for the other as a human being—and perhaps not all such goods, since each wishes for the good things for himself most of all.

Chapter Eight

But the many seem, on account of their love of honor, to wish to be loved more than to love. Hence the many are lovers of flattery. For the flatterer is a friend who is inferior, or at any rate he pretends to be inferior and to love more than he is loved. Moreover, being loved seems to be close to being honored, which is indeed what the many aim at. But they seem to choose honor not on its own account but only incidentally. For the many delight in being honored by those in positions of authority, on account of the hope thus fostered (for they suppose that they will obtain what they need from them; they delight in honor, therefore, as a sign of their faring well).

But those who long for honor from people who are decent and who know them aim at confirming their own opinion of themselves. They delight in honor, therefore, since they trust that they are good as a result of the judgment of those who say so. But they delight in being

loved in itself. Hence being loved would seem to be better than being honored, and friendship would seem to be choiceworthy in itself. But friendship seems to consist more in loving than in being loved. And a sign of this is mothers who delight in loving their children: some mothers give away their own children to be raised, and though they love them just because they know who they are, they do not seek to be loved in return if both are not possible. Rather, it seems to be enough for mothers if they see their children doing well; and they love them even if their children, in ignorance of who their mothers are, may render to them nothing of what is proper to a mother.

Since friendship consists more in loving than in being loved and those who love their friends are praised, loving seems to be a virtue of friends. As a result, those in whom this arises in accord with merit are stable friends, as is their friendship. It is in this way especially that even those who are unequal might be friends, since they could be rendered equal [by a difference in the love offered on each side]. Equality and likeness constitute friendly affection, and especially the likeness of those who are alike in point of virtue: since they are stable in themselves, they remain the same also in relation to each other, and they neither need base things nor offer aid of this sort; rather, they even obstruct it, so to speak, for it belongs to good people neither to err themselves nor to permit their friends to do so. Those who are corrupt are without steadiness, however, for they do not remain alike even to themselves; yet for a short time they do become friends, when they delight in each other's corruption. But those who are useful and pleasant remain friends for a longer time, for however long they provide pleasures or benefits to each other.

It seems that friendship based on utility arises especially from opposites—for example, the friendship of a poor person with a wealthy one, that of an ignorant person with a knower: because the one aims at what he happens to need, he gives something else in return for it. Someone might bring in here both lover and beloved, or the beautiful and the ugly. Hence lovers in fact appear laughable sometimes, when they deem themselves worthy to be loved as they themselves love. Perhaps those who are similarly lovable ought to be deemed worthy of such reciprocal love, but if they are nothing of the sort, it is laughable.

Yet perhaps one opposite does not aim at the other opposite in itself, except incidentally. Rather, the longing involved is for the middle term, since this is good—for example, what is good for the dry is not to become wet but to come to the middle condition, and similarly in the case of heat and the rest. Now, then, let us leave aside these considerations, for indeed they are rather foreign to our purpose.

Chapter Nine

But it seems, as was said in the beginning, that both friendship and the just are concerned with the same matters and are present among the same persons. For in every community, something just seems to exist, and friendship as well. At any rate, people address their shipmates and fellow soldiers as friends, just as those in other communities do. And to the extent that people share in community, there is friendship, since to this extent there is also what is just. The proverb “the things of friends are in common” is correct, since friendship resides in community—for brothers and comrades, all things are in common, whereas for others, only certain definite things are in common, to a greater or lesser degree. In the case of friendships as well, there is greater and lesser community.

The just things too differ, since these are not the same for parents in relation to children and for brothers in relation to one another, or for comrades and for citizens, and similarly in the other friendships. The unjust things also differ in relation to each of them, and they increase the more they concern friends—for example, it is more terrible to steal money from a comrade than from a fellow citizen, not to aid a brother than not to aid a stranger, and to strike a father than to strike anyone else. It is natural for what is just to increase together with friendship, on the grounds that justice and friendship are present among the same persons and are coextensive.

But all communities are like parts of the political community, for people come together for a certain advantage, namely, to provide some of the things conducive to life. And the political community seems to come together from the outset, and to continue to exist, for the sake of what is advantageous; lawgivers aim at this and claim that the advantage held in common is what is just. The other communities, then, aim at a partial advantage—for example, sailors aim at the advantage of making money from sailing or some such thing; soldiers at the advantage bound up with war, since they long for either money, victory, or a city; and similarly too in the case of members of the same tribe or district.

But some communities seem to arise on account of pleasure—like communities of Bacchic revelers and members of a dinner club, for these exist for the sake of performing a sacrifice and of getting others. But all these seem to fall under the political community; for the political community aims not at the present advantage but at that pertaining to life as a whole, [since those engaged in political life] perform sacrifices and host gatherings concerning them, thereby distributing

honors to the gods and providing a pleasant rest for themselves. For the ancient sacrifices and gatherings appear to take place after the harvest—for example, the “first fruits”—because people used to have leisure especially in these seasons. All communities, therefore, appear to be parts of the political community, and the sorts of friendships will correspond with the different sorts of communities.

Chapter Ten

There are three forms of regime and an equal number of deviations that are like corruptions of the former three. The regimes are kingship, aristocracy, and a third that is based on property assessments [*timēma*], which it appears proper to speak of as “timocracy,” though most people are accustomed to calling it “polity.” And the best of these is kingship; the worst, timocracy. The deviation from kingship is tyranny, for while both are monarchical, they differ the most because the tyrant looks to what is advantageous for himself and the king to what is advantageous for the ruled. A king is not someone lacking in self-sufficiency or superiority in any goods; he is, rather, the sort of person who is in need of nothing. He would look to what is beneficial, then, not for himself, but for the ruled. Were he not of this sort, he would be a kind of king appointed merely by lot. But tyranny is in this respect the opposite, for the tyrant pursues the good for himself; and it is quite manifest in this case that tyranny is the most inferior regime, since the opposite of the best is the worst. The change from kingship is to tyranny, for tyranny is the base form of a monarchy, and the corrupt king becomes a tyrant. From aristocracy the change is to oligarchy as a consequence of the vice of the rulers, who distribute what belongs to the city contrary to merit—that is, they distribute all or most of the goods to themselves and the political offices always to the same people, since they make being wealthy their greatest concern. A few corrupt people rule, therefore, instead of the most decent. From timocracy the change is to democracy, for they share a defining feature: timocracy too wishes to be [rule] of the multitude, and all those who meet the property assessment are considered equal. Democracy is the least corrupt, for it deviates only slightly from the form of “polity.” The regimes change especially in this way, then, since in this way they change least and hence most easily.

One could find likenesses and, as it were, models of the regimes in households too. For the community of a father in relation to his sons bears a resemblance to kingship, since the father cares for his children. And this is why Homer too addresses Zeus as “Father,” since kingship tends to be paternal rule. But among the Persians, the rule of the

father is tyrannical, for he uses his sons as slaves. Tyrannical too is the rule of a master over slaves, since it is the advantage of the master that is achieved in it. This latter kind of rule, then, appears to be correct, the Persian in error; for over those who differ, the kinds of rule differ.

The community of husband and wife appears to be aristocratic: the man rules in accord with merit regarding the things over which a man ought to rule, whereas all things suited to a woman, he hands over to her. The man who takes control of all things turns his rule into oligarchy, for he does this contrary to merit and not inasmuch as it is better. Sometimes women rule, when they are heiresses. Their rule, therefore, arises not in accord with virtue but on account of their wealth and power, as oligarchies.

The community of brothers is like timocracy, since they are equals, except insofar as they differ in their ages, which is exactly why the friendship is no longer brotherly if there is a great difference in age. But democracy is found especially in households where there is no master (since in these households all are on an equal footing) and in those where the ruler is weak and each person has license to act as he likes.

Chapter Eleven

Friendship appears in each of the regimes to the extent that what is just does as well. In a king in relation to those over whom he is king, friendship consists in superiority in granting benefactions, for he benefits those over whom he is king—if in fact, being good, he cares for them so that they fare well, just as does a shepherd for his sheep. So it is that Homer too spoke of Agamemnon as the “shepherd of the people.” But a paternal friendship is also of this sort, though it differs in the magnitude of its benefactions; for a father is the cause of one’s very being, which is held to be the greatest thing, as well as of one’s rearing and education; ancestors too are credited with these things. For the rule of a father over his sons is by nature, as is that of ancestors over their descendants and that of a king over those whom he rules as king. These friendships involve superiority; hence parents are also honored. And what is just in these cases, therefore, is not the same for both, but it does accord with merit, since the friendship does as well.

The friendship of a husband for a wife is the same as that in aristocracy, for it accords with virtue, and to the better person goes more of the good and to each what is suited to each. So also in the case of what

is just. The friendship of brothers is like that of comrades, for they are equals and similar in age, and such people for the most part have the same feelings and habits. Also resembling this friendship is the friendship pertaining to timocracy, for the citizens wish to be equals and equitable—to rule in turn, therefore, and on an equal basis. Such too, therefore, is the corresponding friendship.

In the case of the deviations, in the same way as what is just exists there to a small degree, so too does friendship, and it exists least of all in the worst one: in tyranny, there is little or no friendship. For where there is nothing in common for ruler and ruled, there is no friendship either, since what is just does not even exist, as in the cases of an artisan in relation to his tool, the soul in relation to the body, and the master in relation to his slave. For all these are benefited by those who use them, but there is no friendship for inanimate things and nothing just pertaining to them. But neither is there friendship for a horse or an ox, nor for a slave insofar as he is a slave: there is nothing in common, since a slave is an animate tool, and a tool an inanimate slave. Insofar as he is a slave, then, there is no friendship in relation to him, but only insofar as he is a human being, since there seems to be something just for every human being in relation to everyone able to share in law and compact. There is friendship, then, insofar as the slave is a human being. So to a small degree, friendships and what is just exist even in tyrannies; but in democracies, they exist to a greater degree, since those who are equal have many things in common.

Chapter Twelve

Every friendship, then, involves community, as has been said. But one might separate out both the friendship of kinfolk and that of comrades. For the friendships of fellow citizens, tribesmen, sailors, and all of that sort seem more like communities [than friendships], since they appear to be based on a certain agreement among the parties—and with these sorts of friendships one might also assign the friendship connected with foreigners.

But the friendship of kinfolk appears to have many forms, though every one of them appears to depend on the paternal sort: parents feel affection for their children on the grounds that they are something of their own, whereas children feel affection for their parents on the grounds that they themselves are something that comes from them. But parents know what issues from them to a greater degree than their offspring know that they issue from their parents; and the begetter feels more united in kinship to its offspring than does the offspring

to its maker, for what comes from the begetter itself is its own—for example, a tooth, a hair, or anything whatsoever in relation to its possessor—but the begetter is not at all the offspring's own, or is such only to a lesser degree. The length of time involved also makes a difference, for parents immediately feel affection for those who are born, whereas offspring feel affection for their parents after a period of time, once they acquire comprehension or perception. From these considerations too it is clear why mothers are more loving [than fathers].

Parents, then, love children as they love themselves (for those who come from them are like other selves separately existing), whereas children love their parents on the grounds that they are born from them, and brothers love each other because they were born from the same parents. Their sameness in relation to these parents constitutes the sameness brothers share with each other, which is why people claim to be of the same blood, the same root, and such things. They are in some way the same thing, therefore, even though this same thing resides in separate persons. But it is a great matter, when it comes to friendship, for both to have been brought up together and to be of similar age: "like age [gladdens] like age," and those who live together are comrades. Hence too the friendship of brothers is like that of comrades. First cousins and the other descendants are also bound by ties of kinship as a result of these things, since they come from the same persons. Some are closer in kinship, while others are more foreign by dint of being nearer to or farther from the family founder.

The friendship of children for their parents, and that of human beings for gods, is a friendship with what is good and superior. For they have produced the greatest benefits: they are the causes of a child's being and his rearing, and of the education of those born. And this sort of friendship affords both what is pleasant and what is useful to a greater degree than does that between unrelated persons, inasmuch as their lives have more in common. There are qualities of the friendship of brothers that are found also in the friendship of comrades. These qualities are present even more among those brothers who are decent and generally alike, insofar as there is a closer kinship among them and they begin having affection for one another from birth, and insofar as they share more of the same habits, coming as they do from the same parents and having been reared and educated together. Also, their testing of one another over time is greatest and most certain. And what conduces to friendship is present in proportion also among the rest of those who are kin.

The friendship between a husband and a wife seems to be in accord with nature. For a human being is by nature more a coupling being

than a political one, inasmuch as a household is earlier and more necessary than a city and the begetting of children is more common to animals. Among the other animals, then, community exists to that extent; but human beings live together not only for the sake of begetting children but also for the sake of the things that contribute to life, for the tasks involved are divided immediately, those of the husband being different from those of the wife. They assist each other, then, by putting their own things in the service of what is in common. For these reasons, both what is useful and what is pleasant seem to be found in this friendship, though there would be such a friendship also on account of their virtue, should they be decent. For there is a virtue belonging to each, and they would delight in a person of a comparable sort. Children too seem to be a common bond; hence childless couples break up more readily, since children are a good common to both parents, and what is common holds things together.

How a husband must live in relation to his wife, and, in general, a friend in relation to a friend, appears no different a thing to inquire into than how it is just to do so, for the just does not appear to be the same thing for a friend in relation to a friend as it is in relation to a foreigner, a comrade, or a schoolmate.

Chapter Thirteen

Now, friendships are threefold, as was said in the beginning; and in each case, there are friendships consisting in an equality, others based on a superiority. For those who are similarly good become friends, or a good person befriends a worse one; and those who are pleasant and those who are useful become friends in like manner, whether they are equal in the benefits they confer or different. Those who are equal ought to love each other equally, in accord with the relevant equality, whereas those who are unequal ought to render to each what is proportional given the relevant superiorities.

But accusations and blame arise in the friendship based on utility, either in it alone or in it especially, and with good reason. For those who are friends on account of their virtue are eager to benefit each other (for this belongs to virtue and to friendship); and since they compete with a view to this, there are no accusations or fights: no one is annoyed by someone who loves and benefits him, but if he is refined, he retaliates by doing some good to his friend. And since he who surpasses in doing good obtains what he aims at, he would not level an accusation against his friend, for each longs for the good. There are also not many accusations in the friendships based on pleasure

either, since both parties come to possess simultaneously what they long for, if they delight in going through life together. In fact, he who would accuse the other of not pleasing him would appear laughable, since it is possible for him not to spend his days together with him. But friendship based on utility is prone to accusations. For those who use each other with a view to some benefit always want more and suppose they obtain less than what is proper. And so they blame the other because they do not obtain as much as they want and think they merit, and those who perform the benefactions are not able to supply as much as the recipients want.

It seems that, just as there is a twofold distinction in what is just—what is unwritten and what accords with law—so also in the friendship based on utility, there is the moral friendship and the legal one. Accusations arise, then, especially when people do not dissolve the friendship on the same basis on which they entered into it. And the legal type of this friendship depends on stated terms: one kind belongs wholly to marketplace transactions that happen immediately; another is more liberal as regards the time to pay but depends on an agreement that one thing is exchanged for another. The debt is clear and undisputed in this latter case, but it bears the mark of friendship because of the deferral of the payment to the seller. For this very reason, there are no legal arbitrations of these agreements in some places, but people suppose instead that those who entered into agreements on trust ought to feel affection for each other.

The moral type of this friendship, on the other hand, does not depend on stated terms. Instead, a gift (or whatever else) is given as to a friend; but the giver thinks he deserves to receive what is equal, or more than that, in return, on the grounds that he has not given anything but lent it. Yet if someone dissolves the friendship in a way different from that in which he entered into the agreement, the other friend will level an accusation. This happens because all or most people wish for noble things but choose the beneficial ones instead. It is a noble thing to perform a benefit without expecting it to be requited, but it is of course beneficial to receive a benefaction.

He who is able, therefore, must give in return the worth of what he received, and do so voluntarily—for he must not make a friend of someone who is not voluntarily one. On the grounds that he erred completely in the beginning and was done a good deed by someone by whom he ought not to have been done one—for it was not done by a friend or by someone doing this for its own sake—he must therefore dissolve the relation, just as if he had received a benefaction on stated terms. And a person ought to agree to repay whatever he is able to,

whereas if he should be unable to repay something, not even the giver would expect him to do so. As a result, he must repay it if he can; yet at the outset, he must consider the person from whom he receives a benefaction and on what terms, so that he may submit to these terms or not.

There is also a dispute regarding whether one ought to measure the benefit to the recipient and make repayment with a view to this, or to measure the good deed of the person who performed it. For the recipients assert that they received from those giving the benefaction such things as were small to the givers and which it was possible to receive from others, thus depreciating what they received. Conversely, the givers assert that the recipients received their greatest things, that it was not possible to get them from others, and that they gave them amid dangers or comparable situations of need. Since the friendship is based on utility, then, is the relevant measure the benefit to the recipient? For the recipient is the one in need, and the other aids him on the grounds that he will get back what is equal to the aid. The amount of aid, then, is as much as the recipient has been benefited; and so he must repay as much as he has partaken of, or even more, since doing the latter is nobler.

But in friendships that accord with virtue, there are no accusations; and the choice made by the person performing the benefaction is like a measure, for what is authoritative in matters of virtue and character resides in the choice involved.

Chapter Fourteen

But differences arise also in friendships based on a superiority, since each thinks he is worthy of having more; and when this happens, the friendship is dissolved. For he who is better supposes that it is proper that he have more, since it is proper to distribute more to a person who is good. Similar too is the case of the greater benefactor. For people assert that someone who is useless ought not to have what is equal: the relation becomes a matter of charitable service and not a friendship if what comes from the friendship will not accord with the worth of the friend's deeds. For people suppose that just as in a financial partnership, those who contribute more receive more, so it ought to be in friendship too. But he who is in need and is the inferior asserts the converse—that it belongs to a good friend to aid those in need; for, they assert, what advantage is there in being a friend of a serious or powerful person if there is no benefit to be enjoyed from the friendship?

It seems, then, that each partner correctly deems himself worthy of something—that is, that one ought to distribute more to each of them from the friendship, but not more of the same thing. Rather, to the person who is superior, one ought to distribute honor, and to the one in need, gain. Honor is the reward of virtue and of benefaction, whereas aid is the gain appropriate to need.

It appears to be this way also in the regimes. For he who provides nothing good to the community is not honored, since what is held in common is given to the person who benefits the community, and honor is held in common. For it is not possible to make money from the common affairs and at the same time to be honored [by the community]. No one puts up with having the lesser share in all things, and so people distribute honor to the person who [, in performing a benefaction,] suffers a monetary loss, and they give money to the person who accepts gifts. For what accords with merit equalizes and preserves friendship, as has been said. It is in this way too, therefore, that one must associate with those who are unequal; and someone who is benefited in money or virtue must give honor in return, thus giving back what he can. For friendship seeks what is possible, not what accords with the merit [of the giver]. In fact, it is not even possible in every case to do so, as in the honors directed toward the gods and parents; for no one could ever repay what they merit, though he who does service to them to the extent of his capacity is held to be decent.

Hence too it would seem impossible for a son to renounce his father, but possible for a father to renounce his son. For the son must repay the debt, but nothing he may do is worthy of what was done for him, with the result that he is always in debt. But those who are owed have the capacity to discharge the debt, and certainly the father does. At the same time, perhaps, it seems that no father would ever cut off a son who was not of exceeding corruption. For even apart from their natural friendship, it is characteristically human not to reject aid. Yet for the son who is corrupt, aiding his father is something he avoids or does not eagerly pursue. For the many wish to be done a good turn, but they avoid doing one on the grounds that that is unprofitable.

Let what concerns these matters, then, be spoken of to this extent.

Plutarch,
Greek Lives: Alcibiades

It was the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.) with Carthage that saw Hannibal rampaging through the Italian heartland. Roman victory in that war meant Roman control over the western half of the Mediterranean, while the rest of the classical world (comprising the Eastern Mediterranean littoral and the Near East) was in the hands of Greeks. After Alexander the Great's astonishing *blitz* across the Near East, the latter-day Achilles died in 323 B.C., never having lost a battle, in Mesopotamian Babylon. His massive empire was divided up by several of his generals who began to war with each other—so the unified power of Alexander's empire was exceptionally brief.

However, this "Hellenistic" world, created by the military brilliance and insatiable ambition of Aristotle's most prominent pupil, saw Hellenism (Greek culture) saturate the Near East into Central Asia. Greek became the common language of commerce. Greeks colonized as far as India. Cities old and new were physically constituted according to the template of the Greek *polis*. Alexandria (capital of Ptolemaic Egypt) quickly became the intellectual and commercial capital of the world. Behind it were other Hellenistic cities rising in glory: Antioch (capital of Seleucid Syria), Seleucia-on-Tigris, Pergamon (Attalid capital, a "second Athens"), Ephesus. But the incessant rivalry of the Macedonian successor states invited Rome's incursion into the Hellenic East.

Eventually, the city-state of Rome, drawing on a quasi-national Italian metropole, would bring the western and the eastern Mediterranean together in a single empire. The East was far more civilized than the western Mediterranean: more urbanized, wealthier, culturally advanced. But the phalanx could not withstand the legion—and disunity could not overcome a unified power. The Romans conquered the Greek city-states at the Battle of Corinth in 146 B.C. The turmoil between the Hellenistic successor kingdoms and the civil wars that roiled the Roman Republic after its conquest of Greece both come to a close with the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. and the conquest of Greek, Ptolemaic Egypt the following year—Cleopatra and her ally and lover Mark Antony falling to Octavian. A habit of colonizing distant places, the different publics created in the *agora* of each *polis*, demographic fecundity, alongside raw military prowess, had provided material bases for the Hellenic genius and its immense influence. Greece's pragmatic dominance was now supplanted by Rome, but Greek culture never lost its superiority.

Plutarch (A.D. ca. 46-ca. 120) was a Greek man of letters who became a Roman citizen. He lived most of his life in his hometown of Chaeronea in central Greece, which had been the site of Philip of Macedon's victory over Athens and Thebes in 338 B.C., breaking the back of the resistance to his pan-Hellenic project. Plutarch was a Middle Platonist philosopher trained in Athens, sympathetic to Aristotelianism, as well as a priest of the Delphic temple. He wrote his *Parallel Lives* as an ethical pedagogue, attempting to shape others through the biographies he presented. In this project, he brings to bear the Greek breakthrough in philosophy and historiography, along with a profound religious piety. He shows us the interplay of liberty, character, and the unfolding of personality. His life of Alcibiades (ca. 450-404 B.C.) recalls us to Athens during the Peloponnesian War. It is one of only three of the parallel lives that has the Greek personage follow the Roman (in this case Coriolanus). Alcibiades was a leading proponent of the catastrophic Sicilian Expedition, which sealed Athens' fate. He was a high-living and brilliant Machiavellian, defecting at various times to both Sparta and Persia. If Socrates and philosophy had been able to shape his character more, perhaps Alcibiades would have left a more positive mark on history.

Alcibiades

Alcibiades' family-line is supposed to have been founded by Eurysaces the son of Ajax, and on his mother's side he was an Alcmaeonid, since his mother was Deinomache the daughter of Megacles. His father, Cleinias, was famous for the part he played in the sea battle at Artemisium in a trireme he had equipped at his own expense, and died later at Coronea in a battle against the Boeotians. Pericles and Aripbron, the sons of Xanthippus, who were closely related to Alcibiades, then became his guardians.

It is said that his fame is due in no small part to the fact that Socrates befriended him and was kindly disposed towards him, and this does seem to be true. After all, Nicias, Demosthenes, Lamachus, Phormio, Thrasybulus, and Theramenes were Alcibiades' contemporaries and were famous at the time, but there is no trace even of the names of any of their mothers. Where Alcibiades is concerned, however, we know the names not only of his mother, but also of his wet-nurse (a Laconian woman called Amycla) and his tutor (Zopyrus). Antisthenes has recorded the first name, Plato the second.

As for Alcibiades' good looks, perhaps all that needs to be said is that they bloomed in his childhood, in his youth, and when he was grown up too; however old he was and whatever phase of physical growth he was at, the attractiveness and charm afforded him by his good looks never left him. Euripides' notion that anyone beautiful remains beautiful in their autumn is not universally true, but Alcibiades is one of the few people to whom it does apply, because of his natural beauty and physical perfection. Even his lisp suited his voice, it is said, and made his conversation charmingly persuasive. Aristophanes also mentions this lisp of his, in the passage where he makes fun of Theorus by saying:

A. Then Alcibiades said to me in his lisping voice:

 'Look at Theolus in a laven's head! What a thing to blandish!'

B. Yes, Theorus certainly blandishes! Alcibiades and his lisp have got that right!

And when Archippus is making fun of Alcibiades' son he says, 'He wants people to think he's exactly like his father, so he minces along with his cloak trailing behind him, tilts his head to one side and speaks with a pronounced lisp.'

In later life his character became noticeably very inconsistent and changeable, which is perhaps not surprising given the importance of

the enterprises he was engaged in and the ups and downs of his fortunes. He had a highly passionate nature, and his most powerful motivation was the desire to compete, and to come first. Some of his childhood sayings make this clear. Once, for instance, he was hard pressed at wrestling and was in danger of being thrown. In order to prevent this happening, he shifted the grip of the boy who was giving him a hard time to within reach of his mouth and was on the point of biting right through his arms. The other boy let go of him and said, 'You bite like a woman, Alcibiades.' 'No, I don't,' Alcibiades replied. 'I bite like a lion.'

While he was still a small boy, he was playing dice in an alley and, just as it was his turn to throw, a cart laden with goods approached. The first thing he tried was to tell the driver of the pair of oxen to wait, because his throw was about to land in the path of the cart. The rude driver did not listen, however, but continued driving the cart along. All the other boys got out of the way, but Alcibiades threw himself face down in front of the oxen, stretched himself out on the ground, and told the driver to carry on if he wanted to. Faced with this situation, the man was frightened and reined in his oxen, while the shocked spectators called out and ran in a group towards Alcibiades.

During his school days, he was generally quite good at obeying his teachers, but he refused to learn the pipes on the grounds that it was not appropriate for a person of noble and free birth. He argued that there was no disfigurement and distortion of the appearance proper to a free man in wielding a plectrum and playing the lyre, but that when a person set pipes to his mouth and started to blow even his close friends would find it pretty difficult to recognize his features. Besides, he said, the lyre can accompany the voice and singing of its player, whereas the pipes muzzle and obstruct a person and rob him of his ability to express himself in words. 'So let's leave the pipes to the children of Thebans,' he said, 'because they don't know how to make conversation. As for us Athenians, however, our fathers tell us that Athena is the founder of our city and Apollo is our patron—and she discarded the pipes, while he flayed the piper!' With this combination of light-hearted tone and serious intent Alcibiades got not only himself off learning the pipes, but his fellow pupils too, because they soon heard that Alcibiades detested pipe-playing and ridiculed anyone who was learning to play them, and had good reasons for doing so. The upshot was that pipe-playing was dropped from the list of subjects studied by free men and was held in complete contempt.

In an invective, Antiphon has recorded a number of uncomplimentary stories about Alcibiades, one of which is that, during his teens, he

ran away from home to one of his lovers, a man called Democrates. Ariphton wanted to have him publicly pronounced a missing person, but Pericles stopped him by saying, 'If he's dead, the public announcement will bring his discovery forward only one day; but if he's safe and sound, it will damage him for the rest of his life.' Another story Antiphon tells is that once, in Sibyrtius' wrestling-ground, Alcibiades hit one of his servants with a piece of wood and killed him. But we should probably discount these stories, since the person telling them admits that it is his enmity towards Alcibiades which prompts him to retail uncomplimentary facts about him.

Soon a large number of high-born men began to gather around him and follow him. Most of them made no secret of the fact that they were cultivating him because they had been overwhelmed by his dazzling youthful charms. However, the fact that Socrates was in love with him strongly suggests that the boy was endowed with a natural aptitude for virtue. Socrates saw Alcibiades' physical good looks as the brilliant external manifestation of this excellence, and he worried about the boy's wealth and social standing, and about the fact that masses of people from Athens and from both allied and other cities abroad were employing flattery and favouritism to pre-empt his affections. So Socrates set out to protect him against these influences; he could not just stand by and watch a blossoming tree wastefully destroy its own fruit. For fortune has surrounded and enclosed no one so thoroughly with the so-called good things of life that he cannot be pierced by the shafts of philosophy and reached by the stinging candour of reasoned argument. And Alcibiades was no exception. Although he had been spoiled all his life, and although those whose only reason for being in his company was to indulge him tried to stop him listening to anyone who might correct him and discipline him, nevertheless his innate excellence led him to recognize Socrates, and he shunned his rich and eminent lovers in favour of associating with Socrates. He soon became close to Socrates and heard arguments from a lover who was not hunting after unmanly pleasure and was not begging him for kisses and caresses, but was trying to expose the unsoundness of his mind and was harrying his vain and foolish pride. And then 'he crouched down in fear, like a defeated cock, with wing aslant', and he believed that Socrates' mission really was a way of carrying out the gods' wishes by looking after young men and keeping them free from corruption. He began to despise himself and admire Socrates; he began to value Socrates' kindness and feel humble because of his goodness. And so, without realizing it, he gained (to borrow Plato's phrase) 'a counter-love which is a reflection of love given', and then everyone was astonished to see that, while he ate and exercised with Socrates, and

shared his tent on campaigns, he was cruel and intractable to the rest of his lovers. In fact, he occasionally behaved downright imperiously with them, as he did with Anytus the son of Anthemion.

Anytus was a lover of Alcibiades. He was having some guest-friends round for dinner and he invited Alcibiades too, but he refused the invitation. Instead, he got drunk at home with some friends and then they all went in a drunken crowd to Anytus' house. Alcibiades stood in the doorway of the dining-room, and when he noticed that the tables were laden with silver and gold cups, he ordered his servants to take half of them and carry them back to his house. Then he went away, without even bothering to come into the room. Anytus' guests angrily accused Alcibiades of treating him in a disrespectful and high-handed manner, but Anytus replied, 'No, he behaved with moderation and kindness. He could have taken all the cups, but he's left us half of them.'

He treated all his other lovers the same way as well, with the single exception of a resident alien. The story goes that this man, who was not well off, sold everything he owned, brought Alcibiades the sum he realized, which was 100 staters, and begged him to accept it. Alcibiades laughed with delight at what the man had done and invited him to dinner. After giving him an excellent meal and treating him with kindness, he returned his money and ordered him to take part the next day in the auction for the right to collect the public taxes, and to outbid everyone else. The man protested that this would cost a great many talents, but Alcibiades, who in fact held a private grudge against the tax-farmers, threatened to thrash him if he refused to do it. So the next day the resident alien went to the city square and bid an extra talent. When the tax-farmers gathered angrily around him and told him to name his guarantor, expecting him not to have one, the man began to back down in consternation—until Alcibiades, who was standing some way off, said to the archons, 'Put my name down. He's a friend of mine. I'll be his guarantor.' This utterly confounded all the tax-farmers, who generally used the income from the second set of taxes to pay off the debt owed for the first, and therefore seemed to be completely stuck. So they offered the man money and begged him to withdraw his bid, but Alcibiades got him to hold out for a talent, and it was only when they offered him a talent that he told him to take the money and withdraw. So much for the story of how he helped this man, at any rate.

However, against all the odds and despite the number and importance of his rivals, Socrates with his love did tend to subdue Alcibiades, who had sufficient innate excellence for Socrates' arguments to get through

to him, wrench his heart, and start the tears flowing. But he also sometimes surrendered to his flatterers and all the delights they held out, and then he would give Socrates the slip and be hunted down, for all the world like a runaway slave, because Socrates was the only one of his lovers he respected and feared, while he had nothing but contempt for the rest. Cleanthes used to say that although he used to take his beloved by the ears and subdue him, the boy's body offered his rivals a great many grips which he refused to touch, meaning his stomach, genitals, and throat. And Alcibiades was certainly liable to give in to the temptations of pleasure, as is also suggested by the 'lawlessness in respect of his bodily regimen' which Thucydides attributes to him. Nevertheless, it was actually by pandering to his ambitious longing for recognition that his corrupters set him prematurely on the road of high endeavour; they convinced him that as soon as he took up politics, he would not merely eclipse all the other military commanders and popular leaders, but would gain more power and prestige among the Greeks than even Pericles enjoyed. Just as iron, then, is softened in the fire, but is hardened again by cold and reconstitutes its own compact nature, so time and again Socrates took him back in a state of complete promiscuity and presumptuousness, and by force of argument would pull him together and teach him humility and restraint, by showing him how great his flaws were and how far he was from virtue.

Once, when he was scarcely more than a boy, he went up to a teacher and asked for a book of Homer. When the man said that he had nothing by Homer, Alcibiades punched him and walked on by. Another teacher said that he had a Homer corrected by himself. 'What!' exclaimed Alcibiades. 'You're teaching reading and writing, when you're capable of correcting Homer? Why aren't you teaching young men?' He once went to Pericles' house, because he wanted a meeting with him, but was told that he was busy trying to work out how to give the Athenian people an account of his term of office. 'What!' he exclaimed. 'Wouldn't it be better for him to try to work out how not to give such an account?'

During the campaign against Potidaea, when he was still a young adult, he was assigned Socrates as his tent-mate and companion on the battlefield. A fierce engagement took place in which both men displayed great bravery, and when Alcibiades fell wounded, Socrates stood over him, kept the enemy at bay, and manifestly, in plain view of everyone, saved him along with his arms and armour. By all rights, then, the prize for valour should have gone to Socrates, but because of his high rank in society the commanders were obviously very eager for Alcibiades to have the glory. Wanting to increase Alcibiades' am-

bitious determination to succeed, at least where noble pursuits were concerned, Socrates took the lead in testifying to the lad's bravery and in insisting that they award him the garland and the suit of armour. Again, during the Athenian retreat at the battle of Delium, Alcibiades spotted Socrates pulling back with a few comrades, and despite the fact that he was on horseback while Socrates was on foot, he refused to ride on by, but escorted him and defended him on all sides, although the enemy were harassing the Athenians and killing a lot of them. But this happened when he was older.

Hipponicus, the father of Callias, was, thanks to his wealth and lineage, a well-known and influential man, but Alcibiades once punched him without having any real reason such as anger or a quarrel to do so, but just for fun, because he had made a bet with his friends that he would. This preposterous action became the talk of the town, and everyone of course shared the common feeling of outrage, but early the next day Alcibiades went to Hipponicus' house and knocked on the door. Once he had gained admission to his presence, he took off his cloak, exposing his body, and told Hipponicus to thrash him in punishment. But Hipponicus calmed down and forgave him, and later let him marry his daughter Hipparete.

However, some authors say that, rather than Hipponicus, it was his son Callias who gave Hipparete to Alcibiades, with a dowry of ten talents, and that Alcibiades subsequently extracted a further ten talents from Callias after Hipparete had given birth to a child, claiming that this was what they had agreed, if children were born. Callias was so afraid of Alcibiades' intriguing that he stood up before the people of Athens and offered to bequeath his money and property to them in the event of his dying without offspring. Hipparete was a well-behaved and affectionate wife, but the marriage became unbearable to her because of Alcibiades' liaisons with both foreign and native Athenian courtesans, and she moved out of the house and went to live with her brother. This did not worry Alcibiades, who just continued to treat her with disrespect. Hipparete had to lodge the petition for divorce with the archon in her own person, rather than through proxies. But when she arrived to see to this business as the law required, Alcibiades came up, grabbed hold of her, and took her back home with him—and although he passed right through the city square, no one dared to oppose him or take her away from him. She stayed with him, however, until her death, which happened a short while later, while Alcibiades was on a voyage to Ephesus. This violent behaviour of his did not really strike people as showing scant regard for the laws or as being harsh, because in all probability the law has the wife who wants a divorce put in a

public appearance in person precisely to give the husband a chance of meeting her and restraining her.

He had a remarkably large and attractive dog, which had cost him seventy minas; its tail was particularly fine, but he cut it off. When his close friends told him off for this and warned him that everyone was laying into him and saying bad things about him because of the dog, he laughed and said, 'That's exactly what I wanted to happen. I'm perfectly happy for the Athenians to be chattering about this: it will stop them saying anything worse about me.'

His first entry into public life was apparently connected with a donation he made to the state, rather than being part of a deliberate plan. He happened to be passing when a loud noise came from the Athenian people in the Assembly, and he asked what the reason for it was; on being told that someone had donated some money, he went forward and donated some himself. The Athenians were so pleased that they applauded and shouted out loud—but Alcibiades had forgotten about a quail he was carrying in his cloak. The bird took fright and escaped, which made the Athenians shout even louder. Lots of people stood up and joined in trying to catch the bird, but it was Antiochus the helmsman who caught it and gave it back, which endeared him to Alcibiades a great deal.

Although great doors to political life were opened to him by his birth, wealth, and courage in battle, and although he had an extensive network of friends and family, more than anything else he expected the support of the common people to be won by his pleasing rhetorical style. That he was a capable orator is vouched for not only by the comic poets, but by the most capable orator of all, who remarks, in his speech *Against Midias*, on various of Alcibiades' features, including his great skill at speaking. However, if Theophrastus is to be trusted (and he is the most learned and studious of the philosophers), Alcibiades was particularly good at grasping and understanding the essential points of an issue, but then tried to find not only the perfect argument, but also the perfect words and phrases with which to express himself, and since a large vocabulary was not one of his gifts, he often used to hesitate, fall silent in the middle of a speech, and interrupt the flow, while searching for an elusive expression, before picking up the threads again and proceeding with caution.

Everyone heard about his horse farms; they were famous not just in themselves, but also for the number of chariots they supported. For no one else—no king, let alone any other private citizen—had ever entered seven chariots in the Olympic Games. He was the only one to have

done so, and the fact that he came first, second, and fourth (or third, according to Euripides—it is Thucydides who says fourth) means that he gained more, in terms of distinction and renown, than anyone can ever have hoped to have achieved in these games. Euripides' ode goes as follows:

I am full of admiration for you, Cleinias' son.
Victory is fair, but the fairest victory of all,
And never before won by any Greek,
Is to take the first three places in the chariot-race,
And to step down unwearied, crowned with the olive
Of Zeus, to become a subject for the town-crier.

Moreover, the splendour of the occasion was highlighted further by the competitiveness of various communities. The Ephesians erected a magnificently decorated tent for him, the town of Chios provided fodder for his horses and sacrificial animals galore, the Lesbians gave him wine and everything else he would need for the lavish entertainment of large numbers of guests. However, his notorious determination to succeed did lead to a malicious rumour, or possibly a vindictive act on his part, which was talked about even more than his successes. The story goes that there was in Athens a man called Diomedes, a man of some distinction and a friend of Alcibiades, who wanted to win a victory at Olympia; he heard that the Argives had a publicly owned chariot and, knowing that Alcibiades had a lot of influence and friends in Argos, he persuaded him to buy it. Having bought it, however, Alcibiades had it registered for the games in his own name, and simply ignored Diomedes, who furiously called on gods and men to witness how he was being treated. It looks as though the business led to a lawsuit: Isocrates has written a speech *On the Team of Horses* in defence of Alcibiades' son, in which the plaintiff is Tisias, not Diomedes.

No sooner had he embarked on a political career than he humiliated all the other popular leaders and found himself in competition with Phaeax the son of Erasistratus and Nicias the son of Niceratus—and this while he was still a young adult. Nicias was already quite elderly and had the reputation of being an extremely fine military commander, but Phaeax was, like himself, just beginning to win support at the time, and though he came from a distinguished family, he was basically Alcibiades' inferior, especially when it came to delivering speeches. He had the reputation of being an affable and persuasive person in private conversation, but incapable of winning contests in public. He had, in Eupolis' words, 'an unrivalled gift of the gab, but not of speaking'. There is actually extant a speech of Phaeax *Against Alcibiades* which contains, among other things, the assertion that Alcibiades used all

the many gold and silver ceremonial utensils owned by the city in his daily life as if they were his own.

There was a man called Hyperbolus of the deme Perithoedae, also mentioned by Thucydides as a man of little worth, whom all the comic poets without exception constantly ridiculed and made fun of in their productions. However, he had such contempt for the views of others that his bad reputation left him unmoved and unconcerned—an attitude that some call courageous adventurousness, though it is actually empty-headed effrontery. No one liked him, but the common people often made use of him when they wanted to defame and harass those with high social status. Anyway, at the time in question, at Hyperbolus' instigation, the Athenians were about to wield their vote in an ostracism; this was a measure, designed to placate their envy rather than any possible fear, they periodically employed to curb the most outstandingly popular and powerful man in the city and send him into exile. Once it became clear that there were three possible candidates, one of whom would suffer the effects of the ostracism vote, Alcibiades combined the disparate factions and, after holding talks with Nicias, arranged things so that the ostracism backfired on to Hyperbolus. Some say, however, that it was Phaeax, not Nicias, with whom Alcibiades held talks, and that it was after gaining the support of Phaeax's party that he got Hyperbolus banished. Hyperbolus could hardly have anticipated being banished, because this form of punishment had never before fallen on anyone unimportant and obscure, as Plato the comic poet also implies when he says, after mentioning Hyperbolus:

And yet he suffered no less than his conduct deserved,
But more than he and his tattoos deserved,
For ostracism was not invented for the likes of him.

However, I have written down at greater length elsewhere the results of my research into this business.

The admiration Nicias won from Athens' enemies irritated Alcibiades just as much as the respect paid him by his fellow citizens. For although Alcibiades was the Lacedaemonian representative in Athens and had looked after the interests of the men captured at Pylos, Nicias was chiefly responsible for the Lacedaemonians obtaining peace and recovering the prisoners, and so the Lacedaemonians felt a great deal of affection for him. Moreover, the Greeks used to say that it was Pericles who had brought them into conflict and Nicias who had put an end to the war; in fact the most common name for the peace was 'the Peace of Nicias'. All this made Alcibiades exceedingly irritated and he spitefully began to try to find ways to undermine the peace

treaty.

First, because he was aware that the Argives loathed and feared the Spartiates and were looking for an escape-route, he secretly led them to hope for an alliance with Athens, and the messages he sent and talks he held with the leading democrats of the city motivated them to put an end to their attitude of fear and submission to the Lacedaemonians, and instead to look expectantly to the Athenians, who were close to changing their minds and abandoning the peace.

Second, when the Athenians were angry at the Lacedaemonians for entering into an alliance with the Boeotians and for returning Panactum to Athens with its fortifications demolished rather than intact, Alcibiades proceeded to exacerbate things even more. He was constantly jeering at Nicias and accusing him, with considerable plausibility, of having been reluctant to capture the enemy troops trapped on Sphacteria himself during his period of military command, and then, once others had done so, of having set them free and returned them as a favour to the Spartans; as if that were not enough, he said, Nicias, out of loyalty to the Lacedaemonians, did nothing to dissuade them from forming a coalition with the Boeotians or even the Corinthians, and yet whenever anyone in Greece wanted to get on good terms with the Athenians and enter into an alliance with them, he made it hard for them to do so, unless the Lacedaemonians approved.

These attacks did Nicias considerable harm, but just then the tide of fortune seemed to turn in his favour and a delegation arrived from Lacedaemon with a set of reasonable proposals from the government there and with, as they claimed, full powers to negotiate any solution which was fair and which would help to bring the two sides together. The Council gave them a favourable hearing, and the next day the people were due to convene in Assembly, but Alcibiades, who was afraid of what might happen there, arranged a meeting between himself and the Lacedaemonian delegates. At this meeting he said, 'What's up with you Spartiates? How can you be so blind? You must appreciate that while it is the Council's way to be lenient and kind whenever a delegation appears before it, the Athenian people have such high pretensions and ambitions that if you tell them you have come here as a plenipotentiary delegation, they'll coldly tell you what they want to happen, and pressure you until things go their way. You really shouldn't be so naive. If you want to make the Athenians easy to deal with, and if you'd rather not be forced to adopt unwelcome terms, you must pretend that you don't have full powers of negotiation, and discuss the rights and wrongs of the situation with them. And I'll cooperate with you, as a favour to the Lacedaemonians.' And so, once

he had given them pledges in earnest of the truth of his words, he won them away from Nicias; they trusted him completely and were deeply impressed with his ingenuity and resourcefulness, which they judged to be quite extraordinary.

The next day the people convened and the delegates were introduced. Alcibiades asked them, with perfect politeness, what their status was as a delegation, and they replied that they were not plenipotentiary. Alcibiades immediately proceeded to lay into them in a loud and angry tone of voice, as if he were the victim, not the perpetrator of sharp practice. He called them untrustworthy liars and described their mission and their words as spurious. The members of the Council were indignant, the assembled people were furious, and Nicias was astounded and embarrassed at the delegates' change of tack, since he had no idea of the fraudulent deception that had taken place.

Now that the Lacedaemonian initiative had been repulsed in this way, and once he had been appointed to the post of military commander, Alcibiades lost no time in concluding an alliance between Athens and Argos, Mantinea, and Elis. Although no one approved of the means he used to accomplish this, it was a significant achievement, since he created divisions and turmoil throughout almost all the Peloponnese, made it possible for vast numbers of men to muster and all face the Lacedaemonians at Mantinea on a single day, and ensured that the battle, along with its threat to Athens, took place as far away from Athens as it could, in a place where victory brought the Lacedaemonians no significant additional advantage, and where, had they been defeated, the position of Lacedaemon would have been precarious.

Straight after the battle, the thousand-strong oligarchy at Argos set about overthrowing the democracy there and making the city subject to the Lacedaemonians, and the dissolution of the democracy was completed with the arrival of Lacedaemonian troops. But the common people armed themselves and gained the upper hand again. Alcibiades went to them, and once he had helped make sure that their victory was secure, he persuaded them to run their long walls down to the sea and so to make their city wholly dependent on Athenian power by having it joined to the sea. He even brought builders and masons from Athens, and he displayed such wholehearted commitment to their cause that he won as much gratitude and power for himself as he did for his state.

The same thing happened at Patrae: he also persuaded the people there to join their town to the sea with long walls. When someone warned them that the Athenians would swallow them up, Alcibiades

replied, 'That may be so, but they'll do so little by little, starting with the feet, whereas the Lacedaemonians will gulp you down head first and all at once!'

However, he also advised the Athenians to appreciate the importance of the land—that is, to confirm by their actual practice the pledge regularly undertaken by Athenian young men on the threshold of adulthood in the sanctuary of Agraulus, who swear to regard wheat, barley, the vine, the fig-tree, and the olive as the boundaries of Attica, and so are trained to treat all arable, fertile land as their own.

[16] But along with his statesmanship, eloquence, pride, and ingenuity went, by contrast, a luxurious lifestyle, over-indulgence in drink and sex, effeminacy of dress—he would trail his purple-dyed clothing through the city square—and incredible extravagance. For instance, he had the decks of his triremes altered so that he could lay his bed-clothes on cords rather than on bare boards and so have a softer bed to sleep on, and he had a shield made, with golden tracery, which bore, instead of an ancestral device, an image of Eros holding a thunder-bolt. Faced with all these aspects of his behaviour, the notable men of Athens combined feelings of abhorrence and disgust with fear of his haughty and lawless attitude, which struck them as tyrannical in its excessiveness. As for the common people, their feelings towards him have been well summed up by Aristophanes in the following line:

They miss him, hate him, want him to be with them.

And again, but this time more forcefully because of the metaphor:

It's best not to keep a lion in the city,
But if you do, pander to his moods.

And in fact the donations he made, the choruses he financed, the superlative extravaganzas he put on for the city, the fame of his ancestors, his eloquence, his physical good looks and fitness, and his experience and prowess in war made the people of Athens tolerate and make allowances for everything else about him. They were constantly finding blatant euphemisms for his faults and attributing them to youthful high spirits and his determination to succeed. For instance, there was the time when he kept the artist Agatharchus locked up until he had decorated his house with paintings, when he gave him a present and let him go; and once he took a stick to a rival impresario called Taureas because he was so determined to win the competition; or again, he picked a woman from among the Melian prisoners of war, installed her in his house, and brought up a child she bore him. They described this as an act of kindness, but the problem was that he was more respon-

sible than anyone for the slaughter of all the adult male inhabitants of Melos, since he had spoken out in support of the decree.

When Aristophon depicted a personified Nemea, seated and holding Alcibiades in her arms, people were delighted and flocked to see the painting, but the older members of society found this abhorrent too, on the grounds that it was the kind of thing a tyrant might do and showed scant regard for custom and the laws. The general feeling also was that Arcestratus had hit the mark when he said that Greece could not have endured two Alcibiadeses.

Once Timon the misanthrope met Alcibiades returning flushed with success from the Assembly, with a crowd of people around him. Unusually, he did not pass him by or get out of the way, as he did with other people, but walked right up to him, greeted him, and said, 'Keep up the good work, young man! The more power you get, the more harm you'll do this lot.' The basic reaction to this was either laughter or abuse, but Timon's words did make others really stop and think. This shows how, due to his innate inconsistency, people could not make up their minds what to think about Alcibiades.

Even during Pericles' lifetime, the Athenians had coveted Sicily, and after his death they tried to gain control of it. From time to time they sent what they described as 'missions to relieve and reinforce the victims of Syracusan aggression', which actually constituted a process of laying stepping-stones for the larger expedition. But the person who fanned this smouldering desire of theirs into full flame and convinced them not to set about the task gradually or by halves, but to send out a large fleet and overrun the island, was Alcibiades. But however high he raised the common people's hopes, he himself was aiming even higher: he regarded Sicily as the initial objective in a campaign which would fulfil his aspirations, not, as everyone else did, as an end in itself. So while Nicias was trying to persuade the Athenian people not to go, on the grounds that the capture of Syracuse would prove too much for them, Alcibiades was dreaming of Carthage and Libya, and then, after the annexation of these places, of taking over Italy and the Peloponnese. He tended to think of Sicily as little more than an entry-point into the war. The young men of the city were immediately carried away by these hopes of his, while their elders filled their ears with plenty of wonderful tales about the expedition; the upshot was that in the wrestling-schools and alcoves people could commonly be seen sitting and mapping out the shape of Sicily and the position of Libya and Carthage. However, Socrates the philosopher and Meton the astronomer are said

to have been pessimistic about the outcome of this expedition for Athens. Socrates was probably forewarned by his usual divine sign, and Meton—whose apprehension about the future was prompted either by his calculations or by the results of divination of some kind—pretended to have gone mad, grabbed a blazing torch, and came close to setting fire to his own house. Some say that Meton's insanity was not faked, and that he did burn down his house one night, and then came before the people the next day and pleaded with them, in view of the great calamity that had befallen him, to release his son from serving on the expedition. At any rate, he did succeed in duping his fellow citizens and getting his way.

Nicias was reluctantly elected military commander; what put him off the position above all was the colleague he was faced with. For the Athenians imagined that the war would go better for them if they sent Alcibiades on his way diluted, and blended his rashness with Nicias' caution. The third commander was Lamachus, a man who despite his advanced years had the reputation of being just as fiery and fond of taking military risks as Alcibiades. Nicias seized the opportunity presented by the debate about the size and details of the equipment to try once again to raise objections and stop the war, but Alcibiades' responses carried the day, and an orator called Demonstratus argued for a decree he proposed, to the effect that the military commanders should have unconditional powers to decide about the equipment and about the whole war.

After the people had voted this decree into existence, and just when the fleet was poised and ready to set sail, a number of unfortunate things happened, including the festival of Adonis, which fell at that time. All over the city the women were preparing statuettes of the god for burial in a way which closely resembled the treatment of human corpses, and were beating their breasts, just as they would at a funeral, and chanting dirges. Then there was the mutilation of the herms, when in the course of a single night every herm had its facial extremities broken off; this disturbed a great many people, even if they were normally inclined to be indifferent to such things. There was a suggestion that the Corinthians had done it—Syracuse being a Corinthian colony—in the hope that the portent might get the Athenians to delay or even abandon all thoughts of the war, but the common people were unaffected either by this argument or by another which said that there was nothing ominous about the affair at all, but that it was just the kind of thing that tends to happen under the influence of undiluted wine, when undisciplined young men get carried away beyond fun and into violence. Instead, they reacted with anger and fear

to what had happened, and imagined that it was a daring move on the part of a band of conspirators with far-reaching objectives, and they conducted a relentless investigation into every possibility, with both the Council and the Assembly meeting repeatedly within the space of a few days to discuss the matter.

Meanwhile, the popular leader Androcles produced some slaves and resident aliens who accused Alcibiades and a group of his friends of mutilating other statues, and of parodying the Mysteries when drunk. They said that the Herald was played by someone called Theodorus, the Torch-bearer by Poulytion, the High Priest by Alcibiades, and that other friends of his who were there had acted as Watchers and been nominated as Initiates. These were the charges contained in the impeachment brought by Thessalus the son of Cimon, which accused Alcibiades of impiety towards the two goddesses. The people of Athens were bitterly angry with Alcibiades, and Androcles, who was one of Alcibiades' main enemies, fanned the flames of their anger. At first Alcibiades was concerned, but then he realized that he had the loyalty of all the soldiers and sailors on the ships destined for Sicily, and when he heard the 1,000-strong contingent of Argive and Mantinean hoplites openly declaring that if it were not for Alcibiades they would not be undertaking this long overseas expedition, and that if anyone were to treat him unfairly they would not hesitate to leave, he felt more positive about the future and he seized the opportunity to defend himself. As a result, it was the turn of his enemies to be discouraged; they were afraid that the Athenians would let the fact that they needed Alcibiades take the edge off their anger when it came to judging him.

They therefore devised a plan whereby certain speakers who were not known to be hostile to Alcibiades, but who hated him just as much as those who openly professed their enmity, would stand up in the Assembly and argue that it was absurd for someone who had been put in absolute command of such an enormous force, and whose army and allies were all assembled, to let the critical moment pass by while they were casting lots for places on the jury and filling the water-clocks. 'No,' they said, 'let him sail now, and we wish him all the best. But when the war has been brought to a successful conclusion, let him return and defend himself. The laws won't change between then and now.'

Alcibiades was well aware of the malice behind this proposed delay, so he came forward and argued that it would be terrible for him to be sent off at the head of such an enormous force, leaving unresolved accusations and slanders behind him; he said that if he could not secure an acquittal he ought to be put to death, but that if he did, if

he proved his innocence, he ought to be able to proceed against the enemy without any fear that back home information was being laid against him.

The Athenians were not convinced by these arguments, however, and ordered him to set sail. So he and his fellow commanders put to sea with a remarkable armada, including just short of 140 triremes, 5,100 heavy-armed troops, and about 1,300 archers, slingers, and light-armed troops. After they had landed in Italy and captured Rhegium, Alcibiades put forward a strategic plan for the conduct of the campaign, which was opposed by Nicias, but endorsed by Lamachus, and so they sailed to Sicily. In Sicily Alcibiades won Catana over to their side, but achieved nothing else, because he was immediately summoned home by the Athenians to stand trial.

As I have already said, at first it was just a case of certain vague suspicions and slanders against Alcibiades being aired by slaves and resident aliens, but later, while he was away, his enemies put more effort into their attacks; they linked the violence done to the herms and the business with the Mysteries, and made out that they had both been done by a single group of conspirators whose aim was to overthrow the government. Consequently, anyone who was accused of anything at all connected to these two cases was cast into prison without a trial, and the Athenians became irritated with themselves for failing to pass judgement and come to a verdict about Alcibiades at the time, considering how important the charges were. Meanwhile, any of Alcibiades' relatives, friends or intimates who fell foul of the Athenians while they were angry with Alcibiades found them harsher than usual. Thucydides failed to name the people who denounced Alcibiades, but according to others they were Diocleides and Teucer. One of these sources is the comic poet Phrynichus, who has this to say in one of his plays:

- A. Precious Hermes, please take care not to fall and hurt yourself,
Or you'll give another Diocleides, with mischief on his mind,
The chance to spread malicious rumours.
- B. All right, I'll be careful. I've no desire
To reward Teucer, that bloodthirsty foreigner!

The information they lodged was, however, totally unreliable and unsound. When one of the informants was asked how he had recognized the faces of the mutilators of the herms, he replied that he saw them by the light of the moon—which made his whole story unconvincing, because the crime was committed on the last day of the month. Even this, however, although it disturbed anyone with any intelligence,

failed to make the common people feel more lenient when considering the charges. They simply carried on as they had started, gaily casting anyone who was denounced into prison.

One of the people who was imprisoned and held in custody to await trial was Andocides the orator, who was a descendant of Odysseus, according to the historian Hellanicus. Andocides was generally held to be anti-democratic and in favour of oligarchy, but the main thing that made him a suspect in the mutilation of the herms was that the tall herm near his house, which had been erected and dedicated by the Aegeid tribe, was almost the only one of the few really conspicuous statues to remain unharmed. That is why to this day it is known as the Herm of Andocides, which is the name everyone gives it, despite the contradictory evidence of the inscription it bears.

It so happened that Andocides became particularly close friends with one of the people who was in prison with him on the same charge—a man called Timaeus, who did not have the same social standing as Andocides, but was exceptionally intelligent and daring. Timaeus convinced Andocides to turn state's evidence against himself and a few others. He pointed out that if Andocides confessed he would, according to the terms of the people's decree, be immune from punishment, whereas no one could ever tell what the verdict was going to be in a trial, and influential people like him had more to fear than anyone else. Given that the same charge was involved, it was better to tell a lie and save one's life, he argued, than to suffer the ignominy of death; besides, taking the common good into consideration, it was all right to sacrifice a few dubious characters and save a large number of good men from the effects of the people's anger. Andocides was won over by Timaeus' arguments and recommendations; he informed against himself and some others, and while the decree gave him immunity from punishment, all those he named lost their lives, unless they fled into exile. In order to make his story more plausible, Andocides also included among the people he named some of his own slaves.

The Athenian people were not completely mollified by this, however. On the contrary, now that they had resolved the issue of the mutilators of the herms, they hurled themselves with even more vehemence against Alcibiades; it was as if their anger now had the freedom to express itself more fully. In the end they sent the Salaminia to fetch him home, with instructions—sensible instructions, in this case—not to use physical violence or lay hands on him, but just to ask him, as reasonably as they could, to come with them to stand trial and to try to convince the Athenian people of his innocence. The last thing they wanted was for the army to get edgy or even mutinous

in enemy territory, which Alcibiades could easily have engineered had he chosen to, because the men's morale dropped with his departure. They anticipated a long, drawn-out, sluggish war under Nicias' leadership, now that the person who stirred things up had been removed. For Lamachus may have been belligerent and brave, but his poverty meant that he lacked standing and authority.

No sooner had Alcibiades sailed away than he snatched Messana from the Athenians' grasp. There were people there who were on the point of surrendering the city to the Athenians, but Alcibiades knew who they were; he gave unambiguous information about them to the pro-Syracusans in the town, and so made sure that the matter came to nothing. When he reached Thurii, he went ashore and hid himself to escape his pursuers. Someone recognized him and said, 'Alcibiades, don't you trust your fatherland?' 'Basically, yes,' he replied. 'But where my life is concerned I wouldn't trust even my mother not to mistake a black pebble for a white one when she comes to cast her vote.' And later, when he heard that Athens had condemned him to death, he said, 'I'll show them that I'm alive.'

Here is the text of the impeachment the Athenians brought against him:

Thessalus the son of Cimon, of the deme Laciadae, charges Alcibiades the son of Cleinias, of the deme Scambonidae, of crimes against the two goddesses, in that he did parody the Mysteries and make them the subject of a show put on for friends of his in his house, while dressed in garments resembling those the High Priest wears when he shows the sacred objects, and calling himself the High Priest, Poulytion the Torch-bearer, Theodorus of the deme Phegaea the Herald, and the rest of his friends who were there Initiates and Watchers, contrary to the laws and institutions of the Eumolpidae, the Heralds, and the priests of Eleusis.

They found him guilty in absentia, confiscated his property, and also decreed that he should be publicly cursed by all the priests and priestesses in the city. It is said that Theano, the daughter of Meno, of the deme Agryle, was the only one to object to this decree; she declared that she was a priestess for prayers, not for curses.

After escaping from Thurii, Alcibiades immediately made his way to the Peloponnese, and spent some time in Argos, with these decrees and verdicts hanging heavily over him. Since he was afraid of his enemies and had completely given up on his native country, he sent a message to Sparta, asking for asylum and promising to render them the kind

of service and assistance that would outweigh the harm he had done them before when they were on opposite sides. The Spartiates enthusiastically granted this request and welcomed him in Sparta. The first thing he did, as soon as he arrived, was arouse the Lacedaemonians to action over Syracuse: they had been hesitating, and had put off sending help to the Syracusans, but he got them interested in sending an expeditionary force under Gylippus to crush the Athenian army there. Secondly, he got them to start up the war against the Athenians in Greece. Thirdly, and most importantly, he persuaded them to fortify Decelea, which played a more crucial part than anything else in bringing about the destruction and downfall of Athens.

At Sparta, in public as well as in private, he became a well-known and much-admired figure. During this period he gained influence over the common people there, and held them spellbound by adopting a Laconian style of life. When they saw him with his hair in need of a close cut, bathing in cold water, accustomed to coarse bread, and supping broth, they seriously doubted whether this was a man who had ever had a cook in his house, or set eyes on a perfumer, or could endure the touch of Milesian wool. The point is that, of the many skills Alcibiades possessed, we hear in particular of one which was a useful tool for captivating men, and that was that he could assimilate and adapt himself to their habits and lifestyles. He could change more abruptly than a chameleon. The only difference between him and a chameleon was that whereas a chameleon apparently finds it totally impossible to assimilate itself to the colour white, whether Alcibiades found himself in the company of good men or bad, there was nothing he could not imitate and no habit he could not acquire. In Sparta he took exercise, lived frugally, and wore a frown on his face; in Ionia he was fastidious, companionable, and easy-living; in Thrace he went in for hard drinking and hard riding; when he was with the satrap Tissaphernes he outdid the Persians, for all their magnificence, with his pomp and extravagance. It was not that he actually changed personality so readily, or that his character was infinitely mutable, but that when his real self was going to upset the people he was with, he assumed and took refuge in whatever appearance and image was appropriate for them. At any rate, as far as externals were concerned, in Lacedaemon one would have said, "You are no son of Achilles, but the man himself," a true product of Lycurgan training; but as far as his real feelings and behaviour were concerned, one would have cried, "She is the same woman she always was!"

For while King Agis was out of the country on campaign, Alcibiades seduced his wife Timaea so thoroughly that not only did she get preg-

nant with his child, but she did not even deny it. The boy that she gave birth to was called Leotychidas in public, but in private the child's name, as whispered by the mother to her friends and serving-women, was Alcibiades. That is how infatuated the woman was. As for Alcibiades, he used to say, in his wilful fashion, that it was not defiance or lust that had led him to do it, but rather because he wanted to have his descendants rule over the Lacedaemonians. Plenty of people told Agis what was going on, and as time went by he came to believe them, because there had been an earthquake and he had run in terror out of his wife's bedroom and away from her, and then had not slept with her again for ten months. Since Leotychidas was born at the end of this period, Agis declared that he was no son of his—and that is why Leotychidas was later refused the kingship.

After the Athenian catastrophe in Sicily the Chians, Lesbians, and Cyzicans all sent delegations at the same time to Sparta with a view to rebelling against Athens. Although the Boeotians were co-operating with the Lesbians, and Pharnabazus was supporting the Cyzicans, at Alcibiades' instigation the Lacedaemonians chose to help the Chians first. He even went over there in person. He succeeded in fomenting rebellion throughout almost the whole of Ionia and, through constantly working in conjunction with the Lacedaemonian military commanders, did a great deal of harm to Athenian interests. However, he had an enemy in Agis, whose hostility was due not just to his troubles with his wife, but also to his resentment of the reputation Alcibiades was acquiring for being responsible for almost everything that happened, and certainly for nearly all the successes; and, prompted by their envy, the most influential and ambitious of the other Spartiates had also had enough of Alcibiades. So they prevailed on the authorities in Sparta to send a message to their commanders in Ionia, ordering Alcibiades' death.

By surreptitious means, Alcibiades received advance warning of what was going on. Fearing for his life, he continued to co-operate with the Lacedaemonians in all their enterprises, but he made absolutely sure that he kept out of their hands, and for safety's sake he entrusted himself to Tissaphernes, the satrap of the Persian king. Before long there was no one Tissaphernes admired or valued more. The Persian was a devious and malicious man, who felt no qualms about doing wrong, and he was impressed by Alcibiades' versatility and extraordinary ingenuity. No one, whatever his character or temperament, could fail to be touched and captivated by Alcibiades' charisma, if he spent time and lived with him on a daily basis; even those who feared and envied him found themselves enjoying his company and warming to him once

they were with him and could actually see him. At any rate, although Tissaphernes felt as savage a hatred of Greeks as any Persian, he was so won over by Alcibiades' blandishments that he outdid him in flattering him back. He declared that the most beautiful walled garden he had, which was graced with lawns and refreshing pools, and dotted with exceptional haunts and places of resort prepared in a manner fit for a king, should be named 'Alcibiades'—and that is the name by which everyone continued to refer to it for a long time.

So Alcibiades abandoned the Spartan cause because they had turned against him and because of the threat posed by Agis, and set about maligning and defaming them to Tissaphernes. He did not want him to be too ready to help them, and thereby destroy the Athenians, but preferred him to let them have a miserly amount of support, so that they would gradually get into difficulties and be worn down; in this way, he argued, both sides would exhaust each other and fall into the Persian king's hands. Tissaphernes was easily convinced by this, and made no secret of his admiration and approval of Alcibiades. This had the consequence that Greeks on both sides looked up to him, and, now that they were suffering at his hands, the Athenians also began to regret the decisions they had made in his case. Moreover, Alcibiades too had reasons to be worried and apprehensive: the destruction of Athens might mean that he would fall into the clutches of the Lacedaemonians, who hated him.

Now, at the time in question almost all the Athenian forces were stationed on Samos. They were using the island as a naval base from which to regain rebel states and protect others, and they somehow still contrived to be a match for their enemies at sea. However, they were worried about Tissaphernes and his 150 Phoenician triremes, which were said to be due any day, and whose arrival would spell doom for the city. Alcibiades was aware of these fears, and he sent a secret message to the Athenian leaders on Samos, in which he held out the prospect of gaining Tissaphernes' support for their side. This had nothing to do, he said, with trying to curry favour with the common people, whom he did not trust anyway; he was doing it for the aristocrats, to see if they had what it took to prove their courage, stop the common people lording it over them, take matters into their own hands, and save Athens.

Everyone was very interested in what Alcibiades was saying, except for one of the military commanders, Phrynichus of the deme Deirades, who suspected, quite rightly, that Alcibiades had just as much or little use for an oligarchic government as he did for a democratic one—that he was only looking for some way to return to Athens, and was using

complaints against the people as a means of flattering and ingratiating himself with the aristocrats. He therefore spoke out against Alcibiades, but he lost the argument. Now that his enmity towards Alcibiades was out in the open, he sent a secret message to Astyochus, the commander of the enemy fleet, warning him about Alcibiades and suggesting that he arrest him as a renegade. What he did not know, however, was that this was in fact a case of one traitor talking to another. Astyochus was in awe of Tissaphernes and, seeing that Alcibiades was high in his favour, he informed them both of Phrynichus' message.

Alcibiades lost no time in sending men to Samos to denounce Phrynichus, who, finding all his colleagues united in their fury against him, could see no escape from his predicament and tried to alleviate the problems created by one misdeed by committing another, worse one. He sent another message to Astyochus, in which he told him off for revealing the contents of his first message, and promised to put the Athenian fleet and camp in his hands. But the Athenians came to no harm from Phrynichus' treachery, because Astyochus betrayed him yet again: he told Alcibiades what Phrynichus was up to this time as well.

Phrynichus, however, had expected this and, anticipating a second denunciation from Alcibiades, pre-empted him by telling the Athenians that the enemy were about to send a fleet to attack the island, and advising them to man their ships and fortify their camp. The Athenians were in the middle of doing this when a second letter came from Alcibiades, telling them to keep an eye on Phrynichus, as he was planning to betray their naval base to the enemy. They did not trust this information, and assumed that Alcibiades, with his inside knowledge of the enemy's armament and intentions, was using the letter to discredit Phrynichus by telling lies about him. Later, however, when one of the border guards called Hermon stabbed Phrynichus to death in the city square with a dagger, in the ensuing trial the Athenians found Phrynichus, although he was dead, guilty of treason, and rewarded Hermon and his accomplices with garlands.

At the time in question, however, Alcibiades' supporters gained the upper hand on Samos and sent Pisander to Athens to try to bring about a coup; he was to encourage the men of power to overthrow the democracy and form a government, with the argument that only then would Alcibiades bring Tissaphernes over to their side and get him to enter into an alliance with them. This was how the instigators justified and excused their establishment of the oligarchy, but when they grew strong enough to take control of affairs, the Five Thousand (as they were called, although they were actually Four Hundred)

completely ignored Alcibiades. Their war effort was also rather half-hearted, partly because they were not yet sure of their fellow citizens, who had not made up their minds about the change of government, and partly because they thought the Lacedaemonians would be more lenient towards them, since they always looked favourably upon oligarchies. The common people in Athens were cowed into a reluctant state of inactivity by the frequency with which those who openly opposed the Four Hundred were put to death, but when the rank and file in Samos heard what was going on in Athens, they were furious and wanted nothing more than to sail for Piraeus without delay. They sent for Alcibiades, put him in supreme command, and urged him to lead them on an expedition to overthrow the tyrants.

If anyone else had suddenly been raised to power by popular favour, what would he have experienced? What would he have tended to do? He would immediately have thought it his job to do everything he could to please, and nothing to oppose, the people who had just saved him from the life of a wandering fugitive and appointed him to lead and command a mighty fleet and army, with powerful resources. But not Alcibiades. Instead, as befitted a great leader, he resisted their angry impulses and stopped them making a grave mistake. On this occasion, at least, it is undeniable that he proved to be the saviour of the city. For if they had just put to sea and sailed back home, not only would they have enabled their enemies to gain the whole of Ionia, the Hellespont and the Aegean islands without meeting any resistance, but they would also have pitched Athenians against Athenians, and made the city itself a theatre of war. It was thanks to Alcibiades, more than anyone else, that this did not happen. He not only gave convincing reasons for not setting sail in his speeches to the assembled troops, but he also approached people individually, and either pleaded with them or curbed their enthusiasm. He was assisted in this task by Thrasybulus of Steiris, who used to go around with him and bellow out his instructions; apparently, no Athenian had a louder voice.

Another important thing Alcibiades did, in addition to this, was that he undertook either to bring the Phoenician ships, which the Persian king had dispatched and the Lacedaemonians were expecting, over to the Athenian side, or at least to make sure that they did not join the Lacedaemonians, and promptly set sail from Samos to see to this. The Phoenician ships were sighted off Aspendus, but although it was Tissaphernes who let the Lacedaemonians down by not taking them any further, Alcibiades was credited by both sides with having got them to turn back. The Lacedaemonians were particularly vehement in their accusations, claiming that Alcibiades had told Tissaphernes

to stand back and let the Greeks destroy one another. At any rate, it was clear that whichever side was joined by such a large force would completely ruin the other side's chances of gaining control of the sea.

Later, with Alcibiades' friends wholeheartedly co-operating with the democrats, the Four Hundred were overthrown. The Athenians now wanted Alcibiades to return from exile, and urged him to do so, but he had no desire to come back empty-handed, without having achieved anything, and with his restoration accomplished thanks merely to pity and popularity; he wanted to come back in a blaze of glory. So the first thing he did was set sail with a few ships from Samos and patrol the sea off Cnidus and Cos. While he was there he heard that the entire Lacedaemonian fleet, under Mindarus the Spartiate, had pulled back into the Hellespont with the Athenians in pursuit, so he quickly set out to help his fellow commanders. As luck would have it, he managed to arrive with his eighteen triremes at the precise moment when both sides had committed their entire naval resources to a battle off Abydos, and had been engaged in a fierce struggle all day, with one side winning here, the other side there. The sight of his ships gave both sides the wrong idea, in the sense that it raised the morale of the Lacedaemonians and disheartened the Athenians, but he lost no time in hoisting the Athenian standard on his flagship and heading straight for those Peloponnesians who had gained the upper hand and were forcing their opponents into retreat. He scattered them and drove them ashore, but continued after them until he rammed and disabled their ships. The crews swam to land, where Pharnabazus with his infantry came to their help and protected the ships stranded along the coast. But in the end the Athenians captured thirty enemy ships, recovered their own, and erected a victory trophy.

Now, Alcibiades felt a strong competitive urge to take advantage of the outstanding success he had won to show off to Tissaphernes. He supplied himself with tokens of guest-friendship and with gifts, and made his way there at the head of a princely retinue. Things did not turn out as he expected, however. The Lacedaemonians had for a long time been criticizing Tissaphernes, and he had become afraid that the Persian king would find fault with him. Alcibiades' arrival therefore struck him as very opportune: he arrested him and imprisoned him in Sardis, hoping that this offence would serve to dispel the criticisms.

Thirty days later, however, Alcibiades somehow managed to get hold of a horse and break away from his guards. He escaped to Clazomenae, made things worse for Tissaphernes by spreading the rumour that he had been released by him, and then took a boat to rejoin the Athenian forces. Once he was there, he found out that Mindarus had combined

with Pharnabazus, and that they were in Cyzicus. He delivered a stirring speech to the Athenians, telling them that they would now not only have to fight on sea and on land, but even besiege the enemy in his fortresses, because there was no money to pay them unless they won every battle they undertook, whatever kind of warfare it involved. Then he got them to board their ships and brought the fleet in at Proconnesus, where he gave orders that all fishing-boats were to be kept within their perimeter and closely watched, to stop the enemy having any way of getting advance notice of his approach.

It so happened, also, that there was a sudden heavy rainstorm, and the thunder and darkness helped his plans to go undetected. In fact, he not only took the enemy by surprise, but even the Athenians had become resigned to the prospect of not fighting when he ordered them to board their ships, and they put to sea. After a short while, the darkness cleared, and the Peloponnesian ships could be seen hovering in front of the harbour of Cyzicus. Alcibiades was worried that if they caught sight of the size of his force too early they might have time to take refuge ashore, so he ordered his fellow commanders to sail on at a gentle pace, so that they fell behind, while he took forty ships, let himself be seen, and challenged the enemy to battle. The Peloponnesians were completely taken in by the trick. They sailed out to attack what they took to be a pitifully small number of ships, and before long the two sides were locked in battle. In the middle of the fight the remainder of the Athenian ships bore down on them, and the Peloponnesians fled in terror. Alcibiades broke through their lines with twenty of his fastest ships, put in to land, and ordered his men to disembark. They attacked the Peloponnesians as they tried to escape ashore from their boats, and inflicted heavy losses on them. Mindarus and Pharnabazus came up to help the Peloponnesian crews, but Alcibiades defeated them too. Mindarus died fighting bravely, but Pharnabazus managed to escape. The Athenians gained possession of the bodies of large numbers of the enemy, along with their arms and armour, and captured their entire fleet. Pharnabazus abandoned Cyzicus to its fate, and the city fell to the Athenians as well, with the loss of the Peloponnesian troops stationed there. And so the Athenians had not only secured the Hellespont, but had, by main force, driven the Lacedaemonians entirely off the seas. They also intercepted a typically Laconic dispatch to the ephors informing them of the disaster: 'Ships lost. Mindarus dead. Men starving. No idea what to do.'

Alcibiades' troops were now so brimming with confidence and self-importance that they refused to fraternize with the rest of the army, which had often been defeated, while they remained undefeated. For

it was not long since Thrasylus had taken a beating at Ephesus and, much to the Athenians' shame, the Ephesians had erected a bronze trophy. So the men who had been serving with Alcibiades taunted Thrasylus' men with this, while boasting of their own prowess and that of their commander, and refused either to exercise along with them or to share the same patch of ground in the encampment. However, when a sizeable body of cavalry and infantry under Pharnabazus attacked Thrasylus' men, who had been carrying out a raid into the territory of Abydos, Alcibiades came out to reinforce them, and together they forced the enemy back and hunted them down until darkness fell. And so the two forces worked together, and returned to camp on good terms with each other and in high spirits. On the next day, Alcibiades set up a trophy and plundered Pharnabazus' territory without anyone daring to put up any resistance. But he released some captive priests and priestesses without ransom.

While he was on his way to fight the people of Chalcedon, who had revolted from Athens and accepted a Lacedaemonian garrison and harbor, he heard that they had collected all their flocks and herds from the countryside and taken them for safe keeping to the Bithynians, with whom they had friendly relations, so he led his army to the borders of Bithynia instead, and sent a herald on ahead to lay charges against the Bithynians. They were so frightened that they gave him the flocks and herds and entered into a pact of friendship with him.

When he was in the middle of building a siege wall all the way around Chalcedon from sea to sea, Pharnabazus arrived with the intention of raising the siege, and at the same time the Lacedaemonian harbor, Hippocrates, sallied forth from the city at the head of the troops he had there with him to engage the Athenians. But Alcibiades drew his men up in a formation which enabled them to face both armies at once, forced Pharnabazus to take to his heels in an ignominious fashion, and overcame Hippocrates, killing him and a great many of his men in the process.

Next, he sailed in person to the Hellespont to raise money. While he was there, he captured Selymbria, with extraordinary lack of concern for his own safety. The signal agreed on between himself and the Selymbrians who were betraying the city to him was that they would show a torch in the middle of the night, but they were forced to do so early, because they were concerned about one of their accomplices, who had suddenly changed his mind. So the torch was raised before the Athenian army was ready. Alcibiades collected about thirty men and sprinted for the walls, ordering the rest to follow as soon as they could. The gate was opened for him and he dashed inside, at the

head of his thirty men, who had now been reinforced by twenty light-armed foot-soldiers. Just inside the gate, however, he found himself faced by the people of Selymbria, armed and advancing towards him. He was obviously doomed if he put up a fight, and yet his desire to win made the idea of running away intolerable, since in all his campaigns down to that day he had never known defeat, so he had the trumpet call for silence, and then had one of his company issue a formal statement to the effect that the Selymbrians were not to bear arms against Athenians. This proclamation took the edge off some of the Selymbrians' appetite for battle, because they supposed that the whole Athenian army had entered the city, while others began to find the prospect of a peaceful settlement more attractive. The two sides got together and negotiated with each other, and while they were doing so the main bulk of Alcibiades' army arrived. He judged, quite rightly, that the Selymbrians were inclining towards peace, but he was afraid that his Thracian troops might sack the city—there were a lot of them, and their admiration and loyalty towards Alcibiades made them fanatical soldiers—so he sent all of them out of the city, and then, at the Selymbrians' request, left the city completely unharmed. All he did, before leaving, was extract some money from them and install a garrison in the city.

Meanwhile, the commanders who were besieging Chalcedon had concluded a treaty with Pharnabazus, the terms of which were that on receipt of some money, and on the condition that the people of Chalcedon resumed their status as subjects of Athens, Pharnabazus' territory was to be left alone; Pharnabazus was also to provide an escort and safe passage for an Athenian delegation to the Persian king. So when Alcibiades returned, Pharnabazus demanded that he too give his solemn word to honour the agreement, but Alcibiades refused to do so until Pharnabazus had done so first.

Once pledges had been given and received, Alcibiades' next target was Byzantium, which had seceded from Athens. He built a siege wall around the city, but then Anaxilaus, Lycurgus, and a few others undertook to hand the city over to him, provided that he left it unharmed afterwards. So he spread a rumour that developments in Ionia called him away and sailed off with his whole fleet in broad daylight—only to return at night. He himself went ashore with his hoplites, approached the city walls, and waited quietly, while his fleet launched an assault on the harbour and forced their way in, with the crews shouting for all they were worth and making a great deal of noise and commotion. The unexpectedness of the attack terrified the Byzantines, and at the same time gave the pro-Athenians in the city the chance to

let Alcibiades safely in, because everyone had gone to the harbour to resist the Athenian fleet. However, Byzantium was not surrendered without a fight. There were Peloponnesian, Boeotian, and Megarian troops stationed in the city, who managed to repel the troops from the Athenian fleet and force them back on board their ships, and who then realized that there were Athenians inside the city, took up battle stations and advanced to attack them. A fierce fight followed, but Alcibiades won—he commanded the right wing, with Theramenes on the left—and took about 300 of the surviving enemy troops prisoner.

After the battle no one from Byzantium was killed or sent into exile, since those were the terms of the agreement on the basis of which the men had betrayed the city to Alcibiades: they were not concerned to reserve any special treatment for themselves. And that is why, during his defence in Lacedaemon on the charge of treason, Anaxilaus could demonstrate in his speech that he had not acted at all dishonourably. He pointed out that he was a Byzantine, not a Lacedaemonian, and that it was Byzantium, not Sparta, whose perilous state had confronted him. There was a siege wall built around the city, no one could get through, and the Peloponnesians and Boeotians were consuming all the food there was in the city, while the people of Byzantium—men, women, and children—were going hungry. He argued that he had therefore not betrayed his city to the enemy, but rescued it from the horrors of war, and that in doing so he had followed the example of the best Lacedaemonians of the past, for whom the good of their country was the only unequivocal criterion of what was noble and moral. This argument won the admiration of the Lacedaemonians, and they acquitted the defendants.

By now, however, Alcibiades had a strong desire to see his homeland, and an even stronger desire to be seen by his fellow citizens, since he had won so many victories over their enemies, and so he put to sea. His own Attic triremes were decked from stem to stern with shields and other spoils of war, and had plenty of captured triremes in tow, as well as a cargo of an even larger number of figureheads from ships he had defeated and destroyed. The number of enemy triremes in both categories amounted to at least 200.

Duris of Samos, who claims to be a descendant of Alcibiades, goes into more detail. He says that Chrysogonus, the victor at the Pythian Games, played the pipes for the rowers, and that the tragic actor Callippides called the time, both wearing their full competition costume—straight-cut tunics, elegant robes and all—and that the flagship entered the harbour under a purple sail. He makes it sound as though Alcibiades were gadding about after a drinking-party. But these de-

tails are not recorded by Theopompus, Ephorus, or Xenophon, nor is it likely that he would have behaved in such a wilful manner when he was returning from exile and after having been in so much trouble. In fact, he was very nervous as he came in to land, and after the ship had been beached he did not disembark until from where he stood on the deck he could see that his cousin Eurypolemus was there, along with a great many other friends and relatives, welcoming him back home and inviting him ashore.

Once he was ashore, however, people hardly even noticed any of the other military commanders they met, but ran and crowded round him, calling out to him, greeting him, accompanying him on his way, and crowning him with garlands if they could get close to him, while those who could not watch him from a distance, and the older men pointed him out to the younger ones. But the city also found the occasion a bitter-sweet mixture of tears and smiles, as people remembered and compared their present good fortune with their former misfortunes, and reflected that they would not have failed in Sicily, nor would any of their other hopes have been dashed, if only they had left Alcibiades in charge of their affairs at the time, and in command of that expeditionary force. After all, they thought, a short while ago Athens had just about been driven from the seas, on land it was barely in control of its own outskirts, and it was torn by internal schisms, and yet now Alcibiades had taken these wretched, dejected remnants and resurrected the city to such an extent that not only had he restored its mastery of the seas, but on land he had also enabled it to conquer its enemies all over the world.

The decree for his recall had been ratified some time earlier. The motion was proposed by Critias the son of Callaeschrus; we have his own words to verify this, when in one of his elegiac poems he reminds Alcibiades of the favour as follows:

As for the decision to bring you home, it was I who spoke out
Before all the people and, having proposed it, brought it to pass.
Upon these words the seal of my tongue is set.

At the time of his return, then, the people convened in the Assembly and Alcibiades stepped up to address them. He spoke with sorrow and anguish of his sufferings, but he hardly blamed the Athenian people for them at all, and then only moderately; instead, he attributed the whole business to his own bad luck and to a spiteful deity. He spent most of the time talking about his fellow citizens' hopes for the future and boosting their morale. After his speech, he was crowned with garlands of gold, and was elected to the post of military commander with full

powers on land and sea. They also voted to restore his property to him, and decreed that the Eumolpidae and the Heralds were to revoke the curses they had spoken against him in accordance with the people's instructions. All the other priests revoked their curses, except for Theodorus, the High Priest, who said, 'No, I never prayed that he would suffer harm—provided he does no wrong to the city.'

So Alcibiades was doing spectacularly well. However, the timing of his return disturbed some people. The landing of his ship coincided with the day when Athena's Plynteria were being performed; this is the ceremony carried out in secret by the Praxiergidae on the twenty-fifth of Thargelion, which involves taking off the goddess's robes and covering her image. Consequently, the Athenians regard this day as one of the most unlucky in the calendar and refuse to carry out business of any kind on it. So the goddess was taken to be hiding herself from Alcibiades and rejecting him, rather than receiving him back in a kindly or welcoming fashion.

Nevertheless, everything was going Alcibiades' way, and a fleet of 100 triremes was being fitted out for another expedition he planned to make. But then he was seized by a noble ambition which kept him in Athens until the time of the Mysteries. Ever since Decelea had been fortified and by their presence there the enemy had controlled the approaches to Eleusis, the rites had been conducted in a chaotic fashion: the procession went by sea, and sacrifices, dances, and a number of the rites which are performed en route to Eleusis, when they parade out of the city with Iacchus, had to be omitted. It therefore struck Alcibiades as a good idea, bearing in mind how it would enhance not only his piety in the eyes of the gods, but also his reputation among men, to restore the traditional form to the rites, by having his infantry escort and guard the ceremony past the enemy. This, he thought, would either thoroughly embarrass and humiliate Agis, if the king chose to do nothing, or would enable him to fight a sacred battle, with the approval of the gods, in a supremely holy and crucial cause, and to do so within sight of his native city, with all his fellow citizens there to witness his courage.

Once he had decided to go ahead, he told the Eumolpidae and the Heralds of his plans. At dawn on the day of the procession, he posted lookouts in the hills and sent out an advance guard. Then he mustered the priests, the initiates, and their sponsors, provided them with a protective screen of armed men, and led them out in a calm, silent procession. On this occasion he made the post of military commander which he held such an awesome and majestic spectacle that he was described, by those who did not begrudge him his success, as a high

priest and a sponsor of initiates, as much as a military commander. No enemy troops dared to attack the procession, and he led it safely back again to Athens. He felt elated and proud, and the whole affair also raised the morale of the army, which felt that under his command they were invincible and irresistible. He became so popular with the lower, poorer classes that they conceived a passionate longing for him to rule over them as tyrant; some people even brought the issue up in their speeches and approached him to suggest it as a way of reaching a place where the envy of others could have no affect on him, where he could do away with decrees and laws and the idle chatterers who were ruining the city, and so act and administer the city's affairs without fear of the informers.

We do not know what Alcibiades himself thought about tyranny, but the most powerful Athenians were concerned enough to hurry him off on his expedition as quickly as possible. They got everything he wanted ratified by decree, including the colleagues of his choice, and so he sailed away. At Andros, however, although his attack on the island was successful in that he defeated the inhabitants and the Lacedaemonian contingent there, he did not take the town, and this became the first of the fresh charges levelled against him by his enemies.

Alcibiades seems to be a clear case of someone destroyed by his own reputation. His successes had made his daring and resourcefulness so well known that any failure prompted people to wonder whether he had really tried. They never doubted his ability; if he really tried, they thought, nothing would be impossible for him. So they expected to hear that Chios had fallen too, and the whole of the rest of Ionia, and were therefore irritated when they heard that he had not managed to accomplish everything as quickly or instantaneously as they wanted. They did not stop to consider that he was short of money, and that therefore, as he was fighting people who had a powerful financial backer in the Persian king, he often had to make trips away from the scene of the action, leaving the army to its own devices, to raise money for wages and provisions. In fact, this was the context within which the final charge against him arose. Here is what happened.

Lysander, who had been sent out by the Lacedaemonians to take command of their fleet, was giving his men four obols a day, instead of the standard three, out of money he had been given by Cyrus, whereas Alcibiades was pinched to pay even the daily allowance of three obols, so he sailed away on a fund-raising mission to Caria. The person he left in charge of the fleet was Antiochus, a man of undistinguished birth who was a skilful helmsman, but basically not a very intelligent man. Although Alcibiades had left him with instructions not to engage

the enemy even if they sailed out against him, he became so arrogant and disdainful that he manned two triremes (his own and one other), went over to Ephesus, and sailed past the prows of the enemy ships, making coarse gestures and calling out rude comments to them. At first Lysander launched just a few ships to chase him away, but when the Athenians came to Antiochus' assistance, he launched his whole fleet and inflicted a defeat on them. Antiochus himself was among the casualties, a great many Athenian ships and men were captured, and Lysander erected a trophy. As soon as Alcibiades heard what had happened, he returned to Samos, put to sea with his entire fleet and tried to provoke Lysander to fight; but Lysander was perfectly content with his victory and refused to come out against him.

One of the people serving with the Athenian army on Samos who disliked Alcibiades was Thrasybulus the son of Thraso. He felt particularly bitter, and he set sail for Athens to denounce him. He aroused people's feelings there and made a speech in the Assembly in which he claimed that it was Alcibiades who had spoiled their chances and caused the loss of the ships by his wilful attitude towards his position and by leaving in command men who had wormed their way into his confidence by carousing and gossiping with him; he had abandoned his command, Thrasybulus said, so that he could cruise around collecting money without a care in the world, and indulge in drinking sessions and liaisons with courtesans in Abydos and Ionia, while the enemy fleet lay at anchor near by. His enemies also found grounds for complaint in the stronghold he had built in Thrace, near Bisanthe, which they claimed was a bolt-hole in case he was either unwilling or unable to live in his native country.

The Athenians found these accusations convincing and elected other military commanders as a way of showing the anger and rancour they felt towards him. When Alcibiades heard about this, he became afraid, and he left the camp on Samos once and for all. He put together a force of mercenaries and made war on his own account against those Thracian tribes which remained outside the Persian king's dominion. He collected a great deal of money by ransoming prisoners, and also made things safe for the neighbouring Greek settlements, so that they did not have to worry about being raided by the barbarian tribesmen.

The Athenian commanders—Tydeus, Menander, and Adeimantus—who were stationed at Aegospotami with all the ships the Athenians had at the time gathered there, invariably sailed at daybreak to Lampsacus, where Lysander had berthed his fleet, and tried to provoke him to come out and fight them. Then they would turn around and go back

again, and spend the rest of the day in careless disarray, since they did not think much of their enemy. Alcibiades was based near them, and he could not just ignore this behaviour and not do something about it. He rode over on his horse and tried to explain things to the Athenian commanders. He pointed out that their anchorage was no good, since there was no proper harbour there, and no settlements either, so that they had to go all the way to Sestus to get supplies, and suggested that they not let their crews disperse and roam around wherever they wanted when they were on land, while there was a sizeable enemy fleet anchored near by, which was trained to move silently into action without needing orders from more than one man.

The Athenian commanders ignored this advice of Alcibiades', and also his suggestion that they move their anchorage to Sestus; in fact, Tydeus even rudely told him to leave. 'Others are in command now,' he said, 'not you.' Alcibiades left with the distinct impression that there was treachery afoot, and he told acquaintances from the Athenian encampment, who went with him some of the way, that if the commanders had not been so rude to him, he would within a few days have forced the Lacedaemonians either to have taken on the Athenian fleet despite their reluctance to do so, or to have abandoned their ships. Some people thought that this was just vain boasting, but others thought it quite possible, if he had struck at the Lacedaemonians by land with a large force of Thracian javelineers and horsemen, and thrown their camp into confusion.

Events soon proved that his assessment of the Athenians' mistakes was perfectly correct. When Lysander suddenly launched an unexpected attack, only eight Athenian triremes escaped with Conon, while the rest, which numbered not far short of 200, were captured and towed away. Three thousand men from the ships were taken alive by Lysander and then massacred—and before long he took Athens as well, put the Athenian fleet to the torch, and demolished the Long Walls.

After this, Alcibiades was so afraid of the Lacedaemonians, who were by now the masters of land and sea, that he moved to Bithynia, taking a great deal of valuable property with him, and sending a great deal more on ahead by ship, but leaving even more behind in the stronghold where he had been living. In Bithynia he again lost quite a bit of his property, and his land was raided by the local Thracians, so he decided to go up to the court of Artaxerxes. He thought he would prove himself to be just as useful to the king as Themistocles had been, if the king was prepared to put him to the test, while having a better excuse for being there. For he was not going to offer his services to the king and ask him for resources so that he could attack his fellow citizens, as

Themistocles had, but so that he could defend his country against its enemies. It seemed to him that Pharnabazus was the best person to guarantee him safe passage and facilitate his journey up to Artaxerxes, so he went to Pharnabazus in Phrygia and spent some time with him as an honoured member of his court.

The Athenians found it hard enough to bear the loss of their supremacy, but when Lysander also deprived them of their freedom by putting the city in the hands of the Thirty, they came to understand things and, now that they had lost, to entertain ideas they had ignored when they were capable of saving themselves. They looked back with remorse over all their mistakes and misjudgements, and now considered that the most stupid thing they had done was get angry with Alcibiades the second time. He had been cast aside through no fault of his own; they had got angry because a junior officer had lost a few ships in a shameful fashion, and, to their more lasting shame, had deprived the city of its best and most skilful military commander. Yet even in these circumstances some faint hope was reviving that all was not quite lost for the city as long as Alcibiades remained alive. 'Last time,' they thought, 'he couldn't stand spending his exile in passive inactivity, and this time too, if he still has the means, he won't let the Lacedaemonians get away with their arrogant brutality or the Thirty with their abuse of power.' Nor was it irrational for the common people to have these dreams, when even the Thirty found themselves concerned, and were prompted to make enquiries about him, and to take the greatest interest in his actions and intentions.

In the end, Critias tried to explain to Lysander that, if Athens were a democracy, the Lacedaemonians' dominion over Greece would not be secure, and that although the Athenians were not allowing the oligarchy to disturb their self-possession and self-satisfaction in the slightest, yet as long as Alcibiades was alive he would not let them do nothing about the present situation. However, Lysander was not convinced by these arguments until a *skytalē* arrived from the Lacedaemonian authorities ordering him to get rid of Alcibiades, perhaps because they too were worried about his initiative and endeavour, or perhaps because they wanted to gratify Agis.

So Lysander sent a message to Pharnabazus ordering him to do the deed, and Pharnabazus gave the job to his brother Bagaeus and his uncle Susamithras. Now, at the time Alcibiades was living in a village in Phrygia, and he had Timandra the courtesan with him. One night he had a dream in which he was dressed in Timandra's clothes, and she was cradling his head in her arms while she made up his face like a woman's with eye-liner and white lead. Others say that in his dream

he saw Bagaesus cutting off his head and his body burning, but they agree that the dream happened not long before his death.

The men sent to kill him did not dare to enter the house, but surrounded it and set it on fire. When Alcibiades noticed the fire, he picked up nearly all his clothes and bedding, threw them on to the flames, and then, wrapping his cloak around his left arm and holding his drawn dagger in his right hand, he dashed out of the house before the clothing caught fire. He was unharmed by the fire, and when the foreign assassins saw him they scattered. Not one of them stood his ground against him or came up to fight him hand to hand; they kept their distance and hurled javelins and fired arrows at him instead. So this is how he met his death. After the assassins had left, Timandra collected his body for burial. She wrapped her own clothes around the body to cover it, and gave him the most splendid and ambitious funeral she could under the circumstances. This is the woman who is said to have been the mother of Laïs—Laïs of Corinth, as she was called, although she actually came from Hyccara, a town in Sicily, where she became a prisoner of war.

Some writers basically agree with this account of Alcibiades' death, but say that responsibility for it lies not with Pharnabazus or Lysander or the Lacedaemonians, but with Alcibiades himself. They say that he had seduced a woman from a notable family and had her living with him; it was her brothers, on this account, who were driven by their fury at his high-handed behaviour to come one night and set fire to the house where he was staying, and who shot him down, as I have described, when he sprinted through the flames

**Virgil,
*Aeneid***

Through more than two and a half centuries of war, an obscure city-state came to dominate the Italian peninsula, finally achieving complete hegemony with the subjugation of Tarentum, the last holdout in the wealthy Greek south (272 B.C.), and the pacification of the Etruscans (264 B.C.) Generally, Rome did not destroy the cities it defeated, instead pursuing a policy of assimilation, often granting some form of citizenship rights to the conquered—though also requiring that they provide soldiers for Rome. Its armies often lost battles, but Rome was always able to levy more troops, persevering until victory was won. Italy in hand, Rome looked outwards and, in 264 B.C., entered its first war against the old Phoenician colony of Carthage over control of the island of Sicily. The Romans created a navy for this fight, and that opened up long-range imperial possibilities. Carthage was the great enemy during the days of the Roman Republic, which is the name by which we know the territorial empire under the mixed constitution realized after Rome expelled its last king in 509 B.C. Its republicanism involved devolution of the executive power of kingship into various elective magistracies and priesthoods. Two annually elected consuls held the supreme office, presiding over the Senate—the aristocratic body which served as council. The legislative power was held by various assemblies of the citizenry, in which the democratic factor could be found—summed up in the power belonging to the office of the tribune of the plebs.

Eventually, breathtaking inequalities of wealth and *dignitas* generated massive resentment: is the labor of Roman civilization simply for the aggrandizement of a few? The Senate and the People came to blows. The Gracchi brothers were assassinated; several of Rome's Italian allies revolted; there were significant slave uprisings. Marius (ca. 157-86 B.C.), a Roman general and leader of the popular party, by removing the property qualification for service in the military, created a professional soldiery devoted to their commanders more than to the state. Liberty was a rallying cry for the nobles, not for the poor—who had to focus on the simple justice of bread and land. Marius' mortal rival, Sulla, was the first citizen to march into Rome to achieve political ends by force of arms. Julius Caesar would be the second to do so, during his struggle with Pompey, champion of the aristocrats.

In the last of the civil wars, Caesar's great-nephew and adopted heir, Octavian, emerged victorious, establishing the Principate in 27 B.C., an ideological fiction disguising absolute monarchy under the forms of the old republican constitution. Caesar Augustus, as Octavian would be styled, was to be understood simply as the leading citizen (*princeps*, "first"). Salvation from the horrors of civil war came with a high price: the state now depended on this one man's *auctoritas* (authority).

Publius Vergilius Maro (70–19 B.C.), or Virgil, furnishes the political theology for the Roman empire in his great epic, the *Aeneid*, wedding myth to history—but perhaps not wholly uncritically. As a poet, he was influenced by the Hellenistic, Alexandrian style of Theocritus and Callimachus. His poetry flows from a deep assimilation of his Greek and Roman predecessors, brought to bear in a dense allusiveness, only feasible with written verse—as opposed to the oral poetry behind Homer. If one thinks of the *Iliad* as tragic and the *Odyssey* as comic (in the sense of having a happy resolution), then the *Aeneid* is comedy, showing the realization of a beneficial providence. Though there are malign divinities ("Can there be anger so great in the hearts of gods on high?"), with Juno's actions analogous to Poseidon's vengeful attempts to derail Odysseus' return home, malevolence does not win out. Jupiter plans for Rome to possess "*imperium sine fine*" (empire without end). Tracing the founding of Rome to a hero, the "pious" Aeneas, who escapes the Greek destruction of Troy, Virgil returns us to that question of how "East" and "West" relate. In his war with Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Octavian had opposed Latin rectitude to Greek decadence. Is that opposition rehearsed in the story of Dido and her Semitic-African state? Certainly we see a Latin resistance to the Hellenistic romanticism which understands love to be the path to personal realization in a post-political world. Virgil sums up the rationalization of Roman power: "to establish peace, to spare the humbled, and to conquer the proud." It is true that local grandees need humbling, but can imperial power escape the same nemesis?

Book 4

But the Queen, long sick with love,
Nurses her heart's deep wound
With her pounding blood, and dark flames
Lick at her soul. Thoughts of Aeneas—
The man's heroic lineage, his noble character—
Flood her mind, his face and words transfix
Her heart, and her desire gives her no rest.

When Dawn had spread the sunlight over earth
And dispelled night's damp shadow from the sky,
Dido, deeply troubled, spoke to her sister:

“Anna, my nightmares would not let me sleep!
This guest who has come to our house—
His looks, the way he carries himself, his brave heart!
He has to be descended from the gods. Fear
Always gives away men of inferior birth.
What the Fates have put him through at sea,
The wars he painted, fought to the bitter end!
If I were not unshakable in my vow
Never to pledge myself in marriage again
After death stole my first love away—
If the mere thought of marriage did not leave me cold,
I might perhaps have succumbed this once.
Anna, I must confess, since my husband,
Poor Sychaeus, fell at my brother's hands
And stained our household gods with blood,
Only this man has turned my eye,
Only he has caused my heart to falter.
I recognize the old, familiar flames.
But may the earth gape open and swallow me,
May the Father Almighty blast me
Down to the shades of Erebus below
And Night profound, before I violate you,
O Modesty, and break your vows.
The man who first joined himself to me
Has taken my love with him to the grave.”

Thus Dido, and her tears wet her bosom.

And Anna:

“O sister dearer than light itself,
Will you waste your youth in spinsterhood

Alone and grieving, never to taste love's joys,
The sweetness of children? Do you think
Any of this matters to ghosts in the grave?
True, in your mourning no potential husbands
Have caught your eye, neither back in Tyre
Nor here in Libya. You've looked down your nose
At Iarbas and Africa's other heralded chieftains.
But does it make sense to resist someone you like?
Has it crossed your mind just where you've settled?
The Gaetulians, invincible in war,
And Numidian horsemen are on one frontier.
Just off the coast are the Syrtes' quicksand shoals,
Desert to the south, and wild Barcaean nomads
Ranging all over. Need I mention the war clouds
Gathering over Tyre, and your brother's threats?
I think the providential gods, with Juno behind them,
Have blown these Trojan ships our way.
With a husband like this, what a city, Sister,
What a kingdom you would see rise! With Trojan allies
What heights of glory our Punic realm would climb!
Just beg the gods' indulgence, and when you have
Good omens from the sacrifices, pamper
Your guests, and invent reasons for them to linger:
'Stormy Orion vexes the dim sea, your ships
Are battered, the weather just won't cooperate.'
With these words Anna fanned the flames of love
That flickered in Dido's heart and gave resolve
To her wavering mind, dissolving her sense of shame.

First they make the rounds at shrines, soliciting
Divine approval. To Ceres the lawgiver, Apollo,
And father Bacchus the sisters slaughter
Choice sheep in perfect rituals. But they honor
Above all Juno, goddess of marriage. Dido herself,
With her great beauty, holds the wine-bowl
And pours it out between a glossy heifer's horns.
She glides past statues of gods to rich altars,
Ushers in each day with offerings, consults in awe
The steaming entrails of disemboweled bulls.
But what do prophets know? How much can vows,
Or shrines, help a raging heart? Meanwhile, the flame
Eats her soft marrow, and the wound lives,
Silent beneath her breast.

Dido is burning.
She wanders all through the city in her misery,
Raving mad,

*like a doe pierced by an arrow
Deep in the woods of Crete. She is unwary,
And the arrow, shot by a shepherd who has no idea
Where it has landed, finds the animal,
And as she runs all through the Dictaeon forest
The lethal shaft clings to her flank.*

So too Dido.

Now she leads Aeneas on a tour of the walls,
Shows him what the wealth of Sidon can build.
She begins to speak, but her voice cracks.
As dusk comes on her royal desire is a banquet.
Mad to hear once more the labors of Ilium,
She demands the story again, and again she hangs
On every word. When her guests have left,
And the waning moon has set, and the westering stars
Make slumber sweet, she pines away
In the empty hall, lying alone on Aeneas' couch,
Seeing and hearing him although he is gone.
Or she holds little Ascanius in her lap
To fill in the features of Aeneas' face
And in this way cheats her unspeakable love.

The half-built towers rise no higher, the men no longer
Drill at arms or maintain the city's defensive works.
All work stops, construction halts on the huge,
Menacing walls. The idle derricks loom against the sky.

When Jove's dear wife saw Dido so lovesick
That her good name no longer mattered to her
As much as her passion, she approached Venus and said:

"An outstanding victory! What a memorable display
Of divine power by you and your little boy,
Two devious deities laying low a single woman!
Your fear of Carthage and your suspicion
Of its noble houses hardly escapes me, my dear.
But to what purpose? Why are we at odds?
Why not instead work out a lasting peace—
Sealed with a royal marriage? You have what you want:
Dido burning with love, her very bones enflamed.

I propose, therefore, that we rule this people jointly,
With equal authority. Dido can submit
To a Trojan husband, with Carthage as her dowry.”

The Goddess of Love detected a ploy
To divert power away from Italy
And to Libyan shores. She responded this way:

“Only a fool would refuse such an offer
And prefer to oppose you—provided, of course,
That your plan meets with success. But I remain
A little unclear about the intentions of Fate.
Does Jupiter want the Tyrians and Trojans
To form one city? Does he approve
This mingling of races? You are his wife,
And so you should persuade him. Lead on,
And I’ll follow.”

And the Queen of Heaven:

“Leave that to me. Now listen, and I’ll outline
Exactly how we will deal with the business at hand.
Aeneas and the most unfortunate Dido
Are preparing a woodland hunt for tomorrow,
As soon as Titan lifts his luminous head
And dissolves with his rays the curtains of the world.
Just as the beaters start flushing out game
I’ll pour down a black rain laced with hailstones
And make all the heavens rumble with thunder.
The hunters will scatter in the enveloping gloom,
And Dido and Aeneas will find themselves
In the same cave. I will be there too,
And with your consent I will unite them
In holy matrimony. This will be their wedding.”

The Cytherean approved and nodded her assent,
Smiling all the while at Juno’s treachery.

Dawn rose from the river Ocean,
And at first light the hunting party
Spills out from the gates with nets and spears.
Massylian horsemen and keen hounds surge ahead,
But the Carthaginian nobles await their Queen.
She pauses at the threshold of her chamber
While her stallion, resplendent in purple and gold,
Champs the foaming bit. Finally, she steps forward

With her retinue, wearing a Phoenician cloak
Finished with embroidery. Her quiver is gold,
Her hair is bound in gold, and the purple cloak
Is pinned with a clasp of gold.

Then out ride
The Trojans with Iūlus, excited to be among them.
Aeneas himself, handsome as a god,
Takes the lead and joins his troops to Dido's.

*In winter Apollo leaves Lycia and the streams
Of Xanthus and goes to his birth-isle, Delos.
There he renews the circling dances,
And Cretans, Dryopes, and painted Scythians
Whirl around his sacred altars while the god
Paces the ridges of Mount Cynthus, braiding
His flowing hair with soft leaves and gold,
And the arrows rattle in the quiver on his back.*

No less majestic
Was Aeneas, and his face shone with equal glory.

When they came into the high, trackless hills,
Mountain goats, dislodged from the rocks above,
Ran down the ridges. Elsewhere, herds of deer
Streamed across open country, kicking up
Billows of dust in their flight from the hills.
Young Ascanius rode his spirited mount
Up and down the valleys, in high spirits himself,
Chasing deer and goats but hoping all the while
That something less tame, a wild boar or tawny lion,
Would come down from the mountains.

Meanwhile, the sky begins to rumble,
And a rainstorm, turning to hail, sweeps in.
The Tyrians and Trojans, with Iūlus among them,
Venus' own dear grandchild, scatter through the fields
In search of shelter. Streams gush down the mountain,
And Dido and the Trojan leader make their way
To the same cave. Earth herself and bridal Juno
Give the signal. Fires flash in the Sky,
Witness to their nuptials, and the Nymphs
Wail high on the mountaintop. That day
Was the first cause of calamity and of death
To come. For no longer is Dido swayed
By appearances or her good name. No more

Does she contemplate a secret love. She calls it
Marriage, and with that word she cloaks her sin.

Rumor at once sweeps through Libya's great cities,
Rumor, the swiftest of evils. She thrives on speed
And gains power as she goes. Small and timid at first,
She grows quickly, and though her feet touch the ground
Her head is hidden in the clouds. The story goes
That Mother Earth, vexed with the gods, bore this
One last child, a sister to Coeus and Enceladus.
Fast on her feet, her beating wings a blur,
She is a dread, looming monster. Under every feather
On her body she has—strange to say—a watchful eye,
A tongue, a shouting mouth, and pricked-up ears.
By night she wheels through the dark skies, screeching,
And never closes her shining eyes in sleep.
By day she perches on rooftops or towers,
Watching, and she throws whole cities into panic,
As much a hardened liar as a herald of truth.
Exultant now, she fills the people's ears
With all kinds of talk, intoning fact and fiction:
Aeneas has come, born of Trojan blood;
Dido, impressed, has given him her hand,
And now they indulge themselves the winter long,
Neglecting their realms, slaves to shameful lust.
The loathsome goddess spreads this gossip
Far and wide. Then she winds her way to King Iarbas,
And with her words his rage flares to the sky.

Iarbas, a son of Jupiter Ammon
By a Garmantian nymph the god had ravished,
Had built in his vast realm a hundred temples
For his Father, and on a hundred altars
Had consecrated sacred fire, an eternal flame
In honor of the gods. Blood from sacrificial victims
Clotted the soil, the portals bloomed with garlands,
As Iarbas, they say, insane with jealousy at Rumor's
Bitter news, knelt at these altars surrounded by gods,
Uprturned his palms and prayed, prayed to his Father:

“Almighty Jupiter, to whom the Moors now offer
Libations of wine as they feast on brocaded couches—
Do you see these things? Why should we shudder
At you, Father, when you hurl your thunderbolts,
Or when lightning flashes blindly in the clouds

And stammering thunder rolls through the sky?
This woman, a vagrant in my land, who established
Her little town on a strip of coast we sold to her,
With acreage on lease—this woman has spurned
My offers of marriage and embraced Aeneas as her lord.
And now this Paris, with his crew of eunuchs,
The bonnet on his pomaded hair tied with ribbons
Beneath his chin, makes off with the prize
While we, who bring offerings to temples—
Your temples—are worshiping an empty name.”

So Iarbas prayed, clutching the altar.
And the Almighty heard him, and turned his eyes
To the royal city and the lovers oblivious
Of their better name.

Then Jupiter said to Mercury:

“Go now, my son, summon the Zephyrs,
Glide down on your wings and speak to the Trojan
Idling in Carthage. He seems to have quite forgotten,
In his infatuation, the cities given him by Fate.
Carry my words down through the rushing winds.
This is not the man his lovely mother promised us.
Not for this did she rescue him twice from the Greeks,
But that he should be the one to rule Italy, a land
Pregnant with empire and clamorous for war,
And produce a race from Teucer’s high blood,
And bring all the world beneath the rule of law.
If his own glory means nothing to him, if he will not
Take on this labor for his own fame’s sake,
Does he begrudge Ascanius the towers of Rome?
What is he hoping for? Why does he linger
Among a hostile people and have no regard
For Ausonia’s race and Lavinian fields?
In sum, he must sail. That is my message.”

Jupiter had spoken, and his son prepared
To fulfill his commands. He bound on his feet
The golden sandals whose wings carry him over
Landscape and seascape in a blur of wind.
Then he took the wand he uses to summon
Pale ghosts from Orcus or send them down
To Tartarus’ gloom—the same wand he uses
To charm mortals to sleep and make sleepers awake

And unseal the dead's eyelids. Holding this wand
He now rides the wind, sailing through thunderheads.
As he flies along, he makes out the summit
And steep slopes of Atlas, who shoulders the sky.
His pine-clad head is forever dark with clouds
And beaten by storms. Snow mantles his shoulders,
And icy streams drip from his frozen grey beard.
Mercury glided to a halt here, poised in the air,
And then gathered himself for a dive to the sea,
Where he skimmed the waves

like a cormorant

That patrols a broken shoreline hunting for fish.

And so the god flew from the mountain giant, Atlas,
(Whose daughter, Maia, was Mercury's mother)
And came at last to the beaches of Libya.

The wing-footed messenger stepped ashore,
And when he reached the huts he saw Aeneas
At work, towers and houses rising around him.
His sword was enstarred with yellow jasper,
And from his shoulders hung a mantle blazing
With Tyrian purple, a splendid gift from Dido,
Who had stitched the fabric with threads of gold.

Mercury weighed in at once:

“Are you, of all people,
Laying the foundations of lofty Carthage
And building a beautiful city—for a woman?
What about your own realm, your own affairs?
The ruler of the gods—and of all the universe—
Has sent me down to you from bright Olympus,
Bearing his message through the rushing winds.
What are you thinking of, wasting your time in Libya?
If your own glory means nothing to you,
Think of the inheritance you owe to Ascanius—
A kingdom in Italy and the soil of Rome.”

With these words on his lips, Mercury vanished
Into thin air, visible no more to human eyes.

Aeneas stood there amazed, choking with fear.
He bristled all over, speechless, astounded,
And he burned with desire to leave that sweet land,
In awe of the commandment from the gods above.

But what should he do? What can he say
 To the Queen in her passion? How will he choose
 His opening words? His mind ranges all over,
 Darting this way and that, and as he weighs
 His options, this seems the best choice:
 He calls his captains, Mnestheus, Sergestus,
 And brave Serestus, and he orders them
 To prepare the fleet for silent running, get the men
 To the shore and the gear in order, but conceal
 The reason for this change of plans. Meanwhile,
 He explains that—since good Dido knows nothing
 And would never dream that a love so strong
 Could ever be destroyed—he himself will find
 A way to approach her, the proper occasion
 To break the news to her gently.

The captains
 Were more than happy to fulfill his commands.

But the Queen (are lovers ever really fooled?)
 Had a presentiment of treachery. Fearing all
 Even when all seemed safe, she was the first
 To detect a shift in the wind. It was evil Rumor
 Who whispered that the fleet was preparing
 To set out to sea.

She went out of her mind,
 Raging through the city

as wild and furious
As a maenad when the holy mysteries have begun,
Her blood shaking when she hears the cry "Bacchus!"
In the nocturnal frenzy on Mount Cithaeron,
And the mountain echoes the sacred call.

Finally she corners Aeneas and says:

"Traitor! Did you actually hope to conceal
 This crime and sneak away without telling me?
 Does our love mean nothing to you? Does it matter
 That we pledged ourselves to each other?
 Do you care that Dido will die a cruel death?
 Preparing to set sail in the dead of winter,
 Launching your ships into the teeth of this wind!
 How can you be so cruel? If Troy still stood,
 And you weren't searching for lands unknown,
 You wouldn't even sail for Troy in this weather!"

Is it me? Is it me you are fleeing?
By these tears, I beg you, by your right hand,
Which is all I have left, by our wedding vows,
Still so fresh—if I have ever done anything
To deserve your thanks, if there is anything in me
That you found sweet, pity a house destined to fall,
And if there is still room for prayers, I beg you,
Please change your mind. It is because of you
The Libyan warlords hate me and my own Tyrians
Abhor me. Because of you that my honor
Has been snuffed out, the good name I once had,
My only hope to ascend to the stars.
To what death do you leave me, dear guest
(The only name I can call the man
I once called husband)? For what should I wait?
For my brother Pygmalion to destroy my city,
For Gaetulian Iarbas to lead me off to captivity?
If you had at least left me with child
Before deserting me, if only a baby Aeneas
Were playing in my hall to help me remember you,
I wouldn't feel so completely used and abandoned.”
Dido finished. Aeneas, Jupiter's message
Still ringing in his ears, held his eyes steady
And struggled to suppress the love in his heart.
He finally made this brief reply:

“My Queen,

I will never deny that you have earned my gratitude,
In more ways than can be said; nor will I ever regret
Having known Elissa, as long as memory endures
And the spirit still rules these limbs of mine.
I do have a few things to say on my own behalf.
I never hoped to steal away from your land
In secret, and you should never imagine I did.
Nor have I ever proposed marriage to you
Or entered into any nuptial agreement.
If the Fates would allow me to lead my own life
And to order my priorities as I see fit,
The welfare of Troy would be my first concern,
And the remnants of my own beloved people.
Priam's palace would still be standing
And Pergamum rising from the ashes of defeat.
But now the oracles of Gryneian Apollo,
Of Lycian Apollo, have commanded with one voice

That the great land of Italy is my journey's end.
There is my love, my country. If the walls
Of Carthage, vistas of a Libyan city,
Have a hold on you, a Phoenician woman,
Why do you begrudge the Trojans
A settlement in Ausonia? We too have the right
To seek a kingdom abroad.

The troubled ghost
Of my father, Anchises, admonishes me
Every night in my dreams, when darkness
Covers the earth, and the fiery stars rise.
And my dear son, Ascanius—am I to wrong him
By cheating him of his inheritance,
A kingdom in Hesperia, his destined land?
And now the gods' herald, sent by Jove himself,
(I swear by your head and mine) has come down
Through the rushing winds, ordering me to leave.
I saw the god myself, in broad daylight,
Entering the walls, and heard his very words.
So stop wounding both of us with your pleas.
It is not my own will—this quest for Italy.”

While he is speaking she looks him up and down
With icy, sidelong glances, stares at him blankly,
And then erupts into volcanic fury:

“Your mother was no goddess, you faithless bastard,
And you aren't descended from Dardanus, either.
No, you were born out of flint in the Caucasus,
And suckled by tigers in the wilds of Scythia.
Ah, why should I hold back? Did he sigh as I wept?
Did he even look at me? Did he give in to tears
Or show any pity for the woman who loved him?
What shall I say first? What next? It has come to this—
Neither great Juno nor the Saturnian Father
Looks on these things with impartial eyes.
Good faith is found nowhere. I took him in,
Shipwrecked and destitute on my shore,
And insanely shared my throne with him.
I recovered his fleet and rescued his men.
Oh, I am whirled by the Furies on burning winds!
And now prophetic Apollo, now the Lycian oracles,
Now the gods' herald, sent by Jupiter himself,
Has come down through the rushing winds

With dread commands! As if the gods lose sleep
Over business like this! Go on, leave! I'm not
Arguing with you any more. Sail to Italy,
Find your kingdom overseas. But I hope,
If there is any power in heaven, you will suck down
Your punishment on rocks in mid-ocean,
Calling Dido's name over and over. Gone
I may be, but I'll pursue you with black fire,
And when cold death has cloven body from soul,
My ghost will be everywhere. You will pay,
You despicable liar, and I will hear the news;
Word will reach me in the deeps of hell."
With these words she breaks off their talk
And in her anguish flees from the daylight
And out of his sight, leaving him there
Hesitant with fear, and with so much more to say.
Her maids support her as she collapses, take her
To her marble room, and lay her on her bed.

Aeneas, loyal and true, yearns to comfort her,
Soothe her grief, and say the words that will
Turn aside her sorrow. He sighs heavily,
And although great love has shaken his soul,
He obeys the gods' will and returns to the fleet.

Then the Trojans redouble their efforts
And haul their ships down all along the shore.
Keels are caulked and floated, leafy tree limbs
Are brought in for oars, and beams left rough
In the men's impatience to leave. You could see them
Streaming down from every part of the city.

*Ants, preparing for winter, will busily plunder
A huge pile of seeds and store it in their nest.
The black line threads through the fields as the insects
Transport their spoils on a narrow road through the grass.
Some push the huge grains along with their shoulders,
Others patrol the line and keep it moving,
And the whole trail is seething with their work.*

What was it like, Dido, to see all this? What sighs
Escaped your lips, when from your high tower
You saw the shoreline crawling with Trojans,

And the sea roiled with the shouts of sailors?

Cruel Love, what do you not force human hearts to bear?
Again Dido collapses into tears, again feels compelled
To beg Aeneas and to bow down to Love,
Lest she leave something untried and so die in vain:

“Look at them, Anna, scuttling across the shore,
Streaming down from every direction. The canvas
Can hardly wait for the breeze, and the sailors
Are laughing as they hang the sterns with garlands.
I had the strength to foresee this sorrow,
And I will have the strength to endure it, Sister.
There is one more thing I will ask of you.
You are the only one that traitor befriended,
Confiding in you even his deepest feelings.
Only you will know the best way to approach him.
Go, my dear, bend your knee before our archenemy.
Tell him I never joined the Greek alliance at Aulis
To burn down Troy, never sent my warships
To Pergamum, nor defiled his father’s ashes
Or disturbed his ghost. Why, then, does he refuse
To admit my words into his obstinate ears?
What is his hurry? Is he too rushed to grant
The final request of his wretched lover:
To wait for favorable winds for his flight?
I am no longer asking for our marriage back—
The marriage he betrayed—nor that he do without
His precious Latium or relinquish his realm.
All I want is time, some breathing room for my passion,
Until Fate has taught me how the vanquished should grieve.
Beg from him this last favor, Sister. If he grants it,
I will pay it back with interest—by my death.”

Thus Dido’s prayer, and her sister sadly
Bore it to Aeneas, then bore it again. Unmoved
By her tears, he made no response to her words.
Fate stood in the way, and a god sealed the man’s ears.

*Alpine winds swoop down from the North
And struggle to uproot an ancient oak.
They blow upon it from every side until its leaves
Strew the ground and the strong trunk-wood creaks.
But the tree clings to the crag, and as high as its crown
Reaches to heaven, so deep do its roots sink into the earth.*

So too the hero, battered with appeals
On this side and that. His great heart feels
Unendurable pain, but his mind does not move,
And the tears that fall to the ground change nothing.

And now Dido, in awe of her doom,
Prays for death. She is weary of looking upon
The dome of heaven, and, furthering her resolve
To leave the light, she saw as she placed offerings
On the incense-fumed altar a fearful omen:
The holy water turned black, and the wine,
When she poured it, congealed into gore.
She told no one of this, not even her sister.
There was more. Dido had in the palace
A marble shrine to her deceased husband,
A shrine she honored by keeping it wreathed
With snow-white wool and festal fronds.
Now she heard, or seemed to hear, her husband's voice,
When dusk had melted the edges of the world,
Calling her. And the owl, alone on the rooftop,
Would draw out its song into an eerie wail.
And the sayings of seers from days gone by
Would fill her with terror. And then in her sleep
A fierce Aeneas would pursue her as she raved.
And then she would be alone, abandoned forever,
Forever traveling a long, lonesome road
Through a desert landscape, searching for her Tyrians—

*Like mad Pentheus when he sees the maenads,
And sees a double sun and a duplicate Thebes;
Or like Orestes stalked by Furies on an empty stage,
Pursued by his mother with torches and snakes
While the avenging Fiends lurk in the doorway.*

And so Dido, worn down by grief, went mad.
Determined to die, she worked out by herself
The time and the means, and only then
Did she address her sister, hiding her plan
Behind a face radiant with serenity and hope:

“O Sister, I have found a way—be glad for me—
Either to get him back or free myself from love.
On the shore of Ocean, near the setting sun,
Lies farthest Ethiopia, where gigantic Atlas
Turns on his shoulders the star-studded heavens.

A priestess from there, of the Massylian tribe,
Has been presented to me. She guarded the sanctuary
Of the Hesperides, protected the golden apples
On their tree, and feasted the dragon
On honey and the poppy's drowsy opium.
She claims her incantations can set hearts free
Or plunge them into the depths of despair,
All as she chooses. She can stop rivers cold,
Make the stars turn backward, and conjure up
The spirits of night. You will hear the ground bellow
Under your feet, see elms stroll down mountains.
I swear by the gods, Anna, and by your dear head,
I am reluctant to resort to black magic. Still,
Build a pyre secretly in the central courtyard
Under the open sky and pile upon it
The weapons our impious hero left
On our bedroom walls, and all his forgotten clothes,
And the marriage bed that was my undoing.
It will do me good to destroy every reminder
Of that evil man—as the priestess told me.”

She fell silent, and the color drained from her face.

In spite of everything, her sister Anna
Did not believe that Dido was inventing
These strange rites to disguise her own funeral.
She could not conceive of passion so great
And feared no worse for Dido now
Than at the death of Sychaeus.

And so,

Anna prepared the pyre.

But the Queen, out in the open courtyard—
Where the pyre now reared heavenward,
Vast with billets of pine and sawn oak—
Hangs the place with garlands and funeral fronds.
Upon the bed she arranges his clothes, the sword
That he left, and his picture, knowing well
What was to come.

There were altars
Around the courtyard, and the priestess
Shook her hair out free and chanted thunderous prayers
To three hundred gods, to Erebus and Chaos,
To three-bodied Hecate and Diana's three faces,
Virgin huntress, Moon, and pale Proserpina.

She sprinkled water as being from Avernus
And with a bronze knife harvested by moonlight
Herbs selected for their milky, black poison.
She calls for the love charm of a newborn foal
Torn from his forehead before his mother can eat it.
Dido herself, sacred cakes of barley in her pious hand,
Stands close to the altars, one foot unsandaled,
Her dress unbound. Then she calls to witness,
As one about to die, first Gods and then Stars
Who share Destiny's secrets. And then she prays
To whatever Power makes a final reckoning
For lovers who love on unequal terms.

It was night, and all over earth weary bodies
Lay peacefully asleep. Woods and wild seas
Had fallen still, and the stars were midway
In their gliding orbits. Ox and meadow were quiet,
And all the brilliant birds who haunt
The lapping lakes and tangled hedgerows
Were nestled in sleep under the dark, silent sky.

But not Dido, unhappy heart. She never drifted off
Into sleep, nor let night settle on her eyes or breast.
Her anxiety mounts, and her love surges back
And seethes, wave after wave on a furious sea.
At last she breaks into speech, debating in her heart:

“What am I doing? Should I entertain once more
My former suitors—and hear them laugh at me?
Go begging for a marriage among the Nomads,
After scorning their proposals time and again?
Shall I follow the Trojans' fleet and be subject
To their every command? After all, aren't they
So grateful for the help I gave them
That they could never forget my past kindnesses?
Even if I wanted to, who would let me on board,
Welcome someone so hated onto their ships?
Poor Dido, do you not yet appreciate
The treachery bred into Laomedon's race?
What then? Shall I crew with the Trojans
Cruising cheerfully away, all on my own?
Or should I, at the head of my own Tyrian fleet,
Give them pursuit, order my people to hoist sail
Into the wind again, a people I could scarcely persuade
To abandon their city back in Phoenicia?”

No, Dido, die as you deserve, end your sorrow
With a sword.

 You, my dear sister, caving in to my tears,
First loaded my frenzied soul with these sorrows
And put me in the enemy's path. It was not my lot
To live a blameless life as a widow, as free
As a wild thing, untouched by these cares.
I have not kept my vow to Sychaeus' ashes."

As these cries erupted from Dido's heart,
Aeneas, bent on leaving, with everything in order,
Was catching some sleep on his ship's high stern,
And in his sleep he had a vision of Mercury,
Returning to him in the same form as before,
The same voice and face, the same golden hair
And graceful body—and, as before, with a warning:

"Goddess-born, how can you sleep in a crisis like this?
Are you blind to the perils surrounding you,
Madman? Don't you hear a sailing breeze blowing?
Dido's heart revolves around evil. Determined
To die, she seethes with tides of raw passion.
Will you not flee now, while flight is still possible?
You will soon see this sea awash with timbers
And the shore in flames—if Dawn finds you
Lingering here. Push off, then, without delay.
A woman is a fickle and worrisome thing."

And with these words he melted into the dark.

Aeneas was deeply shaken by this apparition.
He tore himself from sleep and woke his crew:

"On the double, men, unfurl those sails
And get to the benches! A god has come down
From heaven again, urging us to cut the cables
And get out of here as fast as we can.
We will follow you, Holy One, whoever you are,
And gladly obey your commands again.
Be with us once more, grant us your grace,
And set propitious stars in the sky before us."

He spoke, drew his sword
Flashing from its sheath, and severed
The stern cable. Aeneas' fervor
Spread through the fleet. They ran to their posts

And shoved off from the shore, blanketing the sea
With their hulls. Leaning into the oars,
They swept the blue water and churned it to foam.

Dawn left Tithonus' saffron bed
And sprinkled the world with early light.
The Queen, in her tower, watched the day whiten
And saw the fleet moving on under level sails.
She knew the shores and harbors were empty,
The oarage gone. She beat her lovely breast
Three times, four times, and tore her golden hair.

"O God!" she said. "Will he get away,
Will this interloper make a mockery of us?
To arms, the whole city, after him!
Launch the fleet! Bring fire, man the oars!
What am I saying? Where am I?
What has come over me? Oh, Dido, only now
Do you feel your guilt? Better to have felt it
When you gave away your crown. Behold
The pledge, the loyalty, of the man they say
Bears his ancestral gods, bore on his shoulders
His age-worn father! Could I have not torn him
Limb from limb and fed him to the fishes?
Murdered his friends? Minced Ascanius himself
And served him up as a meal to his father?
The battle could have gone either way: What of it?
Doomed to die, whom did I have to fear?
I should have torched his camp with my own hands,
Annihilated father and son and the whole race,
And thrown myself on top of the conflagration.
O Sun, fiery witness to all earthly deeds,
And Juno, complicit in my unhappy love,
Hecate, worshiped with howls at midnight crossroads,
Avenging Furies, and gods of dying Elissa—
Attend to this, turn the force of your wrath
Upon sins that deserve it—O hear my prayer!
If this criminal is destined to make harbor again,
If this is what the Fates and Jupiter demand,
May he still have to fight a warlike nation,
Be driven from his land and torn from Iūlus.
May he plead for aid and see his people slaughtered.
And when he has accepted an unjust peace,
May he not enjoy his reign or the light of day

But die before his time and lie unburied
On a desolate shore. This is what I pray for.
These last words I pour out with my blood.
And you, my Tyrians, must persecute his line
Throughout the generations—this your tribute
To Dido's ashes. May treaties never unite
These nations, may no love ever be lost between them.
And from my bones may some avenger rise up
To harry the Trojans with fire and sword,
Now and whenever we have the power.
May coast oppose coast, waves batter waves,
Arms clash with arms, may they be ever at war,
They themselves and their children forever.”
Dido said these things and then set her mind
On a quick escape from the hated light. She exchanged
A few words with Barce, Sychaeus' nurse; her own
Was black ashes back in the old country.

“Dear Nurse, bring my sister Anna here.
Have her sprinkle her body with river water
And bring along the victims for expiation. You
Come with her, and wreath your brows with wool.
I intend to complete the rites to Stygian Jove
That I have begun, and so end my troubles,
And to send the Trojan's pyre up in flames.”

She spoke. The old woman quickened her step.
Dido trembled, panicked at the enormity
Of what she had begun. Eyes bloodshot,
Blotched cheeks quivering, pale with looming death,
She burst into the innermost part of the house,
Climbed the pyre like a madwoman, and unsheathed
The Trojan sword—a gift not sought for such a use.
The sight of the familiar bed and the clothes he wore
Made her stop in tears. Struggling to collect herself,
She lay upon the couch and spoke her final words:

“Love's spoils, sweet while heaven permitted,
Receive this soul, and free me from these cares.
I have lived, and I have completed the course
Assigned by Fortune. Now my mighty ghost
Goes beneath the earth. I built an illustrious city.
I saw my walls. I avenged my husband
And made my evil brother pay. Happy,
All too happy, if Dardanian ships

Had never touched our shores!”

Dido spoke,
And pressing her face into the couch:

“We will die unavenged, but we will die.
This is how I want to pass into the dark below.
The cruel Trojan will watch the fire from the sea
And carry with him the omens of my death.”
With these words on her lips her companions saw her
Collapse onto the sword, saw the blade
Foaming with blood and her hands spattered.
A cry rises to the roof, and Rumor
Dances wildly through the shaken town.
The houses ring with lamentation
And the wails of women. Great dirges
Hang in the air. It was as if Carthage itself
Or ancient Tyre had fallen to the enemy,
And flames rolled through the houses of men
And over the temples of the gods.

Anna, in great distress, heard the cries.
She rushed through the crowd, clawing her face
With her nails, and beating her breasts
With her fists, and then spoke to her dying sister:

“So this is what it was all about, Sister.
You cheated me, didn’t you? This is what
Your pyre was for, your altars, your fire—
To deceive me. What should I lament first,
Deserted like this? Did you scorn my company
In death? You should have called on me
To share your fate, to die by the sword
With the same agony, at the same moment!
Did I build this pyre with my own hands
Calling upon the gods of our fathers,
So that when you were lying upon it like this
I would not be here? Cruel! You have destroyed
Yourself, me, the Sidonian elders, and your city.

Ah, let me bathe her wounds, and if any last breath
Still lingers on her lips, let me catch it on mine.”

She had reached the top of the pyre by now
And was holding her sister close to her bosom,
Sobbing as she used her dress to stanch
The blood’s dark flow. Dido, trying to lift

Her heavy eyes, grew faint again. The wound hissed
Deep in her chest. Three times she struggled
To prop herself upon her elbow,
Three times she rolled back on the bed.
With wandering eyes she sought the light
In heaven's dome and moaned when she found it.

Then Almighty Juno, pitying Dido's long agony
And hard death, sent Iris down from Olympus
To free her struggling soul from its mortal coils.
Her death was neither fated nor deserved
But before her day and in the heat of passion.
Proserpina had not yet plucked from her head
A golden lock, nor allotted her a place
In the Stygian gloom. And so Iris flew down
Through the sky on sparkling, saffron wings,
Trailing in the sunlight a thousand changing hues,
And then stood above Dido's head.

"This offering
I consecrate to Dis and release you from your body."

As soon as she had cut the lock, all the body's warmth
Ebbbed away, and Dido's life withdrew into the winds.

Book 6

Aeneas wept as he spoke, and let the fleet
Glide along until it reached Cumae. Keels
Backed into the long arc of Euboean beach,
Prows seaward, as the anchors bit
Into the sea's shelving floor. Crews flashed ashore
Onto the banks of Italy. Some kindled fire
From veins of flint, some foraged timber
From the wilderness, others located streams.
But Aeneas, on a mission of his own,
Sought the high, holy places of Apollo
And the Sibyl's deeps, the immense caverns
Where the prophetic god from Delos breathes
Into her mind and soul and opens the future.
Aeneas and his men were soon within
The groves of Trivia and under golden eaves.

Daedalus once, fleeing Minoan Crete
On beating wings, trusted himself

To the open sky, an unused path,
North toward the Bears and a light landing
On this Chalcidian height,
And dedicated here his airy oarage
To you, Phoebus, and founded this temple.

On the doors, the murder of Androgeus
And the annual penalty for the Athenians,
Seven of their sons offered for sacrifice.
The urn stands ready, the lots are drawn. Opposite,
Rising from the sea, the island of Crete,
Raw passion for a bull, and Pasiphaë
In her furtive position, raising her knees.
And there too the mixed breed, the Minotaur,
Hybrid monument to unspeakable desire.
Here the Labyrinth winds its inextricable course,
And here is Daedalus himself, pitying
Princess Ariadne's great love, unraveling
The twisted skein of the maze, guiding Theseus'
Blind footsteps with a thread. And you also,
Icarus, would have played a great part
In this masterpiece, if grief had allowed:
Twice the artist attempted your fate in gold,
Twice the father's hands fell.

Aeneas' eyes
Would have scanned every last detail.
But Achates, sent ahead, was back,
And with him was Deïphobe, Glaucus' daughter,
Priestess of Phoebus and Trivia. A figure
Of divine awe, she had this to say to Aeneas:

“This is no time for looking at pictures.
You should be sacrificing seven bulls
From a sacred herd, and seven chosen sheep.”

She spoke, and when Aeneas' men
Had seen to the sacrifice the priestess
Called the Trojans under the looming temple.

The flank of that Euboean cliff was carved
Into a hundred cavernous mouths, gaping orifices
That roar the Sibyl's oracular responses.
The virgin priestess greeted them at the threshold:

“It is time to demand your destiny. The god! Behold,

The god!"

And as she spoke there before the gates
Her color changed, her hair spread out
Into fiery points, she panted for air,
And her breast heaved with feral madness.
She was larger than life now, and her voice
Was no longer human, as the god's power
Took possession of her:

"You hesitate
To pray, hesitate, Aeneas of Troy?
The great mouths of this thunderstruck hall
Will not open until you pray."

And she was silent.
Fear seeped like icy water through the Trojans' bones,
And their lord poured forth his heart in prayer:

"Phoebus, who has always pitied Troy
In its darkest times, who guided the arrow
From Paris' hand into the body of Achilles,
And who guided me through so many seas
Pounding so many distant shores,
The remote Massylian tribes, the lands
Fringed by the shoals of the Syrtes—
Now at last we have in our grasp
The ever-receding shore of Italy.
May Troy's fortune follow us no farther.
You also, gods and goddesses
Whom Ilium's great glory offended,
May now justly spare the Dardan race.
And you, most holy prophetess, who hold
The future in your mind, grant the realm
That has been pledged to me by Fate,
Grant that the Teucrians settle in Italy
With the wandering, harried gods of Troy.
Then to Phoebus and Trivia I will dedicate
A temple of solid marble and holy days
In Phoebus' name. And a great shrine
Awaits you in our realm, gracious priestess,
An inner sanctum where I will deposit
Your prophecies and the mystic sayings
Told to my people and ordain your priests.
Only do not entrust your verses to leaves,

Playthings swirling when the wind gusts,
But chant them out loud.”

Aeneas finished.

But the priestess had not yet taken Apollo's
Bit in her mouth, and she convulsed like a maenad
Monstrous in the cave, desperate to shake
The great god from her breast. All the more,
Though, he tamed her rabid mouth, tamed
Her wild heart, and molded her to his will.
And now the cave's hundred mouths
Opened of their own accord and transmitted
The oracle's response through the empty air:

“You have escaped the perils of the sea,
But perils more grave await you on land.
The Dardanians will enter Lavinium—
Be sure of that—but will wish they had never come.
War, I see horrible war, and the Tiber
Foaming with blood. You will have another
Simois and Xanthus, another Doric camp.
A second Achilles has been born in Latium
To a goddess mother, and Juno will
Continue to afflict the Teucrians,
While you, a suppliant, shall beg for help
Throughout Italy. And the cause
Of all this suffering for the Trojans
Shall be once more a foreign bride,
An alien marriage.
Do not yield, but oppose your troubles
All the more boldly, as far as your fate
And fortune allow. Salvation will come first
From where you least expect it—
A Greek city will open wide its gates.”

In words such as these the Sibyl of Cumae
Chanted eerie riddles from her shrine
In the echoing cave, shrouding truth
In darkness, as Apollo shook the reins
And twisted the goad in her raving heart.
As soon as her frenzy ceased, and her lips
Were hushed, the Trojan hero began:

“Virgin priestess, trouble of any kind,
However strange, no longer surprises me.

I expect it, and I have thought this through.
I ask for one thing. It is said that here
Are the dark lord's gate and the murky swamp
Of Acheron's backwater. Let me pass.
Open the sacred doors and show me the way,
So that I might see my father face to face.
I saved him, I carried him on my shoulders
Through fire and a thousand enemy spears.
He was at my side through the long journey,
Sharing the perils of sea and sky, crippled
As he was, beyond what his age allowed.
It was his pleas that convinced me to come
As suppliant to you. Pity father and son,
Gracious one, for you have the power.
Not in vain did Hecate appoint you
Mistress of the groves of Avernus.
If Orpheus could call forth his wife's ghost,
Enchanting the shades with his Thracian lyre,
If Pollux could ransom his brother, taking turns
With death, traveling the way so many times—
Not to mention Theseus and Hercules.
I too am descended from Jove most high.”

So Aeneas prayed, clutching the altars.
And the Sibyl answered:

“Goddess-born son
Of Trojan Anchises, the road down
To Avernus is easy. Day and night
The door to black Dis stands open.
But to retrace your steps and come out
To the upper air, this is the task,
The labor. A few, whom Jupiter
Has favored, or whom bright virtue
Has lifted to heaven, sons of the gods,
Have succeeded. All the central regions
Are swathed in forest, and Cocytus
Enfolds it with its winding, dark water.
But if you have such longing, such dread desire
To cross the Styx twice, twice to see
Black Tartarus, and if it pleases you
To indulge this madness as a sacred mission,
Listen to what you must do first.
Hidden in a darkling tree there lies

A golden bough, blossoming gold
In leaf and pliant branch, held sacred
To the goddess below. A grove conceals
This bough on every side, and umber shadows
Veil it from view in a valley dim.
No one may pass beneath the earth
Until he has plucked from the tree
This golden-leaved fruit. Fair Proserpina
Decrees it be brought to her as a gift.
When one bough is torn away another
Grows in its place and leafs out in gold.
Search it out with your deepest gaze
And, when you find it, pluck it with your hand.
It will come off easily, of itself,
If the Fates call you. Otherwise you will not
Wrench it off by force or cut it with steel.
Farther, there lies unburied (ah, you do not know)
The lifeless body of your friend,
Defiling the entire fleet with his death
While you seek counsel at my doorstep.
Bear him to his resting place and bury him
In the tomb. Then lead black cattle here
As first victims to expiate your sins.
Only then will you see the Stygian groves
And realms closed to the living.”

She spoke,
Closed her lips, and said no more.

Aeneas

Left the cave and walked on with downcast eyes,
Pondering these mysteries. Loyal Achates
Walked with him, just as worried, and the two
Talked with each other, trying to sort out
Which comrade might be dead, whose unburied body
The seer spoke of. Then they came to the shore
And saw on the beach the body of Misenus,
Dead before his time—Misenus, son of Aeolus,
Second to none at rousing men to war
With his bugle's call. He had been the companion
Of great Hector and fought at his side,
As good with a spear as he was with his horn.
But when Achilles deprived Hector of life,
Misenus joined the ranks of Aeneas,

Unwilling to follow a lesser hero.
But today he had been sounding a conch shell,
Making it blare and sing like the sea, insanely
Challenging the gods to a contest. Triton
Was jealous and, if the tale is true, caught
The man and drowned him in the rocks and surf.
And so they gathered around and mourned,
And Aeneas led the echoing dirge,
Since this also was his duty. Then,
In tears, they hurried to carry out
The Sibyl's orders, piling up trees
For his tomb's altar and rearing it skyward.
Then into the primeval forest, the deep lairs
Of wild things—and down fell the pines,
The ilex rang with the axe, ash logs and oak
Were split with wedges, and enormous trunks
Rolled down the mountainside.

Aeneas

Led the way in this work also, wielding
The same tools and cheering on his men.
But his heart was heavy, and as he gazed
At the deep woods a prayer came to his lips:

“Let the golden bough show itself now
On a tree in this forest, since the prophetess
Was all too right about you, Misenus!”

He had scarcely spoken when twin doves
Came fluttering down from heaven
Before his very eyes and settled
On the green grass. Aeneas' mind soared
When he saw his mother's birds, and he prayed:

“Show me the way, float on the air to the heart
Of the forest, where the earth lies soft
In the shadow of the radiant bough
And you, Goddess and Mother, do not fail me
In these doubtful times.”

And he stood quietly,
Watching, tracking their direction in the trees.
The doves, as they fed, flew only as far
As someone following could keep them in sight.
But when they came to the jaws of Avernus,
With its foul smell, they ascended swiftly,

And then, gliding down through the limpid air,
They sat side by side on their chosen perch,
A tree through whose branches there shone
A discordant halo, a haze of gold.

*During winter's cold, deep in the woods,
Mistletoe blooms with strange leafage
On a tree not its own and entwines
The burl'd branches with its yellow fruit.*

Such was the gold seen on the dark ilex,
And so rustled its foil in the gentle breeze.
Aeneas seized it at once, and though the bough
Hesitated, he broke it off eagerly and brought it
Safely back beneath the Sibyl's roof.

The Trojans were still lamenting Misenus
There on the shore, performing final rites
For thankless ash. First, they built a huge pyre
Out of resinous pine and split oak,
Then trimmed its sides with gloomy foliage
And set up before it funereal cypresses.
They adorned the top with glittering arms.
Others heated water in bronze cauldrons
And bathed and anointed the cold body.
A cry went up. And then they placed the corpse,
Wet with their tears, onto the couch
And draped it with his familiar purple robes.
A small group lifted the heavy bier,
A poignant service, and with eyes averted
In ancestral manner, lit the fire. Flames crackled
Around the gifts heaped on the pyre—frankincense,
Platters of food, bowls filled with olive oil.
After the embers collapsed and the flames
Died away, they doused the remnant
Of glowing ash with wine. Corynaeus
Gathered the bones and placed them in an urn.
Then he circled the company three times,
Sprinkling them with water fresh as dew
From an olive branch, and so purified the men.
Then he spoke some last words. Aeneas,
In an act of piety, heaped above Misenus
A huge burial mound—with the hero's arms,
Horn, and oar—beneath a soaring hill
That is still called Misenus

And will bear that name throughout the ages.

The funeral was finished. Aeneas turned all his attention
To the Sibyl's commands.

There was a deep cave
With a jagged, yawning mouth, sheltered
By a dusky lake and a wood's dark shade.
Over this no winged thing could fly, so putrid
And so foul were the fumes that issued
From the cave's black jaws and rose to the sky
(And so the Greeks called the place Avernus).
Here the priestess set in line four black bulls,
Poured wine upon their brows, and plucked
The topmost bristles from between their horns.
They set them on the sacred fire as first offerings,
Calling on Hecate, mistress of the moon
And of Erebus below. Others slit the bulls' throats
And caught their warm blood in bowls
While Aeneas himself sacrificed a lamb,
Black-fleeced, to Night, the Eumenides' mother,
And to Earth, her great sister. To you,
Proserpina, he offered a barren heifer.
Then began a sacrifice to the Lord of Styx,
As at night's darkest hour the hero lay
Carcasses of bulls on the altars, pouring rich oil
On their burning entrails. But, look, under
The threshold of the rising sun the ground rumbled.
The wooded ridges trembled, and dogs howled
As through the gloom the goddess drew near.

“Begone,

Begone, you uninitiated!” shrieked the seer.
“Stand off from the grove! And you, Aeneas,
Onto the road and unsheathe your sword. Now
Is the time for courage and a heart of iron.”

She spoke, then plunged wildly into the cave,
And Aeneas matched her stride for stride.

Gods of the world below, silent shades,
Chaos and Phlegethon, soundless tracts of Night—
Grant me the grace to tell what I have heard,
And lay bare the mysteries in earth's abyss.

On they went, shrouded in desolate night,

Through shadow, through the empty halls
Of Dis and his ghostly domain, as dim

*As a path in the woods under a faint moon
When Jupiter has buried the sky in gloom
And night has stolen color from the world.*

Just before the entrance, in the very jaws
Of Orcus, Grief and avenging Cares
Have set their beds. Pale Diseases
Dwell there, sad Old Age, Fear, Hunger—
The tempter—and foul Poverty,
All fearful shapes, and Death and Toil,
And Death's brother Sleep, Guilty Joys,
And on the threshold opposite, lethal War,
The Furies in iron cells, and mad Strife,
Her snaky hair entwined with bloody bands.

In the middle a huge elm stands, spreading
Its aged branches, the abode of false Dreams
That cling to the bottom of every leaf.
At the doors are stabled the monstrous shapes
Of Centaurs, and biform Scyllas, and Briareus
With a hundred heads, the Lernaean Hydra,
Hissing horribly, the Chimaera armed with flame,
Gorgons, Harpies, and the hybrid shade of Geryon.
Suddenly panicked, Aeneas drew his sword
And turned its edge against their advance,
And if his guide had not observed
That they were hollow, bodiless forms,
Flitting images, he would have charged
And slashed vainly through empty shadows.

From here a road led to the Tartarean waters
Of Acheron, where a huge whirlpool,
Churning with mire, belched all its sand
Into Cocytus. The keeper of these waters
Was Charon, the grim ferryman, frightening
In his squalor. Unkempt hoary whiskers
Bristled on his chin, his eyes like flares
Were sunk in flame, and a filthy cloak hung
By a knot from his shoulder. He poled the boat
Himself, and trimmed the sails, hauling the dead
In his rusty barge. He was already old,
But a god's old age is green and raw.

And now a whole crowd rushed streaming
To the banks, mothers and husbands, bodies
Of high-souled heroes finished with life,
Boys and unwed girls, and young men
Placed upon the pyre before their parents' eyes.

*As many as leaves that fall in the woods
At autumn's first frost, as many as birds
That teem to shore when the cold year
Drives them over the sea to sunny lands.*

There they stood, begging to be the first
Ferried across, hands stretched out in love
For the farther shore. But the grim boatman
Culled through the crowd, accepting some,
But keeping the others back from the sand.

Aeneas, shocked by this mob of souls, said:

“What does this mean, priestess, the spirits
Crowding to the river? How is it decided
That some must leave the banks while others
Sweep the bruised water with oars?”

And the priestess, ancient of years:

“Son of Anchises and true son of the gods,
You are looking at the lagoons of Cocytus
And the river Styx, by whose name
Even the gods fear to swear falsely.
The crowd you see are the unburied dead;
The ferryman is Charon; his passengers
Are the dead entombed. He may not carry
Any across the raucous, dread water
Until their bones are at rest. Else,
A hundred years they must roam the shoreline
And only then may return to cross these shoals.”

The son of Anchises stopped in his tracks,
Pondering all this, and pitied in his heart
Their unjust lot. He saw among them,
Sad and bereft of death's due, Leucaspis,
And Orontes, captain of the Lycian fleet,
Overwhelmed by the storm that engulfed their ships
As they sailed the windy seas out of Troy.

And now there came Palinurus, who

While reckoning their course from Libya
By the stars had fallen from the stern
Into the waves. Aeneas hardly knew him,
Forlorn in the deep gloom, but finally
Recognized him and called out:

“Palinurus,
What god tore you from us and plunged you
Into the open sea? Apollo, never before
Found false, deluded me when he foretold
You would escape the sea and reach Ausonia.”

And Palinurus:

“Delphi did not mislead you,
My captain, nor did any god drown me.
The rudder I was holding to steer our course
Ripped apart, and as I fell headlong I
Dragged it down with me. I swear by the wild sea
I was not so afraid for myself as for your ship,
Afraid that stripped of its gear and its pilot overboard
It might founder and sink in the heavy weather.
Three stormy nights the South Wind drove me
Over boundless seas. As the fourth dawn broke
I rode the crest of a wave and sighted
Italy. I fought my way toward land and thought
I had safety in my grasp. I hooked my fingers
On a crag of shore, but weighed down
By my dripping clothes I was easy prey
For a band of marauders. Wind and surf
Now roll my body along the tide line.
By the sweet light and the air of heaven,
By your father, by the promise Iūlus holds,
Save me from these woes, Aeneas unconquered!
Either cast earth upon me—it is in your power
If you sail back to Velia—or if your divine mother
Shows you how (surely it is not your plan
To sail the great Styx without divine power),
Give me your hand and take me with you
Across these waves, so that I may at least
Find in death my final resting place.”

Thus Palinurus, and the Sibyl answered him:

“Where did you get this outrageous desire?
Are you, unburied, to look upon the Styx,

The Furies' stream, and approach these shores
Unbidden? Stop hoping that the gods' decrees
Can be bent with prayer. But hear this
And bear it in your heart as consolation.
The neighboring peoples, in cities far and wide,
Will be driven by portents to appease your bones,
Will build a tomb, and to the tomb will tender
Solemn offerings, and forever the place
Will be called Palinurus."

By these words
His anguish was relieved, his grief dispelled.
And the land rejoices in the name Palinurus.

Continuing their journey, they drew near the river.
Out on the water the boatman saw them
Heading to the bank through the silent wood,
And before they could speak he rebuked them:

"Hold it right there, whoever you are
Coming to our river in arms! Why are you here?
This is the Land of Shadows, of Sleep
And drowsy Night. Living bodies
May not be transported in this Stygian keel.
I was not happy to take Hercules
Across the lake, or Theseus and Pirithoüs,
Invincible sons of the gods though they were.
One of them wanted to drag off in chains
The Tartarean watchdog from Pluto's throne—
And dragged him off trembling. The others tried
To carry off the queen from the bedroom of Dis."

Apollo's prophetess responded briefly:

"There is no such treachery here. Calm down.
Our weapons offer no threat of violence.
The giant watchdog may howl from his cave
Eternally and frighten the bloodless shades.
Proserpina may keep her chastity intact
Within her uncle's doors. Aeneas of Troy,
Famed as a warrior and man of devotion,
Goes down to his father in lowest Erebus.
If this picture of piety in no way moves you,
Yet this bough" (she showed it under her robe)
"You must acknowledge."

Charon's engorged rage
Subsided. No more was said. Marveling
At the venerable gift, the fateful bough
So long unseen, he turned the dark-blue prow
Toward shore. There he cleared the deck,
Pushed the shades from the benches, and laid out
The gangplank. He took aboard his hollow boat
Huge Aeneas. Groaning under his weight,
The ragtag craft took on water. At last,
The swamp crossed, the ferryman disembarked
Hero and seer unharmed in the muddy sedge.

Crouching in a cavern on the farther shore
Cerberus made these regions resound,
Barking like thunder from all three of his throats.
The seer, close enough now to see the snakes
Bristling on his necks, flung a honeyed cake
Laced with drugs into his ravenous jaws.
Cerberus snatched it from the air and then
Went slack, easing his huge, limp bulk
To the ground, stretching out over all his den,
Dead to the world. Aeneas entered the cave
And left behind the water of no return.
Now came the sound of wailing, the weeping
Of the souls of infants, torn from the breast
On a black day and swept off to bitter death
On the very threshold of their sweet life.
Nearby are those falsely condemned to die.
These places are not assigned without judge
And jury. Minos presides and shakes the urn,
Calls the silent conclave, conducts the trial.

In the next region are those wretched souls
Who contrived their own deaths. Innocent
But loathing the light, they threw away their lives
And now would gladly bear any hardship
To be in the air above. But it may not be.
The unlovely water binds them to Hell,
Styx confines them in its nine circling folds.

Not far from here the Fields of Lamentation,
As they are called, stretch into the vastness.
Here those whom Love has cruelly consumed
Languish concealed in sequestered myrtle glades,
Sorrow clinging to them even as they wander

These lost paths in death. In this region of Hell
Aeneas makes out Phaedra, Procris,
And mournful Eriphyle, displaying the wounds
She received from her son. He sees Evadne
And Pasiphaë and, walking with them,
Laodamia, and Caeneus, a young man once,
Now a woman, returned to her original form.
And among them, her wound still fresh,
Phoenician Dido wandered that great wood.
The Trojan hero stood close to her there
And in the gloom recognized her dim form

*As faint as the new moon a man sees,
Or thinks he sees, through the evening's haze.*

He broke into tears and spoke to her
With tender love:

“Oh, Dido, so the message was true
That you were dead, that you took your own life
With steel. Was I really the cause of your death?
I swear by the stars, by the powers above,
And by whatever faith lies in the depths below,
It was not my choice to leave your land, my Queen.
The gods commanded me to go, as they force me now
With their high decrees to go through this shadowland,
This moldy stillness, the abyss of Night.
I could not believe that I would cause you
Such grief by leaving. Stop! Don't turn away!
Who are you running from? Fate will never
Let us speak with each other again.”

With such words Aeneas tried to soothe
Her burning soul. Tears came to his eyes,
But Dido kept her own eyes fixed on the ground,
As unmoved by his words as if her averted face
Were made of flint or Marpesian marble.
Finally she left, a stranger to him now, and fled
Into a darkling grove, where her old husband,
Sychaeus, comforted her and returned her love.
But Aeneas, struck by the injustice
Of her fate, wept as he watched her
Disappear, and pitied her as she went.

Aeneas and the Sibyl now made their way

To the farthest fields, a place set apart
For the great war heroes. Here Diomedes
And renowned Parthenopaeus met Aeneas,
And the pale shade of Adrastus. And here,
Lamented on earth and fallen in war,
Were many Dardanians. Aeneas moaned
When he saw their long ranks:
Glaucus, Medon, and Thersilochus,
Antenor's three sons; Polyboetes,
Priest of Ceres, and Idaeus,
Still with his chariot, still bearing arms.
They crowded around him, right and left,
And it was not enough for these shades
To have seen him: they want to linger,
To walk beside him and learn why he came.
But as soon as the foremost Danaans
And the battalions of Agamemnon
Saw Aeneas' arms flashing in the gloom,
They trembled with fear. Some turned to run,
As if fleeing again to their beachhead camp.
Others tried to shout, but their voices,
Thin and faint, mocked their gaping mouths.

And here Aeneas saw Deïphobus,
Son of Priam, his whole body mangled
And his face cruelly mutilated, shredded,
And both hands gone. His ears had been torn
From the sides of his head, and his nostrils lopped
With a shameful wound. Aeneas scarcely
Recognized him as he trembled, struggling
To hide his brutal disfigurement. He paused
But then addressed him in familiar tones:

“Deïphobus, mighty warrior
Of Teucer's high blood, who took delight
In such torture? Who dared treat you like this?
Word reached me that on that last night, weary
With endless slaughter of Greeks, you fell
On a heap of tangled corpses. I set up for you
An empty tomb on the Rhoetian shore
And called three times upon your ghost.
Your name and your arms guard the place.
You, my friend, I could not see, nor bury you
In your native soil before I had to leave.”

And Priam's son responded:

“My friend,
You have left nothing undone but have paid
All that is due to Deiphobus' shade.
My own fate, and that lethal Spartan woman,
Plunged me into this misery. She left
These memorials! You know how we spent
That last night in delusive joy. You know,
You remember all too well. When the Horse
Leapt to the city's high, holy place, its womb
Heavy with infantry, Helen feigned
A ritual dance and led the Trojan women
Crying in ecstasy around Pergamum's heights
While she herself held the huge, blazing torch
That signaled the Greeks from the citadel.
I was asleep in our ill-starred bedroom,
Worn out with care, wrapped in slumber
As peaceful as death, while Helen,
My incomparable wife, was busy removing
Every weapon from the house and even slipped
My trusty sword from under my head.
Then she called Menelaus inside,
Hoping this would please her lover
And wipe out the memory of her old sins.
Why draw it out? They burst into my room,
Ulysses with them, the evil counselor.

O Gods,
If my face is pious enough to pray for vengeance
Make the Greeks pay in kind!

But you,
Tell me now, what has brought you here,
Alive? Were you driven here while roaming the sea,
Or by Heaven's command? Why do you visit
The drear confusion of this sunless realm?”

While they were talking, Dawn had climbed
High up the sky in her roselight chariot,
And they might have spent all their allotted time
On these matters had not the Sibyl warned:

“Night is coming on, Aeneas, yet we
Weep away the hours. Here is the place
Where the road splits into two. To the right,
Winding under the walls of great Dis,

Is the way to Elysium. But the left road
Takes the wicked to their punishment
In Tartarus.”

Deiphobus responded:

“Do not be angry, great priestess. I will go
And return to my place in the shadows. But you,
Glory of our race, go. Go to a happier fate.”

And on this word he turned away.

Aeneas suddenly looked back and saw,
Under a cliff to the left, a great fortification
Surrounded by a triple wall and encircled
By a river of fire—Phlegethon—
That rolled thunderous rocks in its current.
The Gate was flanked by adamantine columns
That could not be destroyed by any force,
Human or divine. High on a tower of iron,
Tisiphone sat, draped in a bloody pall,
Sleeplessly watching the portal night and day.
Groans, the crack of the lash, iron clanking,
And dragging chains grated on the ear.
Stunned by the noise, Aeneas froze in his tracks.

“What evil is here, priestess, what forms of torture,
What lamentation rising on the air?”

And the Sibyl began:

“Teucrian hero,
No virtuous soul may ever set foot
On this accursed threshold, but when Hecate
Made me mistress of the groves of Avernus
She showed me all of the punishments
The gods inflict.

Cretan Rhadamanthus
Rules this iron realm. He queries each soul,
Hears his lies, and forces him to confess
The sins whose atonement he has postponed,
In his deluded vanity, until too late. At once,
Tisiphone pounces upon the guilty soul
With her avenging scourge, brandishing
Glaring serpents in her left fist as she calls
Her sister Furies. Then, metal grinding
Upon metal, slowly open the Gates of Hell.

Do you see the face of the Fury who guards
The vestibule? The Hydra lurking within
Is much worse—fifty gaping black throats.

Then there is the pit of Tartarus itself,
Plunging down into darkness twice as deep
As Olympus is high. Here Earth's ancient brood,
The Titans, struck down by the thunderbolt,
Writhe in the abyss. And here too I saw
The twin sons of Aloeus, the Giants who tried
To tear open the sky and pull Jupiter down.
And I saw Salmoneus suffering torment
For aping the Olympian's thunder and lightning.
Torches shaking, he drove his chariot
Through all the cities of Greece in triumph,
And he brought his show of smoke and mirrors
Home to Elis, demanding a divinity's honors
For mimicking with bronze and horses' hooves
The inimitable rumble of thunderheads.
But the Father Almighty hurled his bolt—
No smoky torch—through the thick clouds
And blasted the sinner into perdition.
And Tityos is there, another son of Earth,
His body stretched over nine full acres,
And a monstrous vulture with a hooked beak
Gnaws away at his immortal liver
And tortured entrails, pecking deep for its feasts.
The bird lives in his bowels while his flesh,
Like his pain, is renewed endlessly.
And then there are the Lapiths, Ixion
And Pirithoüs, above whom a black rock
Totters, ever about to fall. Before their eyes
A banquet fit for a king is spread,
And high festive couches gleam with gold.
Reclining there, the eldest Fury
Keeps their hands from touching the table,
Rearing up with a torch and roaring 'No!'

Here are those who hated their brothers,
Struck a parent, or betrayed a client;
Those who hoarded the wealth they had won,
Saving none for their kin (the largest group this);
Those slain for adultery; those who did not fear
To desert their masters in treasonous war—
All these await their punishment within.

Do not ask its form, or what fortune undid them.
Some roll huge stones, or hang outstretched
On the spokes of a wheel. Theseus sits
And will sit forever. Phlegyas in his agony
Lifts his voice through the gloom, admonishing all:
'Learn justice, beware, do not slight the gods.'
This one sold his country for gold and installed
A tyrant; another made and unmade laws
For a price. This one went to his daughter's bed.
All dared a great crime, and did what they dared.
Not if I had a hundred mouths, a hundred tongues,
And a voice of iron, could I recount
All the crimes or tell all their punishments."

Thus the aged priestess of Apollo.

"But come, pick up your pace, and complete
What you came for," the Sibyl continued. "Hurry!
I see the walls forged by the Cyclopes
And the gates in the archway opposite, where
We have been told to place our offering."

They went side by side down dusky paths
And drew near the doors. Aeneas
Stood on the threshold, sprinkled his body
With fresh water, and fixed the bough in place.

The offering to the goddess complete,
Aeneas and the Sibyl now came
To regions of joy, the green and pleasant fields
Of the Blissful Groves. Air and sky
Are more spacious here, and the light shines
With an amethyst glow. The land here knows
Its own sun and stars.

Some are at exercise
On the grassy wrestling ground, some contend
On the yellow sand, others tread a dance
And chant a choral song. And Orpheus,
In the long robes of a Thracian priest,
Accompanies them on his seven-toned lyre,
Plucking notes with his fingers and ivory quill.
Here too is the ancient race of Teucer,
A people most fair, high-souled heroes
Born in better times—Ilus, Assaracus,

And Dardanus, founder of Troy.

Aeneas

Wonders at their weapons and chariots,
Mere phantoms, and yet their spears
Stand fixed in the ground, and their horses
Graze unyoked over all the plain.
The pleasure they took in arms and chariots
When they were alive, in keeping sleek horses,
Is still theirs now beneath the earth.
And he sees others, to the right and left,
Scattered on the grass, feasting, or singing
Songs of joy in a fragrant grove of laurel
Where the Eridanus rolls its mighty waters
Through forests to the world above.

Here too are those

Wounded fighting in their country's defense,
Those who in life were priests and poets,
Bards whose words were worthy of Apollo;
Also, those who enriched life with inventions
Or earned remembrance for service rendered—
Their brows bound with bands as white as snow.
When they had gathered around, the Sibyl
Addressed them, Musaeus especially,
Who stood head and shoulders above the others:

“Tell me, blessed souls, and you, best of poets,
Which part of this realm harbors Anchises?
For him we have crossed the rivers of Erebus.”

The great soul Musaeus answered her briefly:

“We have no fixed homes but dwell in shadowed
Groves, recline on riverbanks, and live in meadows
Freshened by streams. But if you so wish,
Over this ridge I can show you an easy path.”

He led them up and pointed out to them
Shining fields below. The pair went down.

Anchises, deep in a green valley, was reviewing
As a proud father the souls of his descendants
Yet to be born into the light, contemplating
Their destinies, their great deeds to come.
When he saw his son striding toward him
Through the grass, he stretched out

His trembling hands, tears wet his cheeks,
And these words fell from his lips:

“You have come at last! I knew your devotion
Would see you through the long, hard road.
I can look upon your face, and we can hear
Each other’s familiar voices again.
I have been counting the hours carefully
Until this day, and my love has not deceived me.
All the lands and seas, all the dangers
You have been through, my son! How I feared
You would come to harm in Libya.”

And Aeneas:

“You, Father, your sad image,
Kept appearing to me, leading me here.
Our ships stand offshore in the Italian sea.
Let me hold your hands in mine, Father,
Do not pull away from my embrace!”
As Aeneas said this he began to weep.
Three times he tried to put his arms
Around his father’s neck. Three times
His father’s wraith slipped through his hands,
As light as wind, as fleeting as a dream.

While they talked in this sequestered valley
A secluded grove caught Aeneas’ eye.
A stream drifted past its rustling thickets—
The river Lethe—and around it hovered
Nations of souls, innumerable

*As bees on a cloudless summer day
That settle upon wildflowers in a field
And swarm so thickly around the white lilies
That the whole meadow hums and murmurs.*

Aeneas was shaken at the sight
And asked, in his ignorance, the reason
For this congregation. What was the river,
And who were the men crowding its banks?
Father Anchises answered:

“These are souls owed another body by Fate.
In the ripples of Lethe they sip the waters
Of forgetfulness and timeless oblivion.
I have been longing to show them to you,

The census of my generations, so that you
May rejoice as I do at finding Italy.”

“Father, can it be that souls go from here
To the world above and return again
To their gross bodies? What is this yearning
For these poor souls to taste the light?”

Aeneas asked this.

“I will tell you, my son,
And not keep you in doubt.”

Anchises answered,
And he revealed the mysteries one by one.

“First, heaven and earth, the sea’s expanse,
The moon’s bright globe, the sun and stars
Are all sustained by a spirit within.
Every part is infused with Mind,
Which moves the Whole, the source of life
For man and beast and all winged things
And the monsters of the marmoreal deep.
A divine fire pulses within those seeds of life,
A celestial energy, but it is slowed and dulled
By mortal frames, earthly bodies doomed to die.
And so men fear and desire, sorrow and exult,
And, shut in the shade of their prison-houses,
Cannot see the sky. Nor, when the last gleam
Of life flickers out, are all the ills
That flesh is heir to completely uprooted,
But many corporeal taints remain,
Ingrained in the soul in myriad ways.
And so we are disciplined and expiate
Our bygone sins. Some souls are hung
Spread to the winds; others are cleansed
Under swirling waters or purged by fire.
We each suffer our own ghosts. Then we are sent
Through spacious Elysium, and a few enjoy
The Blessed Fields, until the fullness of time
Removes the last trace of stain, leaving only
The pure flame of ethereal spirit.

All these,
When they have rolled the wheel of time
Through a thousand years, will be called by
God in a great assembly to the river Lethe,

So that they return to the vaulted world
With no memory and may begin again
To desire rebirth in a human body.”

Anchises paused, and he led his son,
Along with the Sibyl, into the heart
Of the murmuring crowd. He chose a mound
From which he could scan all their faces
As they passed by in long procession.

“Now I will set forth the glory that awaits
The Trojan race, the illustrious souls
Of the Italian heirs to our name.
I will teach you your destiny.

That youth you see leaning on an untipped spear
Is first in line to be reborn, first in the upper air
From Italian blood mingled with ours,
Silvius, an Alban name, your last child,
Born in your twilight years and reared by your wife,
Lavinia, in a sylvan home,
To be a king and father of kings.
We shall rule through him in Alba Longa.

Next comes Procas, pride of our race,
Then Capys and Numitor, and then
Your avatar, Aeneas Sylvius,
Equal to you in piety and arms,
If ever he succeeds to Alba’s throne.
Look at these young men, their strength,
Their brows shaded with civic oak!
They will build for you Nomentum, Gabii,
And the town of Fidena. They will crown
Collatia’s hills with towers and will found
Pometii and Inuus, Bola and Cora,
Famous names someday, now places without names.
Then a son of Mars will support his grandsire—
Romulus, born to Ilia from the line of Assaracus.
Do you see the double plumes on his head,
And how the Father of Gods honors him
As one of his own? Under his auspices,
My son, Rome will extend her renowned empire
To earth’s horizons, her glory to the stars.
She will enclose seven hills within the wall
Of one city, blessed with a brood of heroes

*As the Berecynthian Mother
Is blessed with a brood divine, riding
In her chariot through Phrygian towns,
Wearing her turreted diadem, and embracing
A hundred grandsons, all of them gods,
All of them with homes in high heaven.*

Now turn your gaze here and let it rest upon
Your family of Romans. Here is Caesar,
And here are all of the descendants of Iūlus
Destined to come under heaven's great dome.
And here is the man promised to you,
Augustus Caesar, born of the gods,
Who will establish again a Golden Age
In the fields of Latium once ruled by Saturn
And will expand his dominion
Beyond the Indus and the Garamantes,
Beyond our familiar stars, beyond the yearly
Path of the sun, to the land where Atlas
Turns the star-studded sphere on his shoulders.

Even now the Caspian Sea trembles
At the oracles that foretell his coming,
As does Persia, and the seven-mouthed Nile.
Not even Hercules ranged so far
Though he shot the bronze-hooved stag, brought calm
To Erymanthus' groves, and made Lerna quake
At his bow. Nor did Bacchus, though he drove
Tigers yoked with vine shoots from Nysa's heights.
And still we shrink from extending our virtue,
And fear to take our stand in Ausonia?

But who is this in the distance, resplendent
In his olive crown and sacred insignia?
I know that white hair and beard.
This is Numa, who will lay a foundation
Of law in our city, sent from a small town
In Sabine country to command a great nation.
Coming up after Numa is Tullus,
Who will shatter his country's leisure
And rouse to war men sunk in idleness
And an army unaccustomed to triumphs.

Hard upon Tullus' heels is Ancus,
Flaunting himself, blowing even now

Was delay, and who alone saved our state.

Others will, no doubt, hammer out bronze
That breathes more softly, and draw living faces
Out of stone. They will plead cases better
And chart the rising of every star in the sky.
Your mission, Roman, is to rule the world.
These will be your arts: to establish peace,
To spare the humbled, and to conquer the proud.”

Thus Anchises, and as they marvel he adds:

“Look at Marcellus, proud in choice spoils
Torn from the vanquished enemy commander,
Towering triumphant over all the crowd!
When the Roman state is falling in ruin
He will set it upright; he will trample down
The Carthaginians, crush the rebel Gauls,
And offer to Quirinus a third set of arms.”

At this, Aeneas, seeing a youth pass by
Beautiful in his gleaming armor
But with downcast eyes and troubled brow,
Asked his father:

“Who is this,
At the hero’s side? His son, or another
In his great line of descendants? What
An impression he makes with his crowd of followers!
But the shadow of death enshrouds his head.”

And Anchises, tears welling up in his eyes:

“Son, do not seek your people’s great grief.
Fate will permit him on earth a brief while,
But not for long. Gods above, you thought Rome
Would be too powerful had your gift endured.
What lamentation of the brave will hang
Over the Field of Mars. O River Tiber,
What a funeral you will see as you glide past
His new tomb. No boy bred of Troy will ever raise
The hope of his Latin forefathers so high,
Nor the land of Romulus ever be so proud
Of any of its sons. O, lament
His devotion, lament his pristine honor
And his sword arm invincible in war!
No enemy would have faced him unscathed,

Whether he fought on foot or dug his spurs
Into the flanks of a foaming stallion.
If only you could shatter Fate, poor boy.
You will be Marcellus! Let me strew
Armfuls of lilies and scatter purple blossoms,
Hollow rites to honor my descendant's shade."

And so they wandered every region of the wide,
Airy plain, surveying all it contained.
When Anchises had led his son
Through every detail and enflamed his soul
With longing for the glory that was to come,
He told him of the wars he next must wage,
Of the Laurentine people and Latinus' town,
And how to face or flee each waiting peril.

There are two Gates of Sleep. One, they say,
Is horn, and offers easy exit for true shades.
The other is finished with glimmering ivory,
But through it the Spirits send false dreams
To the world above. Anchises escorted his son
As he talked, then sent him with the Sibyl
Through the Gate of Ivory.
Aeneas made his way to the ships,
Rejoined his men, and sailed along the coast
To Caieta's harbor. They cast anchor
From the prow; the sterns faced the shore.

Marcus Aurelius,
Meditations

The golden age of the Roman Empire was the second century A.D., under the Nerva-Antonine dynasty, with succession more or less determined by adoption. Under Trajan (the “*optimus princeps*”), who ruled from 98 to 117, the empire reached its greatest territorial extent. His successor Hadrian reverted to a defensive policy. He was a Hellenophile, who thought of the empire as built on a Greek cultural foundation. His cosmopolitan desires were profoundly frustrated by the only war he waged, to quash the Bar Kokhba revolt in Judaea (132-135). (Both Jewish Wars were uncommon in their ferocity.) The *Pax Romana*, having begun with Augustus’ assumption of power in 27 B.C., came to an end with the death of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180), a Stoic philosopher, and emperor from 161 to 180. He was truly the rarest of things: a philosopher-king. However, his wisdom failed when it came to choice of successor: he was the last of the Five Good Emperors because he did not continue the adoptive principle, instead wanting his biological son Commodus to take the purple, a man singularly unfit for the role.

Marcus had to confront profound demographic facts, such as the Antonine Plague, which devastated the population of the Empire, and the increasing pressure Germanic tribes were placing on Roman borders. (The *Meditations* were written in part while he was campaigning on the Danubian frontier.) A few decades later, underpinned by a revitalized Zoroastrianism, a new Persian Empire emerged under the Sasanians, more effective than the Parthians—who had originally come from the Central Asian steppe. (Parthian weakness had allowed Rome to annex the upper third of Mesopotamia, though that is also where the plague originated.) These would be salient factors in the Crisis of the Third Century, when the Roman Empire almost collapsed. The assassination of Commodus belongs to that causal chain: 193 was the Year of the Five Emperors. The Severan dynasty gained control after that civil war, but disorder constantly welled up—and overwhelmed the imperial system in 235.

Marcus received the training of the Second Sophistic, a renaissance of Greek higher education, oratory, and rhetoric, which further Hellenized Roman elites. But the Greco-Roman synthesis exemplified in Marcus Aurelius runs deeper. He wrote his *Meditations* in Koine Greek (this is the eighth of the selections in this semester's lineup written in Greek), and these journal reflections "to himself" eschew rhetorical embellishment. (It is one of only two documents we have from the hand of a Roman emperor, the other being the *Res gestae* of Augustus Caesar.) What we see in Marcus is the Romanized Stoicism that became the religion of many upper-class Romans as a practical discipline. The *Meditations* are a set of spiritual exercises to cultivate a cosmic perspective and good character, an aid to dealing with adversity and interacting with others serenely. Stoicism had arisen in Hellenistic Athens (rivaling the new Epicurean philosophy), with Zeno of Citium establishing a school around 300 B.C., which would gather at the Stoa Poikile (the "painted porch"), a colonnade on the north side of the Agora. Our access to the writings of the earliest Stoics is limited. The first complete Stoic works we have come from the Roman Empire, from Seneca (tutor and counselor to Nero), Epictetus (a former Greek slave), and Marcus Aurelius. Despite profound points of disagreement, Stoicism would suffuse Christian ethics.

Book 1
Debts and Lessons

1. MY GRANDFATHER VERUS

Character and self-control.

2. MY FATHER (FROM MY OWN MEMORIES AND HIS REPUTATION)

Integrity and manliness.

3. MY MOTHER

Her reverence for the divine, her generosity, her inability not only to do wrong but even to conceive of doing it. And the simple way she lived—not in the least like the rich.

4. MY GREAT-GRANDFATHER

To avoid the public schools, to hire good private teachers, and to accept the resulting costs as money well-spent.

5. MY FIRST TEACHER

Not to support this side or that in chariot-racing, this fighter or that in the games. To put up with discomfort and not make demands. To do my own work, mind my own business, and have no time for slanderers.

6. DIOGNETUS

Not to waste time on nonsense. Not to be taken in by conjurors and hoodoo artists with their talk about incantations and exorcism and all the rest of it. Not to be obsessed with quail-fighting or other crazes like that. To hear unwelcome truths. To practice philosophy, and to study with Baccheius, and then with Tandasis and Marcianus. To write dialogues as a student. To choose the Greek lifestyle—the camp-bed and the cloak.

7. RUSTICUS

The recognition that I needed to train and discipline my character.

Not to be sidetracked by my interest in rhetoric. Not to write treatises on abstract questions, or deliver moralizing little sermons, or compose imaginary descriptions of *The Simple Life* or *The Man Who Lives Only for Others*. To steer clear of oratory, poetry and belles lettres.

Not to dress up just to stroll around the house, or things like that. To write straightforward letters (like the one he sent my mother from Sinuessa). And to behave in a conciliatory way when people who have angered or annoyed us want to make up.

To read attentively—not to be satisfied with “just getting the gist of it.” And not to fall for every smooth talker.

And for introducing me to Epictetus’s lectures—and loaning me his own copy.

8. APOLLONIUS

Independence and unvarying reliability, and to pay attention to nothing, no matter how fleetingly, except the *logos*. And to be the same in all circumstances—intense pain, the loss of a child, chronic illness. And to see clearly, from his example, that a man can show both strength and flexibility.

His patience in teaching. And to have seen someone who clearly viewed his expertise and ability as a teacher as the humblest of virtues.

And to have learned how to accept favors from friends without losing your self-respect or appearing ungrateful.

9. SEXTUS

Kindness.

An example of fatherly authority in the home. What it means to live as nature requires.

Gravity without airs.

To show intuitive sympathy for friends, tolerance to amateurs and sloppy thinkers. His ability to get along with everyone: sharing his company was the highest of compliments, and the opportunity an honor for those around him.

To investigate and analyze, with understanding and logic, the principles we ought to live by.

Not to display anger or other emotions. To be free of passion and yet full of love.

To praise without bombast; to display expertise without pretension.

10. THE LITERARY CRITIC ALEXANDER

Not to be constantly correcting people, and in particular not to jump on them whenever they make an error of usage or a grammatical mistake or mispronounce something, but just answer their question or add another example, or debate the issue itself (not their phrasing), or make some other contribution to the discussion—and insert the right expression, unobtrusively.

11. FRONTO

To recognize the malice, cunning, and hypocrisy that power produces, and the peculiar ruthlessness often shown by people from “good families.”

12. ALEXANDER THE PLATONIST

Not to be constantly telling people (or writing them) that I’m too busy, unless I really am. Similarly, not to be always ducking my responsibilities to the people around me because of “pressing business.”

13. CATULUS

Not to shrug off a friend’s resentment—even unjustified resentment—but try to put things right.

To show your teachers ungrudging respect (the Domitius and Athenodotus story), and your children unfeigned love.

14. [MY BROTHER] SEVERUS

To love my family, truth and justice. It was through him that I encountered Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion and Brutus, and conceived of a society of equal laws, governed by equality of status and of speech, and of rulers who respect the liberty of their subjects above all else.

And from him as well, to be steady and consistent in valuing philosophy.

And to help others and be eager to share, not to be a pessimist, and never to doubt your friends' affection for you.

And that when people incurred his disapproval, they always knew it. And that his friends never had to speculate about his attitude to anything: it was always clear.

15. MAXIMUS

Self-control and resistance to distractions.

Optimism in adversity—especially illness.

A personality in balance: dignity and grace together.

Doing your job without whining.

Other people's certainty that what he said was what he thought, and what he did was done without malice.

Never taken aback or apprehensive. Neither rash nor hesitant—or bewildered, or at a loss. Not obsequious—but not aggressive or paranoid either.

Generosity, charity, honesty.

The sense he gave of staying on the path rather than being kept on it.

That no one could ever have felt patronized by him—or in a position to patronize him.

A sense of humor.

16. MY ADOPTED FATHER

Compassion. Unwavering adherence to decisions, once he'd reached them. Indifference to superficial honors. Hard work.

Persistence.

Listening to anyone who could contribute to the public good.

His dogged determination to treat people as they deserved.

A sense of when to push and when to back off.

Putting a stop to the pursuit of boys.

His altruism. Not expecting his friends to keep him entertained at dinner or to travel with him (unless they wanted to). And anyone

who had to stay behind to take care of something always found him the same when he returned.

His searching questions at meetings. A kind of single-mindedness, almost, never content with first impressions, or breaking off the discussion prematurely.

His constancy to friends—never getting fed up with them, or playing favorites.

Self-reliance, always. And cheerfulness.

And his advance planning (well in advance) and his discreet attention to even minor things.

His restrictions on acclamations—and all attempts to flatter him.

His constant devotion to the empire's needs. His stewardship of the treasury. His willingness to take responsibility—and blame—for both.

His attitude to the gods: no superstitiousness. And his attitude to men: no demagoguery, no currying favor, no pandering. Always sober, always steady, and never vulgar or a prey to fads.

The way he handled the material comforts that fortune had supplied him in such abundance—without arrogance and without apology. If they were there, he took advantage of them. If not, he didn't miss them.

No one ever called him glib, or shameless, or pedantic.

They saw him for what he was: a man tested by life, accomplished, unswayed by flattery, qualified to govern both himself and them.

His respect for people who practiced philosophy—at least, those who were sincere about it. But without denigrating the others—or listening to them.

His ability to feel at ease with people—and put them at their ease, without being pushy.

His willingness to take adequate care of himself. Not a hypochondriac or obsessed with his appearance, but not ignoring things either. With the result that he hardly ever needed medical attention, or drugs or any sort of salve or ointment.

This, in particular: his willingness to yield the floor to experts—in oratory, law, psychology, whatever—and to support them energetically, so that each of them could fulfill his potential.

That he respected tradition without needing to constantly congratulate himself for Safeguarding Our Traditional Values.

Not prone to go off on tangents, or pulled in all directions, but sticking with the same old places and the same old things.

The way he could have one of his migraines and then go right back to what he was doing—fresh and at the top of his game.

That he had so few secrets—only state secrets, in fact, and not all that many of those.

The way he kept public actions within reasonable bounds, games, building projects, distributions of money and so on because he looked to what needed doing and not the credit to be gained from doing it.

No bathing at strange hours, no self-indulgent building projects, no concern for food, or the cut and color of his clothes, or having attractive slaves. (The robe from his farm at Lorium, most of the things at Lanuvium, the way he accepted the customs agent's apology at Tusculum, etc.) He never exhibited rudeness, lost control of himself, or turned violent. No one ever saw him sweat. Everything was to be approached logically and with due consideration, in a calm and orderly fashion but decisively, and with no loose ends.

You could have said of him (as they say of Socrates) that he knew how to enjoy and abstain from things that most people find it hard to abstain from and all too easy to enjoy.

Strength, perseverance, self-control in both areas: the mark of a soul in readiness—indomitable.

(Maximus's illness.)

17. THE GODS

That I had good grandparents, a good mother and father, a good sister, good teachers, good servants, relatives, friends—almost without exception. And that I never lost control of myself with any of them, although I had it in me to do that, and I might have, easily. But thanks to the gods, I was never put in that position, and so escaped the test.

That I wasn't raised by my grandfather's girlfriend for longer than I was. That I didn't lose my virginity too early, and didn't enter adulthood until it was time—put it off, even.

That I had someone—as a ruler and as a father—who could keep me from being arrogant and make me realize that even at court you can live without a troop of bodyguards, and gorgeous clothes, lamps, sculpture—the whole charade. That you can behave almost like an ordinary person without seeming slovenly or careless as a ruler or when carrying out official obligations.

That I had the kind of brother I did. One whose character challenged me to improve my own. One whose love and affection enriched my life.

That my children weren't born stupid or physically deformed.

That I wasn't more talented in rhetoric or poetry, or other areas. If I'd felt that I was making better progress I might never have given them up.

That I conferred on the people who brought me up the honors they seemed to want early on, instead of putting them off (since they were still young) with the hope that I'd do it later.

That I knew Apollonius, and Rusticus, and Maximus.

That I was shown clearly and often what it would be like to live as nature requires. The gods did all they could through their gifts, their help, their inspiration—to ensure that I could live as nature demands. And if I've failed, it's no one's fault but mine. Because I didn't pay attention to what they told me—to what they taught me, practically, step by step.

That my body has held out, especially considering the life I've led.

That I never laid a finger on *Benedicta* or on *Theodotus*.

And that even later, when I was overcome by passion, I recovered from it.

That even though I was often upset with *Rusticus* I never did anything I would have regretted later.

That even though she died young, at least my mother spent her last years with me.

That whenever I felt like helping someone who was short of money, or otherwise in need, I never had to be told that I had no resources to do it with. And that I was never put in that position myself—of having to take something from someone else.

That I have the wife I do: obedient, loving, humble.

That my children had competent teachers.

Remedies granted through dreams—when I was coughing blood, for instance, and having fits of dizziness. And the one at Caieta.

That when I became interested in philosophy I didn't fall into the hands of charlatans, and didn't get bogged down in writing treatises, or become absorbed by logic-chopping, or preoccupied with physics.

All things for which “we need the help of fortune and the gods.”

Book 2 **On The River Gran, Among The Quadi**

1. When you wake up in the morning, tell yourself: The people I deal with today will be meddling, ungrateful, arrogant, dishonest, jealous, and surly. They are like this because they can't tell good from evil. But I have seen the beauty of good, and the ugliness of evil, and have recognized that the wrongdoer has a nature related to my own—not of the same blood or birth, but the same mind, and possessing a share of the divine. And so none of them can hurt me. No one can implicate me in ugliness. Nor can I feel angry at my relative, or hate him. We were born to work together like feet, hands, and eyes, like the two rows of teeth, upper and lower. To obstruct each other is unnatural. To feel anger at someone, to turn your back on him: these are obstructions.

2. Whatever this is that I am, it is flesh and a little spirit and an intelligence. Throw away your books; stop letting yourself be distracted. That is not allowed. Instead, as if you were dying right now, despise your flesh. A mess of blood, pieces of bone, a woven tangle of nerves, veins, arteries. Consider what the spirit is: air, and never the same air, but vomited out and gulped in again every instant. Finally, the intelligence. Think of it this way: You are an old man. Stop allowing your mind to be a slave, to be jerked about by selfish impulses, to kick against fate and the present, and to mistrust the future.

3. What is divine is full of Providence. Even chance is not divorced from nature, from the inweaving and enfolding of things governed by Providence. Everything proceeds from it. And then there is necessity and the needs of the whole world, of which you are a part. Whatever the nature of the whole does, and whatever serves to maintain it, is good for every part of nature. The world is maintained by change—in the elements and in the things they compose. That should be enough for you; treat it as an axiom. Discard your thirst for books, so that you won't die in bitterness, but in cheerfulness and truth, grateful to the gods from the bottom of your heart.

4. Remember how long you've been putting this off, how many extensions the gods gave you, and you didn't use them. At some point you have to recognize what world it is that you belong to; what power rules it and from what source you spring; that there is a limit to the time assigned you, and if you don't use it to free yourself it will be gone and will never return.

5. Concentrate every minute like a Roman—like a man—on doing what's in front of you with precise and genuine seriousness, tenderly, willingly, with justice. And on freeing yourself from all other distractions. Yes, you can—if you do everything as if it were the last thing you were doing in your life, and stop being aimless, stop letting your emotions override what your mind tells you, stop being hypocritical, self-centered, irritable. You see how few things you have to do to live a satisfying and reverent life? If you can manage this, that's all even the gods can ask of you.

6. Yes, keep on degrading yourself, soul. But soon your chance at dignity will be gone. Everyone gets one life. Yours is almost used up, and instead of treating yourself with respect, you have entrusted your own happiness to the souls of others.

7. Do external things distract you? Then make time for yourself to learn something worthwhile; stop letting yourself be pulled in all directions. But make sure you guard against the other kind of confusion. People who labor all their lives but have no purpose to direct every thought and impulse toward are wasting their time—even when hard at work.

8. Ignoring what goes on in other people's souls—no one ever came to grief that way. But if you won't keep track of what your own soul's doing, how can you not be unhappy?

9. Don't ever forget these things:

- The nature of the world.
- My nature.
- How I relate to the world.
- What proportion of it I make up.
- That you are part of nature, and no one can prevent you from speaking and acting in harmony with it, always.

10. In comparing sins (the way people do) Theophrastus says that the ones committed out of desire are worse than the ones committed out of anger: which is good philosophy. The angry man seems to turn his

back on reason out of a kind of pain and inner convulsion. But the man motivated by desire, who is mastered by pleasure, seems somehow more self-indulgent, less manly in his sins. Theophrastus is right, and philosophically sound, to say that the sin committed out of pleasure deserves a harsher rebuke than the one committed out of pain. The angry man is more like a victim of wrongdoing, provoked by pain to anger. The other man rushes into wrongdoing on his own, moved to action by desire.

11. You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think. If the gods exist, then to abandon human beings is not frightening; the gods would never subject you to harm. And if they don't exist, or don't care what happens to us, what would be the point of living in a world without gods or Providence? But they do exist, they do care what happens to us, and everything a person needs to avoid real harm they have placed within him. If there were anything harmful on the other side of death, they would have made sure that the ability to avoid it was within you. If it doesn't harm your character, how can it harm your life? Nature would not have overlooked such dangers through failing to recognize them, or because it saw them but was powerless to prevent or correct them. Nor would it ever, through inability or incompetence, make such a mistake as to let good and bad things happen indiscriminately to good and bad alike. But death and life, success and failure, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty, all these happen to good and bad alike, and they are neither noble nor shameful—and hence neither good nor bad.

12. The speed with which all of them vanish—the objects in the world, and the memory of them in time. And the real nature of the things our senses experience, especially those that entice us with pleasure or frighten us with pain or are loudly trumpeted by pride. To understand those things—how stupid, contemptible, grimy, decaying, and dead they are—that's what our intellectual powers are for. And to understand what those people really amount to, whose opinions and voices constitute fame. And what dying is—and that if you look at it in the abstract and break down your imaginary ideas of it by logical analysis, you realize that it's nothing but a process of nature, which only children can be afraid of. (And not only a process of nature but a necessary one.) And how man grasps God, with what part of himself he does so, and how that part is conditioned when he does.

13. Nothing is more pathetic than people who run around in circles, “delving into the things that lie beneath” and conducting investigations into the souls of the people around them, never realizing that all you have to do is to be attentive to the power inside you and worship

it sincerely. To worship it is to keep it from being muddled with turmoil and becoming aimless and dissatisfied with nature—divine and human. What is divine deserves our respect because it is good; what is human deserves our affection because it is like us. And our pity too, sometimes, for its inability to tell good from bad—as terrible a blindness as the kind that can't tell white from black.

14. Even if you're going to live three thousand more years, or ten times that, remember: you cannot lose another life than the one you're living now, or live another one than the one you're losing. The longest amounts to the same as the shortest. The present is the same for everyone; its loss is the same for everyone; and it should be clear that a brief instant is all that is lost. For you can't lose either the past or the future; how could you lose what you don't have?

Remember two things:

- i. that everything has always been the same, and keeps recurring, and it makes no difference whether you see the same things recur in a hundred years or two hundred, or in an infinite period;
- ii. that the longest-lived and those who will die soonest lose the same thing. The present is all that they can give up, since that is all you have, and what you do not have, you cannot lose.

15. "Everything is just an impression." —Monimus the Cynic. And the response is obvious enough. But the point is a useful one, if you take it for what it's worth.

16. The human soul degrades itself:

- i. Above all, when it does its best to become an abscess, a kind of detached growth on the world. To be disgruntled at anything that happens is a kind of secession from Nature, which comprises the nature of all things.
- ii. When it turns its back on another person or sets out to do it harm, as the souls of the angry do.
- iii. When it is overpowered by pleasure or pain.
- iv. When it puts on a mask and does or says something artificial or false.
- v. When it allows its action and impulse to be without a purpose, to be random and disconnected: even the smallest things ought to be directed toward a goal. But the goal of rational beings is to follow the rule and law of the most ancient of communities and states.

17. Human life.

Duration: *momentary*. Nature: *changeable*. Perception: *dim*. Condition of Body: *decaying*. Soul: *spinning around*. Fortune: *unpredictable*. Lasting Fame: *uncertain*. Sum Up: *The body and its parts are a river, the soul a dream and mist, life is warfare and a journey far from home, lasting reputation is oblivion.*

Then what can guide us?

Only philosophy.

Which means making sure that the power within stays safe and free from assault, superior to pleasure and pain, doing nothing randomly or dishonestly and with imposture, not dependent on anyone else's doing something or not doing it. And making sure that it accepts what happens and what it is dealt as coming from the same place it came from. And above all, that it accepts death in a cheerful spirit, as nothing but the dissolution of the elements from which each living thing is composed. If it doesn't hurt the individual elements to change continually into one another, why are people afraid of all of them changing and separating? It's a natural thing. And nothing natural is evil.

Book 4

1. Our inward power, when it obeys nature, reacts to events by accommodating itself to what it faces—to what is possible. It needs no specific material. It pursues its own aims as circumstances allow; it turns obstacles into fuel. As a fire overwhelms what would have quenched a lamp. What's thrown on top of the conflagration is absorbed, consumed by it—and makes it burn still higher.

2. No random actions, none not based on underlying principles.

3. People try to get away from it all—to the country, to the beach, to the mountains. You always wish that you could too.

Which is idiotic: you can get away from it anytime you like.

By going within.

Nowhere you can go is more peaceful—more free of interruptions—than your own soul. Especially if you have other things to rely on. An instant's recollection and there it is: complete tranquillity. And by tranquillity I mean a kind of harmony.

So keep getting away from it all—like that. Renew yourself. But keep it brief and basic. A quick visit should be enough to ward off all (. . .) and send you back ready to face what awaits you.

What's there to complain about? People's misbehavior?

But take into consideration:

- that rational beings exist for one another;
- that doing what's right sometimes requires patience;
- that no one does the wrong thing deliberately;
- and the number of people who have feuded and envied and hated and fought and died and been buried.

. . . and keep your mouth shut.

Or are you complaining about the things the world assigns you? But consider the two options: Providence or atoms. And all the arguments for seeing the world as a city.

Or is it your body? Keep in mind that when the mind detaches itself and realizes its own nature, it no longer has anything to do with ordinary life—the rough and the smooth, either one. And remember all you've been taught—and accepted—about pain and pleasure.

Or is it your reputation that's bothering you? But look at how soon we're all forgotten. The abyss of endless time that swallows it all. The emptiness of all those applauding hands. The people who praise us—how capricious they are, how arbitrary. And the tiny region in which it all takes place. The whole earth a point in space—and most of it uninhabited. How many people there will be to admire you, and who they are.

So keep this refuge in mind: the back roads of your self. Above all, no strain and no stress. Be straightforward. Look at things like a man, like a human being, like a citizen, like a mortal. And among the things you turn to, these two:

i. That things have no hold on the soul. They stand there unmoving, outside it. Disturbance comes only from within—from our own perceptions.

ii. That everything you see will soon alter and cease to exist. Think of how many changes you've already seen.

“The world is nothing but change. Our life is only perception.”

4. If thought is something we share, then so is reason—what makes us reasoning beings.

If so, then the reason that tells us what to do and what not to do is also shared.

And if so, we share a common law.

And thus, are fellow citizens.

And fellow citizens of something.

And in that case, our state must be the world. What other entity could all of humanity belong to? And from it—from this state that we share—come thought and reason and law.

Where else could they come from? The earth that composes me derives from earth, the water from some other element, the air from its own source, the heat and fire from theirs—since nothing comes from nothing, or returns to it.

So thought must derive from somewhere else as well.

5. Death: something like birth, a natural mystery, elements that split and recombine.

Not an embarrassing thing. Not an offense to reason, or our nature.

6. That sort of person is bound to do that. You might as well resent a fig tree for secreting juice. (Anyway, before very long you'll both be dead—dead and soon forgotten.)

7. Choose not to be harmed—and you won't feel harmed.

Don't feel harmed—and you haven't been.

8. It can ruin your life only if it ruins your character.

Otherwise it cannot harm you—inside or out.

9. It was for the best. So Nature had no choice but to do it.

10. That every event is the right one. Look closely and you'll see.

Not just the right one overall, but right. As if someone had weighed it out with scales.

Keep looking closely like that, and embody it in your actions: goodness—what defines a good person.

Keep to it in everything you do.

11. Not what your enemy sees and hopes that you will, but what's really there.

12. Two kinds of readiness are constantly needed: (i) to do only what the *logos* of authority and law directs, with the good of human beings in mind; (ii) to reconsider your position, when someone can set you straight or convert you to his. But your conversion should always rest on a conviction that it's right, or benefits others—nothing else. Not because it's more appealing or more popular.

13. You have a mind?

—Yes.

Well, why not use it? Isn't that all you want—for it to do its job?

14. You have functioned as a part of something; you will vanish into what produced you.

Or be restored, rather.

To the *logos* from which all things spring.

By being changed.

15. Many lumps of incense on the same altar. One crumbles now, one later, but it makes no difference.

16. Now they see you as a beast, a monkey. But in a week they'll think you're a god—if you rediscover your beliefs and honor the *logos*.

17. Not to live as if you had endless years ahead of you.

Death overshadows you. While you're alive and able—be good.

18. The tranquillity that comes when you stop caring what they say. Or think, or do. Only what *you* do. (Is this fair? Is this the right thing to do?)

(. . .) not to be distracted by their darkness. To run straight for the finish line, unswerving.

19. People who are excited by posthumous fame forget that the people who remember them will soon die too. And those after them in turn. Until their memory, passed from one to another like a candle flame, gutters and goes out.

But suppose that those who remembered you were immortal and your memory undying. What good would it do you? And I don't just mean when you're dead, but in your own lifetime. What use is praise, except to make your lifestyle a little more comfortable?

“You’re out of step—neglecting the gifts of nature to hand on someone’s words in the future.”

20. Beautiful things of any kind are beautiful in themselves and sufficient to themselves. Praise is extraneous. The object of praise remains what it was—no better and no worse. This applies, I think, even to “beautiful” things in ordinary life—physical objects, artworks.

Does anything genuinely beautiful need supplementing? No more than justice does—or truth, or kindness, or humility. Are any of those improved by being praised? Or damaged by contempt? Is an emerald suddenly flawed if no one admires it? Or gold, or ivory, or purple? Lyres? Knives? Flowers? Bushes?

21. If our souls survive, how does the air find room for them—all of them—since the beginning of time?

How does the earth find room for all the bodies buried in it since the beginning of time? They linger for whatever length of time, and then, through change and decomposition, make room for others. So too with the souls that inhabit the air. They linger a little, and then are changed—diffused and kindled into fire, absorbed into the *logos* from which all things spring, and so make room for new arrivals.

One possible answer.

But we shouldn’t think only of the mass of buried bodies. There are the ones consumed, on a daily basis, by us and by other animals. How many are swallowed up like that, entombed in the bodies of those nourished by them, and yet there is room for them all—converted into flesh and blood, transformed to air and fire.

How is the truth of this determined?

Through analysis: material and cause.

22. Not to be driven this way and that, but always to behave with justice and see things as they are.

23. To the world: Your harmony is mine. Whatever time you choose is the right time. Not late, not early.

To nature: What the turn of your seasons brings me falls like ripe fruit. All things are born from you, exist in you, return to you.

The poet says “dear city of Cecrops . . .” Can’t you bring yourself to say “of Zeus”?

24. “If you seek tranquillity, do less.” Or (more accurately) do what’s essential—what the *logos* of a social being requires, and in the requisite

way. Which brings a double satisfaction: to do less, better.

Because most of what we say and do is not essential. If you can eliminate it, you'll have more time, and more tranquillity. Ask yourself at every moment, "Is this necessary?"

But we need to eliminate unnecessary assumptions as well. To eliminate the unnecessary actions that follow.

25. And then you might see what the life of the good man is like—someone content with what nature assigns him, and satisfied with being just and kind himself.

26. You've seen that. Now look at this.

Don't be disturbed. Uncomplicate yourself.

Someone has done wrong . . . to himself.

Something happens to you. Good. It was meant for you by nature, woven into the pattern from the beginning.

Life is short. That's all there is to say. Get what you can from the present—thoughtfully, justly.

Unrestrained moderation.

27. An ordered world or a mishmash. But still an order. Can there be order within you and not in everything else? In things so different, so dispersed, so intertwined?

28. Character: dark, womanish, obstinate. Wolf, sheep, child, fool, cheat, buffoon, salesman, tyrant.

29. Alien: (n.) one who doesn't know what the world contains. Or how it operates.

Fugitive: (n.) one who evades his obligations to others.

Blind: (adj.) one who keeps the eyes of his mind shut tight.

Poor: (adj.) requiring others; not having the necessities of life in one's own possession.

Rebel: (n.) one who is rebellious, one who withdraws from the *logos* of Nature because he resents its workings. (It produced you; now it produces this.)

Schismatic: (n.) one who separates his own soul from others with the *logos*. They should be one.

30. A philosopher without clothes and one without books. “I have nothing to eat,” says he, as he stands there half-naked, “but I subsist on the *logos*.” And with nothing to read, I subsist on it too.

31. Love the discipline you know, and let it support you. Entrust everything willingly to the gods, and then make your way through life—no one’s master and no one’s slave.

32. The age of Vespasian, for example. People doing the exact same things: marrying, raising children, getting sick, dying, waging war, throwing parties, doing business, farming, flattering, boasting, distrusting, plotting, hoping others will die, complaining about their own lives, falling in love, putting away money, seeking high office and power.

And that life they led is nowhere to be found.

Or the age of Trajan. The exact same things. And that life too—gone.

Survey the records of other eras. And see how many others gave their all and soon died and decomposed into the elements that formed them.

But most of all, run through the list of those you knew yourself. Those who worked in vain, who failed to do what they should have—what they should have remained fixed on and found satisfaction in.

A key point to bear in mind: The value of attentiveness varies in proportion to its object. You’re better off not giving the small things more time than they deserve.

33. Words once in common use now sound archaic. And the names of the famous dead as well: Camillus, Caeso, Volesus, Dentatus . . . Scipio and Cato . . . Augustus . . . Hadrian and Antoninus, and . . .

Everything fades so quickly, turns into legend, and soon oblivion covers it.

And those are the ones who shone. The rest—“unknown, unasked-for” a minute after death. What is “eternal” fame? Emptiness.

Then what should we work for?

Only this: proper understanding; unselfish action; truthful speech. A resolve to accept whatever happens as necessary and familiar, flowing like water from that same source and spring.

34. Hand yourself over to Clotho voluntarily, and let her spin you into whatever she pleases.

35. Everything transitory—the knower and the known.

36. Constant awareness that everything is born from change. The knowledge that there is nothing nature loves more than to alter what exists and make new things like it. All that exists is the seed of what will emerge from it. You think the only seeds are the ones that make plants or children? Go deeper.

37. On the verge of dying and still weighed down, still turbulent, still convinced external things can harm you, still rude to other people, still not acknowledging the truth: that wisdom is justice.

38. Look into their minds, at what the wise do and what they don't.

39. Nothing that goes on in anyone else's mind can harm you.

Nor can the shifts and changes in the world around you.

—Then where is harm to be found?

In your capacity to see it. Stop doing that and everything will be fine. Let the part of you that makes that judgment keep quiet even if the body it's attached to is stabbed or burnt, or stinking with pus, or consumed by cancer. Or to put it another way: It needs to realize that what happens to everyone—bad and good alike—is neither good nor bad. That what happens in every life—lived naturally or not—is neither natural nor unnatural.

40. The world as a living being—one nature, one soul. Keep that in mind. And how everything feeds into that single experience, moves with a single motion. And how everything helps produce everything else. Spun and woven together.

41. "A little wisp of soul carrying a corpse."—Epictetus.

42. There is nothing bad in undergoing change—or good in emerging from it.

43. Time is a river, a violent current of events, glimpsed once and already carried past us, and another follows and is gone.

44. Everything that happens is as simple and familiar as the rose in spring, the fruit in summer: disease, death, blasphemy, conspiracy. . . everything that makes stupid people happy or angry.

45. What follows coheres with what went before. Not like a random catalogue whose order is imposed upon it arbitrarily, but logically connected. And just as what exists is ordered and harmonious, what comes into being betrays an order too. Not a mere sequence, but an astonishing concordance.

46. Remember Heraclitus: “When earth dies, it becomes water; water, air; air, fire; and back to the beginning.”

“Those who have forgotten where the road leads.”

“They are at odds with what is all around them”—the all-directing *logos*. And “they find alien what they meet with every day.”

“Our words and actions should not be like those of sleepers” (for we act and speak in dreams as well) “or of children copying their parents”—doing and saying only what we have been told.

47. Suppose that a god announced that you were going to die tomorrow “or the day after.” Unless you were a complete coward you wouldn’t kick up a fuss about which day it was—what difference could it make? Now recognize that the difference between years from now and tomorrow is just as small.

48. Don’t let yourself forget how many doctors have died, after furrowing their brows over how many deathbeds. How many astrologers, after pompous forecasts about others’ ends. How many philosophers, after endless disquisitions on death and immortality. How many warriors, after inflicting thousands of casualties themselves. How many tyrants, after abusing the power of life and death atrociously, as if they were themselves immortal.

How many whole cities have met their end: Helike, Pompeii, Herculaneum, and countless others.

And all the ones you know yourself, one after another. One who laid out another for burial, and was buried himself, and then the man who buried him—all in the same short space of time.

In short, know this: Human lives are brief and trivial. Yesterday a blob of semen; tomorrow embalming fluid, ash.

To pass through this brief life as nature demands. To give it up without complaint.

Like an olive that ripens and falls.

Praising its mother, thanking the tree it grew on.

49. To be like the rock that the waves keep crashing over. It stands unmoved and the raging of the sea falls still around it.

49a. —It’s unfortunate that this has happened.

No. It’s fortunate that this has happened and I’ve remained unharmed by it—not shattered by the present or frightened of the future. It could

have happened to anyone. But not everyone could have remained unharmed by it. Why treat the one as a misfortune rather than the other as fortunate? Can you really call something a misfortune that doesn't violate human nature? Or do you think something that's not against nature's will can violate it? But you know what its will is. Does what's happened keep you from acting with justice, generosity, self-control, sanity, prudence, honesty, humility, straightforwardness, and all the other qualities that allow a person's nature to fulfill itself?

So remember this principle when something threatens to cause you pain: the thing itself was no misfortune at all; to endure it and prevail is great good fortune.

50. A trite but effective tactic against the fear of death: think of the list of people who had to be pried away from life. What did they gain by dying old? In the end, they all sleep six feet under—Caedicianus, Fabius, Julian, Lepidus, and all the rest. They buried their contemporaries, and were buried in turn.

Our lifetime is so brief. And to live it out in these circumstances, among these people, in this body? Nothing to get excited about. Consider the abyss of time past, the infinite future. Three days of life or three generations: what's the difference?

51. Take the shortest route, the one that nature planned—to speak and act in the healthiest way. Do that, and be free of pain and stress, free of all calculation and pretension.

Book 11

1. Characteristics of the rational soul:

Self-perception, self-examination, and the power to make of itself whatever it wants.

It reaps its own harvest, unlike plants (and, in a different way, animals), whose yield is gathered in by others.

It reaches its intended goal, no matter where the limit of its life is set. Not like dancing and theater and things like that, where the performance is incomplete if it's broken off in the middle, but at any point—no matter which one you pick—it has fulfilled its mission, done its work completely. So that it can say, "I have what I came for."

It surveys the world and the empty space around it, and the way it's put together. It delves into the endlessness of time to extend its grasp

and comprehension of the periodic births and rebirths that the world goes through. It knows that those who come after us will see nothing different, that those who came before us saw no more than we do, and that anyone with forty years behind him and eyes in his head has seen both past and future—both alike.

Also characteristic of the rational soul:

Affection for its neighbors. Truthfulness. Humility. Not to place anything above itself—which is characteristic of law as well. No difference here between the *logos* of rationality and that of justice.

2. To acquire indifference to pretty singing, to dancing, to the martial arts: Analyze the melody into the notes that form it, and as you hear each one, ask yourself whether you're powerless against that. That should be enough to deter you.

The same with dancing: individual movements and tableaux. And the same with the martial arts.

And with everything—except virtue and what springs from it. Look at the individual parts and move from analysis to indifference.

Apply this to life as a whole.

3. The resolute soul:

Resolute in separation from the body. And then in dissolution or fragmentation—or continuity.

But the resolution has to be the result of its own decision, not just in response to outside forces [like the Christians]. It has to be considered and serious, persuasive to other people. Without dramatics.

4. Have I done something for the common good? Then I share in the benefits.

To stay centered on that. Not to give up.

5. “And your profession?” “Goodness.” (And how is that to be achieved, except by thought—about the world, about the nature of people?)

6. First, tragedies. To remind us of what can happen, and that it happens inevitably—and if something gives you pleasure on that stage, it shouldn't cause you anger on this one. You realize that these are things we all have to go through, and that even those who cry aloud “O Mount Cithaeron!” have to endure them. And some excellent lines as well. These, for example:

If I and my two children cannot move the gods

The gods must have their reasons

Or:

And why should we feel anger at the world?

And:

To harvest life like standing stalks of grain
and a good many others.

Then, after tragedy, Old Comedy: instructive in its frankness, its plain speaking designed to puncture pretensions. (Diogenes used the same tactic for similar ends.)

Then consider the Middle (and later the New) Comedy and what it aimed at—gradually degenerating into mere realism and empty technique. There are undeniably good passages, even in those writers, but what was the point of it all—the script and staging alike?

7. It stares you in the face. No role is so well suited to philosophy as the one you happen to be in right now.

8. A branch cut away from the branch beside it is simultaneously cut away from the whole tree. So too a human being separated from another is cut loose from the whole community.

The branch is cut off by someone else. But people cut themselves off—through hatred, through rejection—and don't realize that they're cutting themselves off from the whole civic enterprise.

Except that we also have a gift, given us by Zeus, who founded this community of ours. We can reattach ourselves and become once more components of the whole.

But if the rupture is too often repeated, it makes the severed part hard to reconnect, and to restore. You can see the difference between the branch that's been there since the beginning, remaining on the tree and growing with it, and the one that's been cut off and grafted back.

“One trunk, two minds.” As the gardeners put it.

9. As you move forward in the *logos*, people will stand in your way. They can't keep you from doing what's healthy; don't let them stop you from putting up with them either. Take care on both counts. Not just sound judgments, solid actions—tolerance as well, for those who try to obstruct us or give us trouble in other ways.

Because anger, too, is weakness, as much as breaking down and giving up the struggle. Both are deserters: the man who breaks and runs, and the one who lets himself be alienated from his fellow humans.

10. The natural can never be inferior to the artificial; art imitates nature, not the reverse. In which case, that most highly developed and comprehensive nature—Nature itself—cannot fall short of artifice in its craftsmanship.

Now, all the arts move from lower goals to higher ones. Won't Nature do the same?

Hence justice. Which is the source of all the other virtues. For how could we do what justice requires if we are distracted by things that don't matter, if we are naive, gullible, inconstant?

11. It's the pursuit of these things, and your attempts to avoid them, that leave you in such turmoil. And yet they aren't seeking you out; you are the one seeking them.

Suspend judgment about them. And at once they will lie still, and you will be freed from fleeing and pursuing.

12. The soul as a sphere in equilibrium: Not grasping at things beyond it or retreating inward. Not fragmenting outward, not sinking back on itself, but ablaze with light and looking at the truth, without and within.

13. Someone despises me.

That's their problem.

Mine: not to do or say anything despicable.

Someone hates me. Their problem.

Mine: to be patient and cheerful with everyone, including them. Ready to show them their mistake. Not spitefully, or to show off my own self-control, but in an honest, upright way. Like Phocion (if he wasn't just pretending). That's what we should be like inside, and never let the gods catch us feeling anger or resentment.

As long as you do what's proper to your nature, and accept what the world's nature has in store—as long as you work for others' good, by any and all means—what is there that can harm you?

14. They flatter one another out of contempt, and their desire to rule one another makes them bow and scrape.

15. The despicable phoniness of people who say, “Listen, I’m going to level with you here.” What does that mean? It shouldn’t even need to be said. It should be obvious—written in block letters on your forehead. It should be audible in your voice, visible in your eyes, like a lover who looks into your face and takes in the whole story at a glance. A straightforward, honest person should be like someone who stinks: when you’re in the same room with him, you know it. But false straightforwardness is like a knife in the back.

False friendship is the worst. Avoid it at all costs. If you’re honest and straightforward and mean well, it should show in your eyes. It should be unmistakable.

16. To live a good life:

We have the potential for it. If we can learn to be indifferent to what makes no difference. This is how we learn: by looking at each thing, both the parts and the whole. Keeping in mind that none of them can dictate how we perceive it. They don’t impose themselves on us. They hover before us, unmoving. It is we who generate the judgments—inscribing them on ourselves. And we don’t have to. We could leave the page blank—and if a mark slips through, erase it instantly.

Remember how brief is the attentiveness required. And then our lives will end.

And why is it so hard when things go against you? If it’s imposed by nature, accept it gladly and stop fighting it. And if not, work out what your own nature requires, and aim at that, even if it brings you no glory.

None of us is forbidden to pursue our own good.

17. Source and substance of each thing. What it changes into, and what it’s like transformed; that nothing can harm it.

18. i. My relationship to them. That we came into the world for the sake of one another. Or from another point of view, I came into it to be their guardian—as the ram is of the flock, and the bull of the herd.

Start from this: if not atoms, then Nature—directing everything. In that case, lower things for the sake of higher ones, and higher ones for one another.

ii. What they’re like eating, in bed, etc. How driven they are by their beliefs. How proud they are of what they do.

iii. That if they're right to do this, then you have no right to complain. And if they aren't, then they do it involuntarily, out of ignorance. Because all souls are prevented from treating others as they deserve, just as they are kept from truth: unwillingly. Which is why they resent being called unjust, or arrogant, or greedy—any suggestion that they aren't good neighbors.

iv. That you've made enough mistakes yourself. You're just like them. Even if there are some you've avoided, you have the potential. Even if cowardice has kept you from them. Or fear of what people would say. Or some equally bad reason.

v. That you don't know for sure it is a mistake. A lot of things are means to some other end. You have to know an awful lot before you can judge other people's actions with real understanding.

vi. When you lose your temper, or even feel irritated: that human life is very short. Before long all of us will be laid out side by side.

vii. That it's not what they do that bothers us: that's a problem for their minds, not ours. It's our own misperceptions. Discard them. Be willing to give up thinking of this as a catastrophe. . . and your anger is gone. How do you do that? By recognizing that you've suffered no disgrace. Unless disgrace is the only thing that can hurt you, you're doomed to commit innumerable offenses—to become a thief, or heaven only knows what else.

viii. How much more damage anger and grief do than the things that cause them.

ix. That kindness is invincible, provided it's sincere—not ironic or an act. What can even the most vicious person do if you keep treating him with kindness and gently set him straight—if you get the chance—correcting him cheerfully at the exact moment that he's trying to do you harm. “No, no, my friend. That isn't what we're here for. It isn't me who's harmed by that. It's you.” And show him, gently and without pointing fingers, that it's so. That bees don't behave like this—or any other animals with a sense of community. Don't do it sardonically or meanly, but affectionately—with no hatred in your heart. And not ex cathedra or to impress third parties, but speaking directly. Even if there are other people around. Keep these nine points in mind, like gifts from the nine Muses, and start becoming a human being. Now and for the rest of your life. And along with not

getting angry at others, try not to pander either. Both are forms of selfishness; both of them will do you harm. When you start to lose your temper, remember: There's nothing manly about rage. It's courtesy and kindness that define a human being—and a man. That's who possesses strength and nerves and guts, not the angry whiners. To react like that brings you closer to impassivity—and so to strength. Pain is the opposite of strength, and so is anger. Both are things we suffer from, and yield to.

. . . and one more thought, from Apollo:

x. That to expect bad people not to injure others is crazy. It's to ask the impossible. And to let them behave like that to other people but expect them to exempt you is arrogant—the act of a tyrant.

19. Four habits of thought to watch for, and erase from your mind when you catch them. Tell yourself:

- This thought is unnecessary.
- This one is destructive to the people around you.
- This wouldn't be what you really think (to say what you don't think—the definition of absurdity).

And the fourth reason for self-reproach: that the more divine part of you has been beaten and subdued by the degraded mortal part—the body and its stupid self-indulgence.

20. Your spirit and the fire contained within you are drawn by their nature upward. But they comply with the world's designs and submit to being mingled here below. And the elements of earth and water in you are drawn by their nature downward. But are forced to rise, and take up a position not their own. So even the elements obey the world—when ordered and compelled—and man their stations until the signal to abandon them arrives.

So why should your intellect be the only dissenter—the only one complaining about its posting? It's not as if anything is being forced on it. Only what its own nature requires. And yet it refuses to comply, and sets off in the opposite direction. Because to be drawn toward what is wrong and self-indulgent, toward anger and fear and pain, is to revolt against nature. And for the mind to complain about anything that happens is to desert its post. It was created to show reverence—respect for the divine—no less than to act justly. That too is an element of coexistence and a prerequisite for justice.

21. “If you don’t have a consistent goal in life, you can’t live it in a consistent way.”

Unhelpful, unless you specify a goal.

There is no common benchmark for all the things that people think are good—except for a few, the ones that affect us all. So the goal should be a common one—a civic one. If you direct all your energies toward that, your actions will be consistent. And so will you.

22. The town mouse and the country mouse. Distress and agitation of the town mouse.

23. Socrates used to call popular beliefs “the monsters under the bed”—only useful for frightening children with.

24. At festivals the Spartans put their guests’ seats in the shade, but sat themselves down anywhere.

25. Socrates declining Perdiccas’s invitation “so as to avoid dying a thousand deaths” (by accepting a favor he couldn’t pay back).

26. This advice from Epicurean writings: to think continually of one of the men of old who lived a virtuous life.

27. The Pythagoreans tell us to look at the stars at daybreak.

To remind ourselves how they complete the tasks assigned them—always the same tasks, the same way. And their order, purity, nakedness. Stars wear no concealment.

28. Socrates dressed in a towel, the time Xanthippe took his cloak and went out. The friends who were embarrassed and avoided him when they saw him dressed like that, and what Socrates said to them.

29. Mastery of reading and writing requires a master. Still more so life.

30. “. . . For you/Are but a slave and have no claim to *logos*.”

31. “But my heart rejoiced.”

32. “And jeer at virtue with their taunts and sneers.”

33. Stupidity is expecting figs in winter, or children in old age.

34. As you kiss your son good night, says Epictetus, whisper to yourself, “He may be dead in the morning.”

Don’t tempt fate, you say.

By talking about a natural event? Is fate tempted when we speak of grain being reaped?

35. Grapes.

Unripe . . . ripened . . . then raisins.

Constant transitions.

Not the “not” but the “not yet.”

36. “No thefts of free will reported.”[—Epictetus.]

37. “We need to master the art of acquiescence. We need to pay attention to our impulses, making sure they don’t go unmoderated, that they benefit others, that they’re worthy of us. We need to steer clear of desire in any form and not try to avoid what’s beyond our control.”

38. “This is not a debate about just anything,” he said, “but about sanity itself.”

39. Socrates: What do you want, rational minds or irrational ones?

—Rational ones.

Healthy or sick?

—

Then work to obtain them.

—We already have.

Then why all this squabbling?

**Augustine,
*Confessions***

Under the emperor Caracalla, in A.D. 212, Roman citizenship was extended to every free male in the Empire. Even though the city of Rome (the origin of the Empire) would come to be displaced as imperial seat, throughout non-barbarian Europe, north Africa, and the non-Persian Near East, everyone was “Roman.” This *Romanitas* would be essential to the identity of people in both the “East” and the “West” of the Empire for centuries to come. There was a universalizing dynamic in the name of this once-obscure Latin *civitas*, still preserved in the term “Roman Catholic.”

Diocletian resolved the Crisis of the Third Century, though in doing so he made clear that the Principate was truly a Dominate, in which the emperor is lord over slaves, not citizens.

Adumbrated by Diocletian’s tetrarchic system (A.D. 293), the Empire was administratively divided (though remaining a unitary state) into a western part and an eastern part in 395. The Western Roman Empire had its capital at Milan (later Ravenna), and the Eastern at Constantinople (“Nova Roma”). The bilingualism of the ruling class faded away: Westerners forgot their Greek, Easterners their Latin. Aside from the superior culture, wealth, and urbanization of the East, the adoption of the Christian cause by Constantine (who reigned from 306 to 337) encouraged an eastward shift in the center of gravity, where all of the prime metropolitan episcopal sees were to be found, except for Rome: Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The East was more Christianized. Nevertheless, when Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410, it was a devastating psychological blow across the Empire. The eternal city had been breached. The Empire was still spiritually rooted in this city. Here we see again that civilizational tension between city and empire. Is order to be rooted in the *polis*, or the empire, or a federation, or . . . the nation (an option provided by modernity)? Or in the individual soul’s relation to a transcendent source of order, implied in much classical philosophy and the world religions? Can one personalize the quest for order without losing the desire to realize more perfectly a universal solidarity?

Saint Augustine (354-430) wrote his *Confessions* around 400, even as the fall of the Western Roman Empire was in motion. Western power would shift away from the Mediterranean, inland and towards the Atlantic (due in part to Islamic territorial gains and rivalry with the Greek “East”), far from civilization’s roots in Mesopotamia. The “West,” forgetting Greek, lost its matrix. With fundamental orders in flux, how are we to orient ourselves?

Augustine finds the flourishing of human personality in a constant dialogue with the divine ground of each moment and of all history—whatever political crises might be occurring. He is the greatest formative mind behind the distinctiveness of “Western” Civilization, the one who most decisively trained the Latin spirit of the Western Roman Empire in a new direction from out of the Eastern Mediterranean origins of Christianity. The Western sense of self would not have coalesced without Augustine.

The political philosopher Eric Voegelin writes of an “Ecumenic Age,” stretching from the rise of Cyrus’ Persian Empire to the fall of the Western Roman Empire, in which empire after empire emerges and dissolves in Near Eastern Asia, Europe, and northern Africa: what ancient Greek geographers called the “ecumene” (from the Greek for “inhabited”)—the known world. This spectacle would eventually lead some to reject the identification of power and spirit typified in political mythologies operative since the beginning of civilization in Sumer. An individual under God, or under some absolute principle of meaning, might now understand that the constitution and aims of his or her given social system are not necessarily true as such. The religious and the social become differentiated from political, monarchical, and imperial orders. During the Ecumenic Age, philosophy and trans-mythological religions break out. There is a deepening sense of one’s unique personality, alongside recognition of a cosmopolitan need—for a community that realizes universally shared humanity, parodied in the imperial drive for world conquest.

There is a problem of personal order (How should I live?) and of common order (How should we live?): and the conversation we have in pursuit of those questions is ever at the heart of civilization.

Book VII
Neo-Platonism Frees Augustine's Mind

By now my misspent, impious adolescence was dead, and I was entering the period of youth, but as I advanced in age I sank ignobly into foolishness, for I was unable to grasp the idea of substance except as something we can see with our bodily eyes. I was no longer representing you to myself in the shape of a human body, O God, for since beginning to acquire some inkling of philosophy I always shunned this illusion, and now I was rejoicing to find a different view in the belief of our spiritual mother, your Catholic Church. Yet no alternative way of thinking about you had occurred to me; and here was I, a mere human, and a sinful one at that, striving to comprehend you, the supreme, sole, true God.

Materialistic notions of God insufficient

From the core of my being I believed you to be imperishable, inviolable and unchangeable, because although I did not understand why or how this could be, I saw quite plainly and with full conviction that anything perishable is inferior to what is imperishable, and I unhesitatingly reckoned the inviolable higher than anything subject to violation, and what is constant and unchanging better than what can be changed. My heart cried out in vehement protest against all the phantom shapes that thronged my imagination, and I strove with this single weapon to beat away from the gaze of my mind the cloud of filth that hovered round me, but hardly had I got rid of it than in another twinkling of an eye it was back again, clotted together, invading and clogging my vision, so that even though I was no longer hampered by the image of a human body, I was still forced to imagine something corporeal spread out in space, whether infused into the world or even diffused through the infinity outside it. This was still the case even though I recognized that this substance was imperishable, inviolable and immutable (necessarily so, being superior to anything perishable, subject to violation or changeable); because anything to which I must deny these spatial dimensions seemed to me to be nothing at all, absolutely nothing, not even a void such as might be left if every kind of body—earthly, watery, aerial or heavenly—were removed from it, for though such a place would be a nothingness, it would still have the quality of space.

Whatever was not stretched out in space, or diffused or compacted or inflated or possessed of some such qualities, or at least capable of possessing them, I judged to be nothing at all. Yet in so thinking I was gross of heart and not even luminous to myself; for as my eyes were

accustomed to roam among material forms, so did my mind among the images of them, yet I could not see that this very act of perception, whereby I formed those images, was different from them in kind. Yet my mind would never have been able to form them unless it was itself a reality, and a great one.

Hence I thought that even you, Life of my life, were a vast reality spread throughout space in every direction: I thought that you penetrated the whole mass of the earth and the immense, unbounded spaces beyond it on all sides, that earth, sky and all things were full of you, and that they found their limits in you, while you yourself had no limit anywhere. Since material air—I mean the atmosphere above the earth—posed no barrier to the sun's light, which was able to penetrate and pass through it, filling it entirely without bursting it apart or tearing it, I assumed that not only the material sky, air and sea, but even the material earth, were similarly traversable by you, penetrable and open in all their greatest and tiniest parts to your presence, which secretly breathes through them within and without, controlling all that you have made.

I held this view only because I was unable to think in any other way; it was false, because on that showing a larger part of the earth would contain a larger portion of you, and a smaller a lesser portion, and all things would be full of you in such a way that an elephant's body would contain a larger amount of you than a sparrow's, because it is bigger and takes up more space. You would be distributed piecemeal throughout the elements of the world, with greater parts of yourself present where there is plenty of room, and smaller parts in more cramped places. Obviously this is not the case. You had not yet illumined my darkness.

I had a sufficient argument, Lord, against those self-deceived deceivers who, though so talkative, were dumb because your word did not sound forth from them. Yes, I had a sufficient argument, one which Nebriidius had been wont to propose ever since our days in Carthage, which left us all shaken who heard it. Those so-called powers of darkness, whom they always postulate as a horde deployed in opposition to you: what would they have done to you if you had refused to fight? If the reply is that they could have inflicted some injury on you, it would imply that you are subject to violation and therefore destructible. If, on the other hand, it is denied that they had power to injure you, there would have been no point in fighting. Yet the fighting is alleged to have been so intense that some portion of yourself, a limb perhaps, or an offspring of your very substance, became entangled with hostile powers and with the natures of beings not created by you, and was

by them so far corrupted and changed for the worse that its beatitude was turned to misery, and it could be rescued and purified only with help; and this portion is supposed to be the soul, enslaved, defiled, corrupt, and in need of aid from your Word, which must necessarily be free, pure and unscathed if it is to help, and yet, since it is of the same nature as the soul, must be equally corrupt itself!

It follows that if they admitted that, whatever you are, you are incorruptible (your substance, that is, by which you exist), this whole rigmarole would be shown up as untrue and to be rejected with loathing; but if they alleged that you are corruptible, their position would already be false and no sooner stated than be condemned. The foregoing argument was therefore quite sufficient, and I ought to have squeezed these people from my gullet and vomited them out, for no escape was left them from the horrible sacrilege of heart and tongue they were committing by thinking and speaking of you in this fashion.

The problem of evil

I declared and firmly believed that you, our God, our true God, who made not only our souls but our bodies too, and not only our souls and bodies but people everywhere and all things, are subject to no defilement or alteration, and are in all respects unchangeable; yet even so I was still convinced that the cause of evil had not been clarified or disentangled. Nonetheless I saw that, whatever it might be, I must beware of looking for it in such a way as to be forced into believing that the immutable God was changeable, lest I become myself the very thing I was trying to trace. Accordingly I conducted my search without anxiety, certain that those whom I now wholeheartedly shunned were not speaking the truth, because I saw that through their inquiry into the origin of evil they had waxed full of malice, more ready to claim that your substance was vulnerable to evil than that their own perpetrated it.

I strained to see for myself the truth of an explanation I had heard: that the cause of evil is the free decision of our will, in consequence of which we act wrongly and suffer your righteous judgment; but I could not see it clearly. I struggled to raise my mental gaze from the depths, but sank back again; I strove repeatedly, but again and again sank back. I was as sure of having a will as I was of being alive, and this it was that lifted me into your light. When I wanted something, or did not want it, I was absolutely certain that no one else but I was wanting or not wanting it, and I was beginning to perceive that the root of my sin lay there. Any involuntary act I regarded as something I suffered rather than as something I did, and I judged it to be a

penalty rather than a fault, being quick to acknowledge that I was not unjustly punished in this way, since I held you to be just. But then I was forced to ask further, "Who made me? Was it not my God, who is not merely good, but Goodness itself? Whence, then, did I derive this ability to will evil and refuse good? Is it in me simply so that I should deserve the punishment I suffer? Who established that ability in me, who planted in me this bitter cutting, when my whole being is from my most sweet God? If the devil is responsible, where did the devil come from? If he was a good angel who was transformed into a devil by his own perverted will, what was the origin of this evil will in him that turned him into a devil, when an angel is made entirely by the supremely good creator?"

I was pushed down again by these thoughts and nearly choked; but never was I sucked into that pit of error where no one confesses to you, because people would rather hold that you suffer evil than that we commit it.

My efforts were directed toward discovering more of the truth, on the basis of the discovery already made that what is indestructible is better than anything liable to be destroyed. Accordingly I confessed that, whatever you might be, you must be indestructible. No intelligence has ever conceived of anything better than you, or ever will, for you are the supreme and all-surpassing good; but since the indestructible is most truly and certainly to be esteemed above what is destructible, as I already knew, it followed that you must be indestructible, because otherwise my mind would have been able to attain something better than my God.

From this point, then, where I saw that the indestructible must be superior to what can be destroyed, I should have begun my inquiry by trying to understand where evil resides: that is, whence springs the corruption to which your nature is totally immune. For corruption can touch our God in no way whatever: neither by will, nor by necessity, nor by any unexpected misfortune. He is God, and what he wishes for himself is good, and he is himself the very nature of goodness, whereas to be corrupted is not good. Nor are you forced unwillingly into anything, because your will is not greater than your power: it could be greater only if you were greater than yourself, for God's will and God's power are identical with God himself. And what unexpected chance can overtake you, who know everything? No nature exists, except because you know it. What need is there to prove at length why that substance which is God cannot be corruptible? If it were, it would not be God.

So I was seeking the origin of evil, but seeking in an evil way, and failing to see the evil inherent in my search itself. I conjured up before my mind's eye the whole of creation: all the things in it that we can see, such as earth and sea and stars and trees and living things that are mortal, and all that we do not see in it, such as the heavenly firmament overhead and all the angels and all its spiritual inhabitants; and my imagination gave form to them also, and arranged them in their due places as though they had been corporeal. And I envisaged your creation as one huge mass in which all were arrayed according to bodily kinds, both those things which were really bodily in nature and the bodies I had myself attributed to spirits. I pictured it as enormous, not of such size as it really was, of course, for that I could not know, but as large as my fancy stretched, yet finite on all sides. I imagined you, Lord, who are infinite in every possible respect, surrounding and penetrating it in its every part, like a sea extending in all directions through immense space, a single unlimited sea which held within itself a sponge as vast as one could imagine but still finite, and the sponge soaked in every fibre of itself by the boundless sea.

This was how I pictured your creation filled with your infinite being, and I reflected, "Look, this is God, and these are the things God has created. God is good, and though he is far more wonderful than they in every respect, still he who is good has created them good; see too how he surrounds and pervades them. Where, then, is evil; where does it come from and how did it creep in? What is its root, its seed? Or does it not exist at all? But in that case, why do we fear and avoid something that has no reality? If we say that our fear is meaningless, then the fear itself is undeniably evil, for it goads and tortures our heart to no purpose, and so the evil is all the greater inasmuch as the object of our fear is non-existent, yet we fear all the same. Either the evil we fear exists, or our fear itself is the evil. So where does it come from, if the good God made all things good? He is the greater good, to be sure, the supreme good, and the things he has made are lesser goods; nonetheless creator and creatures are all good. Whence, then, comes evil? Was something bad in the material he used, so that though he formed it and disposed it in order he left in it some element that was not turned to good? But why? Did he lack the power so to convert and change it all that no evil would remain, he who is omnipotent? In any case, why would he have chosen to use it for making things, rather than using this same almighty power to destroy it entirely? Or could it have existed against his will? Or again, if matter was eternal, why did he allow it to exist so long, from infinite ages past, and then at last decide to make things out of it? Or, if he suddenly decided to act, surely he, being almighty, could have acted in such a way that it

should cease to be, and he alone should exist, he, the complete, true, supreme, infinite Good? Or, supposing that it was unseemly for him who is good not to fashion and build something good as well, ought he not to have done away with all the bad material and destroyed it, and himself originated some good matter instead, which he could use to create everything? If he were able to construct good things only with the help of material he had not himself constructed, he would not be omnipotent.”

Such thoughts as these was I turning over in my miserable soul, weighed down as it was by the gnawing anxieties that flowed from my fear that death might overtake me before I had found the truth. Faith in your Christ, our Lord and Savior, as I found it in the Catholic Church, still persisted steadfastly in my heart, though it was a faith still in many ways unformed, wavering and at variance with the norm of her teaching. Yet my mind did not abandon it, but drank it in ever more deeply as the days passed.

He finally rejects astrology

It was some time since I had rejected the misleading divinations and impious ravings of astrologers. On this score too let your merciful dealings themselves sing praise to you from the innermost depths of my soul, O my God! In my obstinacy you took care of me by providing me with a friend: you it was, you and no other, for who else calls us back from our every death-dealing error but the Life that cannot die, the Wisdom who enlightens our needy minds but needs no borrowed light itself, the Wisdom who governs the whole world, even to the fluttering leaves on the trees? Obstinate indeed had I struggled against the shrewd old man, Vindicianus, and against Nebridius, a youth of wonderful insight. The former had declared with emphasis, the latter admittedly with more hesitation, but frequently, that the art of foretelling the future is bogus, that human guesswork is often lucky, and that when people talk a great deal many truths about future events are likely to be uttered, not because the speakers know but because they stumble upon them by not keeping their mouths shut. So you provided for me a friend who was keen to consult astrologers, but not well versed in their lore. Having sought answers from them out of curiosity, as I have indicated, he already knew a certain amount, which he had heard, he said, from his father. Little did he know how efficacious it was to prove in giving the lie to that superstition.

His name was Firminus. He had been educated in the liberal arts and was a well-spoken man, and since he regarded me as a dear friend he consulted me about certain of his business affairs of which he had high hopes, inquiring how I interpreted his birth horoscope, as they call it. Now I was already inclined toward Nebridius' view of the practice; however, I did not refuse to offer an interpretation or say what came into my mind, doubtful though I was; but I remarked that I was almost persuaded that divination was absurd and meaningless.

Then he told me that his father had been an avid student of books dealing with such matters, and had had a friend who was equally a devotee. As the two men collaborated in research and discussion they became more and more ardently enthusiastic for this nonsense. If even dumb animals in their households were due to produce young, these men would record the exact moments of birth and note the position of the stars at the time, on the pretext of collecting experimental data for what claimed to be a science. Firminus went on to say that he had heard his father tell how, when his mother was pregnant with him, Firminus, a certain slave-girl in the house of his father's friend was expecting a baby at the same time. This fact could not escape the girl's master, who took the utmost care to calculate even the whelping-times of his dogs. So while one man was observing and counting with meticulous precision the days, hours and smaller fractions of hours in his wife's case, the other was doing the same in respect of his maid-servant.

The two women gave birth simultaneously, forcing them to assign exactly the same horoscope, even in the finest detail, to both babies, the one to his son, the other to his slave. It happened like this. As the women went into labor the two friends sent word to each other to let each know what was happening at the other's house, and held messengers in readiness who would announce to each the birth of the child as soon as it occurred. It was easy for them to arrange for instantaneous announcement, since each was master in his own domain. So, Firminus related, the two sets of messengers were dispatched, and met at a point exactly halfway between the two houses, which meant that neither of the friends could assign a different position of the stars, or record any different moment of time. Yet Firminus was born in easy circumstances among his own relatives, and pursued quite a brilliant career in the world making money and advancing in rank, while that slave-boy went on serving his masters, with no alleviation whatever of the yoke his status imposed on him. Firminus, who knew him, testified to the fact.

As soon as I heard this story, which, in view of the narrator's character, I believed, my obstinate resistance was completely overcome and dropped away. I attempted first of all to rescue Firminus himself from his curiosity about the occult by pointing out to him that if, after inspecting his birth horoscope, I had to make a prediction that accorded with the facts, I would have to say that I read in it that his parents were of excellent standing among his kinsfolk, that his family was a noble one in his home town, and that having been born a gentleman he would receive a good education in the liberal arts; whereas if the slave had consulted me about the indications of his birth horoscope—and his had been precisely the same—I would have to say, if my answer were to match reality, that what I saw in it was a family of the lowest class, a servile status, and all the rest of those very different conditions which marked off his lot from the other man's. The realization that after inspecting the same data I would either have to make divergent predictions in order to give a true answer, or else make the same prediction in the two cases and thereby speak falsely, was to me most certain evidence that when true predictions were offered by diviners who studied horoscopes, such things were the product of luck, not skill; but when false predictions were made, they resulted not from the practitioner's lack of skill, but from his luck letting him down.

Approaching the subject from this aspect and pondering these points, I now turned my attention to the case of twins. I hoped to attack and refute and make a laughing-stock of the demented people who make a living by astrology, and I wanted to make sure that none of them would be in a position to retort that either Firminus had lied to me or his father had lied to him. At the birth of twins, then, it usually happens that both are delivered from the womb with only a short interval of time between them; and however great the influence this space of time may be alleged to have in the course of nature, it cannot be measured by human observation and certainly cannot be registered in the charts which an astrologer will later study with a view to making a true forecast. And true it will not be, because anyone who had examined the one same birth horoscope that applied to Esau and Jacob would have been obliged to foretell the same fate for both of them, whereas in fact their destinies were different. The astrologer would therefore have been wrong; or, if he spoke truly and foretold different things for each, he would have done so on the basis of the same data. He could speak the truth only by chance, then, not by skill.

For in truth it is you, Lord, who are at work, you, the supremely just ruler of the universe, though those who consult astrologers and those who are consulted know it not. By your secret inspiration you make

each inquirer hear what befits him, as your unfathomable judgment shall justly assess our souls' secret deserving. Let no human being challenge you, "What is this?" or "Why that?" Let him not ask; no, let him not ask, for he is but human.

Still searching

So it was that you, my helper, had already freed me from those bonds, but I was still trying to trace the cause of evil, and found no way out of the difficulty. Yet you allowed no flood of thoughts to sweep me away from the faith whereby I believed that you exist, that your essence is unchangeable, that you care for us humans and judge our deeds, and that in your Son, Christ our Lord, and in the holy scriptures which the authority of your Catholic Church guarantees, you have laid down the way for human beings to reach that eternal life which awaits us after death. These beliefs were unaffected, and persisted strong and unshaken in me as I feverishly searched for the origin of evil.

What agonizing birth-pangs tore my heart, what groans it uttered, O my God! And there, unknown to me, were your hearkening ears, for as I labored hard in my silent search the mute sufferings of my mind reached your mercy as loud cries. You alone knew my pain, no one else; for how little of it could I express in words to my closest friends! Could their ears have caught all the tumult that raged in my soul, when even I had neither time enough nor eloquence to articulate it? Yet even as my heart roared its anguish my clamor found its way to your hearing, and all my longing lay before you, for the light of my eyes was not there at my command: it was within, but I was outside; it occupied no place, but I had fixed my gaze on spatially positioned things, and so I found in them nowhere to rest. Nor did they welcome me or afford me the chance to say, "This is enough, now all is well," nor did they even release me to return to where I could well have found what was enough. I was nobler than they, but lowlier than you; and as long as I was subject to you my true joy was your very self, and you had subjected to me all those things which you created below me. The happy mean, the central region where I would find salvation, was to preserve your image in me, serving you and subduing my body; but because I was rearing up against you in my pride, charging head-high against the Lord and crassly presuming on my own strength, even those inferior things gained the upper hand and pressed me down, so that nowhere could I find respite or relief. When I looked outward they crowded upon me thick and fast; when I tried to think the images of these material things blocked my path of return, as though demanding, "Where are you off to, you unworthy, degraded fellow?" All this had sprung from my wounded condition, for you humbled this proud man

with a wounding blow. My swollen pride got in the way and kept me from you, and my face was so puffy that my eyes were closed.

But you, Lord, abide for ever and will not for ever be angry with us, for you have taken pity on us who are earth and ashes; and so it was pleasing in your sight to give new form to my deformity. You goaded me within to make me chafe impatiently until you should grow clear to my spiritual sight. At the unseen touch of your medicine my swelling subsided, while under the stinging eye-salve of curative pain the fretful, darkened vision of my spirit began to improve day by day.

He reads "the books of the Platonists"

You wanted to show me first and foremost how you thwart the proud but give grace to the humble, and with what immense mercy on your part the way of humility was demonstrated to us when your Word was made flesh and dwelt among men and women; and so through a certain man grossly swollen with pride you provided me with some books by the Platonists, translated from the Greek into Latin. In them I read (not that the same words were used, but precisely the same doctrine was taught, buttressed by many and various arguments) that *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; he was God. He was with God in the beginning. Everything was made through him; nothing came to be without him. What was made is alive with his life, and that life was the light of humankind. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to master it; and that the human soul, even though it bears testimony about the Light, is not itself the Light, but that God, the Word, is the true Light, which illumines every human person who comes into this world; and that he was in this world, a world made by him, but the world did not know him. But that he came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him; but to those who did receive him he gave power to become children of God: to those, that is, who believe in his name— none of this did I read there.*

I also read in them that God, the Word, was born not of blood nor man's desire nor lust of the flesh, but of God; but that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*, I did not read there. I certainly observed that in these writings it was often stated, in a variety of ways, that the Son, being *in the form of God the Father, deemed it no robbery to be equal to God*, because he is identical with him in nature. But that *he emptied himself and took on the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men was found in human form, that he humbled himself and was made obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, which is why God raised him from the dead, and*

gave him a name above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, on earth, or in the underworld, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, in the glory of God the Father, of this no mention was made in these books.

I did read in them that your only-begotten Son, coeternal with you, abides before all ages and above all ages, and that of his fullness our souls receive, to become blessed thereby, and that by participation in that Wisdom which abides in itself they are made new in order to become wise; but that *at the time of our weakness he died for the wicked*, and that you did not spare even your only Son, but delivered him up for us all, these things are not to be found there. For you have *hidden these matters from the sagacious and shrewd, and revealed them to little ones*, so that those who toil under heavy burdens may come to him and he may give them relief, because he is gentle and humble of heart. He will guide the gentle aright and teach the unassuming his ways, for he sees our lowly estate and our labor, and forgives all our sins. As for those who are raised on the stilts of their loftier doctrine, too high to hear him calling, *Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls*, even if they know God, they do not honor him as God or give him thanks; their thinking has been frittered away into futility and their foolish hearts are benighted, for in claiming to be wise they have become stupid.

In consequence what I also read there was the story of their exchanging your glorious, imperishable nature for idols and a variety of man-made things, for the effigy of a perishable human or of birds or animals or crawling creatures; these are the food of the Egyptians, for the sake of which Esau bartered away his dignity as the first-born, just as your first-born people turned back to Egypt in their hearts, worshiping a beast's head instead of you, and abasing their souls, made in your image, before the image of a calf munching hay.

These things I found there, but I did not eat that food; for it was pleasing in your sight, Lord, to take away from Jacob the shame of his subordination and cause the elder to serve the younger, so you called the Gentiles into your inheritance. And I had come to you from the Gentiles. I set my heart upon the gold which at your bidding your people had brought out of Egypt, because wherever it was, it belonged to you. So you told the Athenians through your apostle that in you we live and move and have our being, and that indeed some of their own authorities had said this, and unquestionably those books I read came from there. I disregarded the idols of the Egyptians, to which they paid homage with gold that belonged to you, for they perverted the truth of God into a lie, worshiping a creature and serving it rather

than the creator.

He attempts Platonic ecstasy, but is "beaten back"

Warned by these writings that I must return to myself, I entered under your guidance the innermost places of my being; but only because you had become my helper was I able to do so. I entered, then, and with the vision of my spirit, such as it was, I saw the incommutable light far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mind: not this common light which every carnal eye can see, nor any light of the same order but greater, as though this common light were shining much more powerfully, far more brightly, and so extensively as to fill the universe.

The light I saw was not this common light at all, but something different, utterly different, from all these things. Nor was it higher than my mind in the sense that oil floats on water or the sky is above the earth; it was exalted because this very light made me, and I was below it because by it I was made. Anyone who knows truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity. Love knows it.

O eternal Truth, true Love, and beloved Eternity, you are my God, and for you I sigh day and night. As I first began to know you you lifted me up and showed me that while that which I might see exists indeed, I was not yet capable of seeing it. Your rays beamed intensely upon me, beating back my feeble gaze, and I trembled with love and dread. I knew myself to be far away from you in a region of unlikeness, and I seemed to hear your voice from on high: "I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me." And I recognized that you have chastened man for his sin and caused my soul to dwindle away like a spider's web, and I said, "Is truth then a nothing, simply because it is not spread out through space either finite or infinite?" Then from afar you cried to me, "By no means, for *I am who am.*"

I heard it as one hears a word in the heart, and no possibility of doubt remained to me; I could more easily have doubted that I was alive than that truth exists, truth that is seen and understood through the things that are made.

New light on the problem of evil

Contemplating other things below you, I saw that they do not in the fullest sense exist, nor yet are they completely non-beings: they are real because they are from you, but unreal inasmuch as they are not what you are. For that alone truly is, which abides unchangingly. As for me, my good is to hold fast to God, for if I do not abide in him,

I shall not be able to in myself; whereas he, abiding ever in himself, renews all things. You are my Lord, for you need no goods of mine.

It was further made clear to me that things prone to destruction are good, since this destructibility would be out of the question if they were either supremely good or not good at all; because if they were supremely good they would be indestructible, whereas if they were not good at all there would be nothing in them that could be destroyed. Destruction is obviously harmful, yet it can do harm only by diminishing the good. It follows, then, that either destruction harms nothing, which is impossible, or that all things which suffer harm are being deprived of some good; this conclusion is beyond cavil. If, however, they lose all their good, they will not exist at all, for if they were to continue in existence without being any longer subject to destruction, they would be better, because permanently indestructible; and what could be more outrageous than to declare them better for having lost everything that was good in them? Hence if they are deprived of all good, they will be simply non-existent; and so it follows that as long as they do exist, they are good.

Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good. Either it would be an indestructible substance, and that would mean it was very good indeed, or it would be a substance liable to destruction—but then it would not be destructible unless it were good.

I saw, then, for it was made clear to me, that you have made all good things, and that there are absolutely no substances that you have not made. I saw too that you have not made all things equal. They all exist because they are severally good but collectively very good, for our God has made all things *exceedingly good*.

For you evil has no being at all, and this is true not of yourself only but of everything you have created, since apart from you there is nothing that could burst in and disrupt the order you have imposed on it. In some parts of it certain things are regarded as evil because they do not suit certain others; but these same things do fit in elsewhere, and they are good there, and good in themselves. All these things that are at odds with each other belong to the lower part of creation that we call earth, which has its own cloudy, windy sky, as befits it. Far be it from me ever to say, "These things ought not to be"; because even if I could see these things alone, and longed, certainly, for something better, it would already be incumbent on me to praise you for them alone; for on earth the dragons and all the depths proclaim you worthy of praise, as do the fire, hail, snow, ice and stormy winds that obey your word,

the mountains and hills, fruit-bearing trees and all cedars, wild beasts and tame, creeping creatures and birds on the wing. Earth's kings and all its peoples, rulers and the world's judges, young men and maidens, old men and youths, all praise your name. But since in heaven too your creatures praise you, our God, let all your angels tell your praises on high, let all your powers extol you, sun and moon, all stars and the light, the empyrean and the waters above the heavens: let them too praise your name. No longer was I hankering for any elements to be better than they were, because I was now keeping the totality in view; and though I certainly esteemed the higher creatures above the lower, a more wholesome judgment showed me that the totality was better than the higher things on their own would have been.

There is no wholesomeness for those who find fault with anything you have created, as there was none for me when many of the things you have made displeased me. Since my soul did not dare to find my God displeasing, it was unwilling to admit that anything that displeased it was truly yours. This was why it had strayed away into believing in a duality of substances, but there it found no rest, and only mouthed the opinions of others. Turning back again it had made for itself a god extended through infinite space, all-pervasive, and had thought this god was you, and had set him up in its heart; so it became yet again a temple for its own idol and an abomination in your sight. But when you cradled my stupid head and closed my eyes to the sight of vain things so that I could absent me from myself awhile, and my unwholesome madness was lulled to sleep, then I awoke in you and saw you to be infinite, but in a different sense; and that vision in no way derived from the flesh.

I turned my gaze to other things and saw that they owe their being to you and that all of them are by you defined, but in a particular sense: not as though contained in a place, but because you hold all things in your Truth as though in your hand; and all of them are true insofar as they exist, and nothing whatever is a deceit unless it is thought to be what it is not. I saw, further, that all things are set not only in their appropriate places but also in their proper times, and that you, who alone are eternal, did not set to work after incalculable stretches of time, because no stretches of time, neither those which have passed away nor those still to come, would pass or come except because you are at work and you abide eternally.

Drawing on my own experience I found it unsurprising that bread, which is pleasant to a healthy palate, is repugnant to a sick one, and that diseased eyes hate the light which to the unclouded is delightful. Villains find even your justice disagreeable, and snakes and maggots

far more so, yet you have created these things good, and fit for the lower spheres of your world. Indeed, the villains themselves are fit only for these lower regions in the measure that they are unlike you, but for the higher when they come to resemble you more closely.

I inquired then what villainy might be, but I found no substance, only the perversity of a will twisted away from you, God, the supreme substance, toward the depths—a will that throws away its life within and swells with vanity abroad.

Fresh attempt at mounting to God; he attains That Which Is

I found it amazing that though I now loved your very self, and not some figment of imagination in place of you, I could not continue steadfastly in the enjoyment of my God. I was drawn toward you by your beauty but swiftly dragged away from you by my own weight, swept back head long and groaning onto these things below myself; and this weight was carnal habit. Nonetheless the memory of you stayed with me, and I had no doubt whatever whom I ought to cling to, though I knew that I was not yet capable of clinging, because the perishable body weighs down the soul, and its earthly habitation oppresses a mind teeming with thoughts. I was fully persuaded that your invisible reality is plainly to be understood through created things, your everlasting power also, and your divinity; for I had been trying to understand how it was possible for me to appreciate the beauty of material things in the sky or on earth, and why the power to make sound judgments about changeable matters was readily available to me, so that I could say, “This thing ought to be like this, but that other different”; and in seeking the reason why I was able to judge as I did I realized that above my changeable mind soared the real, unchangeable truth, which is eternal.

Thus I pursued my inquiry by stages, from material things to the soul that perceives them through the body, and from there to that inner power of the soul to which the body’s senses report external impressions. The intelligence of animals can reach as far as this.

I proceeded further and came to the power of discursive reason, to which the data of our senses are referred for judgment. Yet as found in me even reason acknowledged itself to be subject to change, and stretched upward to the source of its own intelligence, withholding its thoughts from the tyranny of habit and detaching itself from the swarms of noisy phantasms. It strove to discover what this light was that bedewed it when it cried out unhesitatingly that the Unchangeable is better than anything liable to change; it sought the fount whence flowed its concept of the Unchangeable—for unless it had in

some fashion recognized Immutability, it could never with such certainty have judged it superior to things that change.

And then my mind attained to That Which Is, in the flash of one tremulous glance. Then indeed did I perceive your invisible reality through created things, but to keep my gaze there was beyond my strength. I was forced back through weakness and returned to my familiar surroundings, bearing with me only a loving memory, one that yearned for something of which I had caught the fragrance, but could not yet feast upon.

He realizes the need for Christ the Mediator

Accordingly I looked for a way to gain the strength I needed to enjoy you, but I did not find it until I embraced the mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus, who also is God, supreme over all things and blessed for ever. Not yet had I embraced him, though he called out, proclaiming, *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life*, nor had I known him as the food which, though I was not yet strong enough to eat it, he had mingled with our flesh; for the Word became flesh so that your Wisdom, through whom you created all things, might become for us the milk adapted to our infancy. Not yet was I humble enough to grasp the humble Jesus as my God, nor did I know what his weakness had to teach. Your Word, the eternal Truth who towers above the higher spheres of your creation, raises up to himself those creatures who bow before him; but in these lower regions he has built himself a humble dwelling from our clay, and used it to cast down from their pretentious selves those who do not bow before him, and make a bridge to bring them to himself. He heals their swollen pride and nourishes their love, that they may not wander even further away through self-confidence, but rather weaken as they see before their feet the Godhead grown weak by sharing our garments of skin, and wearily fling themselves down upon him, so that he may arise and lift them up.

I took a different view at the time, regarding Christ my Lord as no more than a man, though a man of excellent wisdom and without peer. I was the more firmly persuaded of this because he had been born of a virgin and made plain to us by his own example that disdain for temporal goods is a condition for winning immortality; and it seemed to me that through God's solicitude for us in this respect Christ's teaching had acquired incomparable authority. But I could not even begin to guess what a mystery was concealed in the Word made flesh. All I had understood from the facts about him handed down in the scriptures—as, for instance, that he ate, drank, slept, walked, experienced

joy and sorrow and spoke to the people—was that his flesh was united to your Word only in conjunction with a human soul and a human consciousness. This must be obvious to anyone who has recognized the immutability of your Word, as I had insofar as I was able, and on this score I had no doubt. It is characteristic of the instability of our soul or mind that it can move its bodily limbs at one moment and not move them at another, can be affected now by some emotion and now again be unaffected, can give expression to wise sentiments at one time and at another remain silent. If these actions were reported of him falsely it would lay the entirety of the scriptures open to suspicion of lying, and then these writings would afford no possibility of saving faith to the human race. In fact, however, the scriptures are trustworthy; and so I acknowledged Christ to be a perfect man: not a human body only, nor a body with a human soul but lacking intelligence. Yet I held that this same man was to be preferred to others not because he was Truth in person, but on account of the outstanding excellence of his human nature and his more perfect participation in wisdom.

Alypius thought that Catholics believed God to be clothed in flesh in such a way that there was in Christ nothing else but godhead and flesh; he did not think their preaching assigned to him a human soul or a human consciousness. Being firmly convinced that the actions Christ was remembered to have performed would have been impossible in the absence of a principle of created, rational life, Alypius was little disposed to Christian faith; but later on he recognized this error to be that of the Apollinarian heretics, and so he came to rejoice with Catholics in their faith and to acquiesce in it.

For my own part I admit that it was later still that I learned how sharply divergent is Catholic truth from the falsehood of Photinus with respect to the teaching that the Word was made flesh. Indeed, the discrediting of heretics serves to throw into high relief the mind of your Church and the content of sound doctrine. For it was necessary for heresies to emerge in order to show up the people of sound faith among the weak.

Christ the Way

But in those days, after reading the books of the Platonists and following their advice to seek for truth beyond corporeal forms, I turned my gaze toward your invisible reality, trying to understand it through created things, and though I was rebuffed I did perceive what that reality was which the darkness of my soul would not permit me to contemplate. I was certain that you exist, that you are infinite but not spread out through space either finite or infinite, and that you exist in the

fullest sense because you have always been the same, unvarying in every respect and in no wise subject to change. All other things I saw to have their being from you and for this I needed but one unassailable proof—the fact that they exist. On these points I was quite certain, but I was far too weak to enjoy you. Yet I readily chattered as though skilled in the subject, and had I not been seeking your way in Christ our Savior I would more probably have been killed than skilled. For I had already begun to covet a reputation for wisdom, and though fully punished I shed no tears of compunction; rather was I complacently puffed up with knowledge. Where was that charity which builds on the foundation of humility that is Christ Jesus? And when would those books have taught it to me? I believe that you willed me to stumble upon them before I gave my mind to your scriptures, so that the memory of how I had been affected by them might be impressed upon me when later I had been brought to a new gentleness through the study of your books, and your fingers were tending my wounds; thus insight would be mine to recognize the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal but not the way to it and the Way to our beatific homeland, a homeland to be not merely desecrated but lived in. If I had first become well informed about your holy writings and you had grown sweet to me through my familiarity with them, and then I had afterward chanced upon those other volumes, they might perhaps have torn me loose from the strong root of piety, or else, if I had held firm in the salutary devotion I had absorbed, I might have supposed that it could be acquired equally well from those books, if everyone studied them and nothing else.

Augustine discovers Saint Paul

It was therefore with intense eagerness that I seized on the hallowed calligraphy of your Spirit, and most especially the writings of the apostle Paul. In earlier days it had seemed to me that his teaching was self-contradictory, and in conflict with the witness of the law and the prophets, but now as these problems melted away your chaste words presented a single face to me, and I learned to rejoice with reverence.

So I began to read, and discovered that every truth I had read in those other books was taught here also, but now inseparably from your gift of grace, so that no one who sees can boast as though what he sees and the very power to see it were not from you—for who has anything that he has not received? So totally is it a matter of grace that the searcher is not only invited to see you, who are ever the same, but healed as well, so that he can possess you. Whoever is too far off to see may yet walk in the way that will bring him to the place of seeing and possession; for even though a person may be delighted with God's law

as far as his inmost self is concerned, how is he to deal with that other law in his bodily members which strives against the law approved by his mind, delivering him as prisoner to the law of sin dominant in his body? You are just, O Lord; but we have sinned, and done wrong, and acted impiously, and your hand has lain heavy upon us. With good reason were we assigned to that ancient sinner who presides over death, for he had seduced our will into imitating that perverse will of his by which he refused to stand fast in your truth.

What is a human wretch to do? Who will free him from this death-laden body, if not your grace, given through Jesus Christ our Lord, whom you have begotten coeternal with yourself and created at the beginning of all your works? In him the ruler of this world found nothing that deserved death, yet slew him all the same; and so the record of debt that stood against us was annulled.

None of this is to be found in those other books. Not in those pages are traced the lineaments of such loving kindness, or the tears of confession, or the sacrifice of an anguished spirit offered to you from a contrite and humbled heart, or the salvation of a people, or a city chosen to be your bride or the pledge of the Holy Spirit, or the cup of our ransom. Not there is anyone heard to sing, *Shall not my soul surrender itself to God? For my salvation comes from him. He is my very God, my Savior, my protector, and I shall waver no more.* No one there hearkens to a voice calling, *Come to me, all you who struggle.* They are too scornful to learn from him, because he is gentle and humble of heart, and you have hidden these things from the sagacious and shrewd, and revealed them to little ones.

It is one thing to survey our peaceful homeland from a wooded height but fail to find the way there, and make vain attempts to travel through impassable terrain, while fugitive deserters marshaled by the lion and the dragon obstruct and lurk in ambush; and quite another to walk steadily in the way that leads there, along the well-built road opened up by the heavenly emperor, where no deserters from the celestial army dare commit robbery, for they avoid that way like torment.

In awe-inspiring ways these truths were striking deep roots within me as I read the least of your apostles; I had contemplated your works and was filled with dread.

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