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The Nobility of Sophocles' Antigone

When Sophocles first presents Antigone to us, she is already determined to violate Creon's decree prohibiting the burial of one of her two dead brothers. Each has just died at the hands of the other in a battle for the kingship of Thebes. Eteocles has been honored in a hero's funeral for defending the city. Polyneices is dishonored as a traitor, his flesh cast outside the city walls to rot and to be devoured by vultures and wild dogs. This is all the background for the drama that Sophocles gives us explicitly, but his Greek audiences would also be familiar with the story of Antigone's father, Oedipus, the former king of Thebes. They would be aware that his two sons had quarreled over who was to rule the city after their father's death. Either Eteocles had refused to step down when his turn to rule alternately with his brother was complete, or Polyneices, the elder, objected to his brother ruling instead of himself. Whichever it was, Polyneices then married an Argive princess and marshalled an army of warriors to conquer and recapture his city. The play begins at dawn on the day after their defeat.

In her opening speech Antigone refers to the misery and dishonor

that she and Ismene have suffered, evils that have sprung from Oedipus' slaying of his father and from his incestuous marriage with his mother. These evils have, as Antigone sees it, continued into the present. Creon's recent decree prohibiting the burial of her brother is another in a long line of dishonors to which she sees no end. She cannot view the decree with the detachment her sister displays. Ismene expresses the hope and expectation that those under the earth will forgive her for not risking her life to bury Polyneices because she, a woman, is unable to resist the power of the king. In her view, Antigone's determination to oppose Creon will surely be the cause of her death, and thus of another in the series of horrible, untimely deaths that have ravaged the family. For Antigone, by contrast, this determination is the evidence that she is truly well-born. She has no choice but to seek nobility in death - the word she uses is kalos - there is no splendor in resigned moderation. Thus, in a final attempt to persuade Ismene to aid her, she says: "You will soon show whether you are noble by nature, or a base daughter of a noble line."

Antigone believes that both sisters are noble by birth, and Creon seems to have ignored that in dishonoring the corpse of her brother. But she also believes that they must prove their nobility by burying him. Even if it is correct to call any birth noble (and that in itself is doubtful), the births of the

children of Oedipus were not. Antigone is confused when she asserts that if Ismene refuses to help in the burial of Polyneices she will prove herself unworthy of her origin. The same birth that is the source of Antigone's shame seems to provide the basis of her claim to honor, but she nevertheless recognizes that honor depends upon deeds. In her actions throughout the play she clings to her place in her tainted family. She hopes to return to loving intimacy with all of its members in Hades.

Antigone's preoccupation with her genesis and her expressions of concern for her unburied brother seem to most readers excessive. The intensity of her feelings is all the more striking given the contrast they make with Ismene's reaction to Creon's decree. It is not inevitable that the daughter of Oedipus would feel the dishonor of her brother's corpse so acutely, for apparently Ismene does not. Ismene's response is reasonable: for one who wants to live, it makes little sense to court an untimely death for the sake of a corpse, even the corpse of one's kin. Ismene at least is able to envision a life for her sister that is not plagued with the memory of what happened in the lives of their parents and their brothers. She reminds Antigone that she is engaged to be married to the son of the man who has just acquired power and handed down the hated decree. Why cannot this hopeful

attitude of Ismene's have any effect on Antigone's determination to bury her brother? It is Antigone's motives especially that I would like to clarify here.

The conflict between Antigone and Creon is really a conflict over the nature of the city and its needs. Creon's decree exemplifies his understanding of the city, and Antigone believes that she cannot live honorably there. I shall argue that her objection to Creon's city is essentially correct and that, when she errs in her understanding of herself, her errors are due to her sharing with Creon certain presuppositions that derive from the legendary founding of Thebes. I shall argue further that the founding of Thebes is a model for the founding of all cities. The conflict between Creon and Antigone is, then, a conflict of concern for us all.

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However imprudent, wrongheaded, and even mad Antigone appears in her single-minded aim, she is certainly impressive in her firm resistance to the power of the king. No sensitive reader can remain completely indifferent to her haughty dignity and her determination. Her insistence that the gods below demand the burial of her brother commands respect, for we cannot without an arrogance that resembles Creon's dismiss the possibility that the laws of the gods supersede the laws of the city. But the first

three episodes of the play provide no clear evidence of Antigone's rightness, and the three choral odes separating these episodes are tauntingly ambiguous.

The hardest evidence of the views of the gods that Sophocles presents comes late in the play, in the form of Teiresias' testimony to Creon that they will not accept Theban sacrifice as long as Polyneices' corpse lies rotting. But he also warns Creon of the anger of the cities whose men fought with Polyneices: Creon has left their bodies unreturned and unburied as well. The anger of these cities may be Teiresias' real concern, and it suggests that Creon is a dangerously incompetent ruler rather than an impious man. Furthermore, although Teiresias' words establish that Creon's decree was wrong, they do not clearly support Antigone's rebellion against it. Before we can begin to inquire into her reasons for rebelling, we must see the meaning of Creon's distasteful decree.

In Creon's view, it is clear that his responsibility for the safety of the city justifies his ruling that anyone who tries to bury Polyneices' corpse shall die. But his decree has undermined the distinction between men and animals by treating a man's corpse as though it were the corpse of a dog, or worse. Teiresias' speech later in the play allows us to speculate that

if the gods exist and wish to be worshipped, they must have an interest in preserving this distinction. Even before Teiresias speaks, we may wonder whether Creon's decree can be justified. Why not allow the two sisters to bury their brother's body privately, without honor or distinction? Creon must think that if he as ruler does not utterly repudiate even the physical remains of the traitor, he would himself be wounding the city to its heart.

Polyneices threatened the existence of the city not only in the way that any belligerent enemy might have, but also and even more dangerously, in presenting the example of a man violating the city of his birth. Creon responds by declaring it a crime to bury Polyneices' body, whether in Theban earth, or anywhere at all. There is no question that Creon recognizes that he is interfering with the established means of disposing of the dead, for if he did not, the distinction he makes between Polyneices and Eteocles would have no force. Clearly, in making this distinction Creon intends to announce that the traditional practice of ritual burial is not applicable to the corpse of such a monster as Polyneices. He apparently means to show that one who fights against his own city not only rescinds his citizenship but also relinquishes his humanity. Creon sees the city as the necessary basis of both friendship (l. 190) and human life

simply.

Men and women who do not submit to legitimate rule are beasts; or rather, human beings are beasts but for their submission to rule. Creon articulates this view over and over again through his constant use of animal imagery. Antigone is like a spirited horse (477-79), and so are potentially disobedient subjects. Ismene is an adder who has sucked out his blood (531-33). Polyneices may be something worse than an animal, for he " came to feed on kindred blood." (201-2). Creon retains his use of such imagery even at the end of the play when he observes that a god " ... drove me into ways of cruelty, overturning and trampling on my joy." (1273-75). Maybe even the gods are not fundamentally different from animals in his view. Creon's understanding of the city as crucial to the distinction between men and beasts explains why, in his opening speech, in stark contrast with the chorus' account in the parodos, Creon says nothing about the victory over the Argive army and even ignores the disturbing fact that the two brothers fought each other to the death. Fratricide seems not to seriously disturb him, but the violation of one's city arouses in him all the horror incest can arouse, if not more.

From the start Creon anticipates that someone will try to bury

the body (l.219, cf. ll.289ff.), but he expects this opposition to come from political enemies, or from others whom they might bribe. We, however, see no evidence that anyone is jealous of his power. Creon does not expect Polyneices' sisters to resist him, partly because they are women, and partly because he is blind to the possibility that piety and the tie of blood may be strong enough to overcome even the desire to live.

This is Creon's view. Now let us examine Antigone's.

As Antigone sees it, Creon bears the primary responsibility for forcing her to violate his decree, for in promulgating it he has tried to transform an act of piety - the burial of one's own dead - into an act of treachery. Antigone does not describe Polyneices as an individual, and we have no reason to think that there is anything beyond the fact that they are brother and sister to account for the intensity of her feeling for him. The mere fact of intimate blood relation matters. In Antigone's case the blood tie is strengthened by her terrible family history, and the weight of that history is all the more pressing because she feels compelled to bear that weight by herself. Antigone's birth determines who she is, and as her name implies, she wants desperately to undo that birth, or to go behind it.

Antigone's thought is apparently something like this: in correcting the impiety involved in leaving her brother's corpse unburied she will act honorably (as, she believes, Oedipus would have done), and at the same time she will erase the hideousness of the circumstances of her birth. It is she, and apparently not the city, who is concerned with the shame of her birth, for there is no evidence that it will affect her future position in Thebes. Furthermore, Antigone demands that in bestowing its honors the city acknowledge the difference between what is respectable and what is shameful in itself. She demands that all of Thebes recognize that, although the circumstances of her brother's death were not praiseworthy, the city's behavior in failing to bury him is more shameful. Worse, it is impious.

Antigone's demand that the city see these things is an appropriate demand. But the fact that she must act out her criticism of Creon in a noble death for the sake of her brother's corpse suggests more: she must compel the city in general and Creon in particular to recognize her worth. Antigone cannot rest in the private assurance that she can distinguish piety from impiety. Antigone, like Creon, believes that the difference between the high and the low will dissolve without the city's support. Her piety must be reinforced by the city's standards. It must assure her nobility as well.

In leaving the corpse that belongs beneath the earth above it, Creon has confused two sources of baseness. A man may be base in that he lacks the honors a city may grant, and he may also be base by nature. That is, he may lack the human qualities that make one deserving of honors. The two do not always coincide. Marriage and legal paternity substitute public institutions for the private and physical acts that make our kinship to the animals undeniable, thus casting doubt upon the nobility of even the supposedly "best" of us. While we live, many of our acts are determined by our corporeal nature, and to the extent that these force us to recognize our similarity to beasts, the city attempts to treat them like corpses. For the most part, it conceals them from view. Corpses, of course, are always unworthy of the honors of the city. But Creon considers even burial an honor (time) that is his to withhold or to bestow, and in doing so, he errs.

Antigone responds to Creon's error with a similar error. She too fails to distinguish between dishonor that derives from something shameful or disgraceful in itself (aiskhros), and the unjust deprivation of the honors and offices of the city (hai timai). Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that she does not even recognize the latter. The gods, and not the city, preserve the difference between human beings and animals, in her view. She

insists that the city recognize that the commands of the gods below supplant its laws and its needs. This insistence accounts for the fact that, even though she is too weak to complete the burial rites for her brother by herself, she is determined to be discovered in the attempt. Antigone gets angry when Ismene promises to keep her "crime" secret: she would prefer that her sister proclaim it out loud.

Perhaps when Ismene refuses to help her sister, she provokes Antigone to ignore the distinction between what is merely shameful, or at least unworthy of respect, and what is impious. For Antigone lacks the strength to bury a corpse properly without help, and she never considers calling upon Haemon. At the same time, she is not confident that the gods will reward her lonely and perhaps ineffectual acts. There is no place in the cosmos she inhabits for forgiving and generous gods. If it is true that the gods recognize only deeds and not intentions, it is ultimately impossible to distinguish between what their laws command and what the city and its laws support, for it is not only isolated women who need the help of others to act. Without the help of one another, individuals can rarely even survive. When they do, they are generally indistinguishable from beasts. Antigone is consistent in her understanding of the gods, but her view seems unnecessarily harsh. If the gods take an interest in

humans at all, must not they acknowledge the defects we cannot overcome?

Both Creon and Antigone reveal through their behavior that they are either unwilling or unable to separate what the city considers dishonorable from what is low or unworthy in itself. The chorus have the distinction no clearer, for in the first stasimon, where they glorify the various achievements of man, they repudiate him who fails to honor the laws of the land. They do not consider that it is sometimes appropriate to question the validity of a law, and even to rebel. Although they also refer in the same phrase to "the justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold," there is no evidence that they see the gods as providing guidelines or limits for human justice. But is it clear that the gods always support what the ruler commands? The leader of the chorus does, it is true, express dismay to find that it is Antigone, a woman and a member of the ruling family, who has violated Creon's decree. But neither he nor the others are disconcerted enough to be provoked to defend her.

It is in the family, as Antigone's behavior reveals, that the commands of the gods, at least those of the underworld, are learned and remembered. Moreover, it seems to be especially the gods below to which the standard of shame belongs, and human

beings develop a sense of shame nowhere if not in the family. Although Teiresias does not mention it in his account to Creon of the gods' response to his decree, it makes sense, I think, to suppose that it is the family who will ordinarily bury their dead and perform the rituals required by the gods below. But this institution does more than provide for the disposal of the city's corpses. In the family, the passions that allow for one's attachment to others first arise.

If the city does not recognize both the shame of its citizens and their private attachments, it becomes an arbitrary order in which all subjects are slaves. To avoid despotism, the city must recognize limits to its authority. While it imposes a political hierarchy over the hierarchy of the family, the city must accept the essential similarity of citizens. That similarity lies partly in their recognition of the horror of death and of other things even more horrible, and partly in the fact that each has loved ones by whom he will be remembered even once he is dead. It is an inevitable fact that these loved ones can never include the whole city. Those who compose it, whether rulers or ruled, are dignified as well as partial in their private attachments, for where we learn shame we also learn awe. In making citizenship identical with humanity, Creon's city both rejects men's need for privateness and at the same time destroys their

ability to look up. He substitutes force for love, and fear, a bestial emotion, for everything that would support the noble character a ruler should wish his subjects to have. Creon ignores all this when he makes his decree. He recognizes only that no one freely chooses to die.

If all of Thebes has difficulty recognizing a standard for the laws that is independent of them, this difficulty may stem from the legendary origin of the city. The original Thebans presumably arose from the earth, their mother, which Cadmus sowed with the teeth of the dragon he killed. As legend has it, Ares was the father of that dragon and Athena advised Cadmus to plant its teeth in the earth. The gods, then, had a part in the founding of Thebes. The original Thebans, however, are clearly not godlike, and perhaps not fully human: most of those who sprang from the earth slew one another. The human family was not part of Thebes at its origin. Only the decrees of the rulers and the conventions they enforced could have brought the family into being.

While Antigone's resistance to Creon's decree seems to teach us something about the family in general, there is no denying that hers is no ordinary family. In fact it may be more reminiscent of the origin of Thebes than it is of the groups of parents and

children of which most cities are composed. If the earth gave birth to the original Thebans, and if all true Thebans arise from the earth, the city of Thebes can be nothing but an incestuous family, and an ignoble or low one at that. Creon's neglect of the family and all that it stands for implies that he does see the city as a family, or at least as an adequate substitute for a family. Moreover, when the leader of the chorus objects that Creon cannot kill his sons' betrothed, Creon responds by remarking that there are plenty of other fields for Haemon to plow. He speaks as though mere earth were an appropriate wife for a true Theban. But the citizens of Thebes may be no more able to live decently in a city in which the earth supplants human mothers than Antigone is. Her inability to tolerate Creon's decree may be a sign of the plight that all Theban citizens ultimately share, and of which she alone is conscious.

If the family as we know it owes its origin everywhere to the support of cities, to some extent we all share the plight of the Thebans. It seems likely that in our origins we are nothing but beasts, and while many species take extraordinarily good care of their young, they do not have families as we know them. The city is, then, essential to human life, but politics does not suffice to make our lives human. The city lies between our base

beginnings and the gods we revere, and it can supplant neither the one nor the other. Somehow while providing for the shared life of the community, those who rule must support the shame and reverence of the individuals who compose it. Acknowledging the importance of the family may be a way for a city to do this without allowing private loves and hates to endanger its security. But the task of a ruler in balancing public against private concerns requires a mysterious skill. Antigone's story reveals only the problem, and Creon's refusal to confront it.

Antigone upholds the traditional, timeless laws of the gods against Creon's impiety. More than that, she insists on her attachment to her family and refuses to be a part of Creon's Thebes. She describes herself as already at home with the dead (590ff.). Hades is her proper home because the family whom she cannot forget resides there. This is why she must secure burial for Polyneices: without it the shade of her brother cannot enter Hades but must endlessly wander the earth, like a roving beast. Antigone's attachment to her family is primarily through memory, and so it does not tie her to the one living member of her immediate family, Ismene, as much as it does to the dead. Antigone cannot forget whose womb she came from and which father begat her. She cannot forget that Ismene and Polyneices, along with the honored Eteocles and even Oedipus himself, came from the

same womb. She cannot forget any of the horrors that stem from the root of her father, Oedipus, and that apparently will not cease until she is dead. Her unrelenting memory contrasts notably with the chorus' call upon Bacchus at the end of the parodos to help them to celebrate the victory of Thebes and "to enjoy forgetfulness."

Antigone's need to remain tied to her family can be restated in the following terms: Hades is the home of the dead, and she sees it as a home in which all members of the family may live together in loving intimacy through eternity. In death, then, there is an acknowledgment that despite the distinctions among the generations and the difference between the sexes, each of us alike is held dear. Reverence for one's dead ancestors allows one to combine respect for the hierarchy among both dead and living family members with a sense of our oneness with them. The family can thus be an ordered whole in which no one is a slave. Antigone is mad in thinking that she can enjoy the loving intimacy of the family by joining the corpses of the dead members of her family under the earth. The family must be alive to share in the love that she craves. Still, there is a core of truth in her feeling.

As Antigone probably sees it, to marry Haemon and to live in

Creon's city would be to give up her position as daughter of Oedipus, the dead and tainted but still honorable king, to become Creon's slave. Under his rule, marriage and childbearing become for Antigone merely bestial acts. This speculation provides a way to think about Antigone's otherwise bizarre assertion (906ff.) that what she has done for her brother she would not have done for a husband or a child of her own. If the city did recognize the importance of the family and its reverence for the dead, its members could more easily bear being ruled by one from among them. Even a woman, who could not participate in ruling in ancient Greece, could remain confident of her place in a whole bound by blood alone, a tie the city did not create.

When the Antigone opens, Creon is no more ready than Antigone herself to join with the chorus in a Bacchic victory celebration. In his own way, he may be as plagued as Antigone by the memory of the horrors of the past. His assertion that he alone shall determine who is worthy of honor, and that he shall do so on the basis of the good of the city and on no other, is in effect a denial that men and women can be well-born, or that they are honorable before the city metes out honors. As we have seen, it also implies a denial that human beings in general are well-born in comparison with beasts. He may feel that this view is born out by the recent history of Thebes.

Through his slaying of his father and his incestuous marriage with his mother, Oedipus confused the generations of his family in a way that can be permissable only in Hades. In doing so he may have undermined the subsequent stability of Thebes, for no city can be indifferent to the disgrace of its ruler, and the troubles Oedipus began seem to have continued in the battle between his sons. Each treated the city as though it were a private estate that he had the right to inherit. Creon has gone to the other extreme. In his view, anything private is a threat to the security of the city. The citizens of Thebes must substitute honor for the friends of the city and hatred for its enemies for their private loves and hates. But friendship or fellowship (philia) depends not only upon the security of the city, as Creon argues in his opening speech (187ff.), but also upon the dignity of the individuals who make up the city. Antigone feels that she cannot retain her nobility in marrying Haemon as long as her marriage depends upon submitting to Creon's decree. Similarly, any lawgiver who seeks to protect fellowship by legislating what citizens may love and hate will inevitably fail.

When Creon accuses Antigone of challenging his political authority and his authority as a man (484ff.), he is not far

wrong. The exchange between Creon and Antigone once she has been brought forward as a criminal reflects her sense that his politics destroy philia:

> Not to join in hating, but in loving (synphilein), was I born,

she says. Creon responds:

> Go down now and love the dead, if it is necessary (for you) to love. No woman will rule me while I live (l. 523-25).

Later Creon says to his son: " ... with loathing and as if she were a foe, let this girl go to seek marriage in Hades." (l. 654) Antigone's death is described both by herself and by the chorus as well as by Creon as a marriage. In fact, in the opening scene Antigone expresses a similar thought when she tells Ismene that she will lie with her brother, a friend (or beloved) with a friend (l.73). How defensible we can consider Antigone's morbid manner of speaking here depends upon whether her sense that Creon's sovereignty would destroy the humanity of personal attachments is justified. Two dramatic events in the play powerfully reinforce the sense that it is. One is Ismene's attempt to implicate herself in Antigone's crime and to die with her. She reveals her despair when she asks Antigone "What life is beloved (philos) to me bereft of you?" (ll.535ff.). The other is Haemon's suicide in Antigone's tomb.

Haemon's suicide seems more difficult to account for than

Ismene's offer, for he seems to have a promising future in Thebes. He is the son of the present ruler and his likely successor. Why cannot he accept his father's suggestion and find another bride? The first and most important response to this question is surely that he loves Antigone, but I suspect that the full answer lies as much in Haemon's exchange with his father just after he has learned that Antigone must die as it does in his love for her. In that exchange, Creon virtually outlaws his son's passions when he accuses him of treasuring a private and indefensible love for the wrong sort of woman. Even when Haemon claims that his knowledge of the sympathies of the people and his respect for those sympathies provoke him to try to persuade his father to free Antigone, Creon hears nothing but disobedience and treachery in his words. He repudiates Haemon's advice just as vehemently as he repudiates Antigone's violation of his decree.

The immediate cause of Haemon's suicide is that he has just found himself trying to slay his father out of anger for the death of his betrothed. Haemon cannot allow himself to perform such a heinous act any more than he can bow to his father's will. This shows that Haemon respects the claims of kinship even when they conflict with his own desires. The son is about as unlike his father as he could be.

Just as Creon accuses his son of treachery for the sake of a woman, so he accuses both the guard and Teiresias, and in fact whoever opposes his authority as ruler of Thebes, of seeking to enrich themselves at the price of the city's good. But it cannot be the case that any personal interest that is not identical with upholding the security of the city makes one a traitor. Not all such concerns can be petty and unworthy of respect. Creon's mistake in thinking so blinds him even to his own motives, for he is surely as interested in his own glory as he is in the welfare of Thebes. His error, as we have seen, may have its base in a misunderstanding of the horror of Oedipus' history, and its implications for the city. _His fate is no more enviable than Oedipus' own.

Creon repudiates the passions that reside in and preserve the human family at his personal peril. This becomes clear in the occasion for his dramatic reversal towards the end of the play (1092ff.). When Teiresias tells him that to enforce his decree will mean to sacrifice the life of his own son, he is willing to bow to tradition (ll. 1111-1112), but he is too late. His personal catastrophe seems to coincide with the danger to the city about which Teiresias has warned him. Creon cannot fail to associate his neglect of tradition with his loss of all who were dear to him. His suffering is pathetic and terrible.

Like Creon, Antigone too suffers a change of heart in the course of the drama. In her case it occurs just after she has been condemned. Although she never repudiates her illegal act, she seems overwhelmed by the terror of sacrificing the life that she has not yet had an opportunity to live. Her partial success in performing a rudimentary version of the rites of burial for her brother is not enough to console her. Indeed, Antigone snaps at the chorus when, after she has compared herself to a goddess (824ff.), they remind her of her mortality (834ff.). She accuses them of mocking her, even though only few lines earlier (828ff.) they were clearly admiring her glory. Their admiration looks like mockery to her because, now that she has confronted the end of her life, splendour in death looks hollow.

In defending the domain of the gods Antigone exaggerates the claims of the family and denies a place in her soul to the feelings she could have has for a husband and children of her onw. She is forced to expose the basis of a tradition in the attempt to uphold it. As she does so, she does violence to herself. In this sense, Antigone lacks self-knowledge, at least up to the moment when she is condemned, but her imperfect knowledge of herself is not a "tragic flaw" that makes her deserving of her fate. No human being can have perfect self-

knowedge and Antigone cannot be responsible for being limited in a way that characterizes all human beings. Rather, her situation is an extreme version of a plight we all share: we must learn about ourselves through action and experience. Our need for political structures reflect this truth. So do both our attachments to our families and the traditions that guide us in giving due recognition to (God or) the gods.

The change in Antigone's tone when she is aware that she is about to die provides an approach to understanding the obscure passage in which the chorus tells her:

> Advancing to the furthest limit of courage (or rashness, to thrasos) up to the lofty throne of justice (dike) you fell, child, hard. You are paying in full the penalty of the contest of your father. (852-55)

The passage means something like the following: Attaining the foundation or throne of justice is not the same as living in the most appropriate way. If we are to live decently, justice must guide the lives of mortals without being fully disclosed to us. In forbidding the burial of Polyneices Creon was the immediate cause of denial of this possibility to Antigone, but the real source of the problem is in Oedipus' incest, and perhaps ultimately in the founding of Thebes.

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Sophocles' Antigone is often said to represent the contest between divine law and human law, but this is an inadequate

account of what is at issue. After all, Creon claims and probably believes that the gods support his decree. Nor will it suffice to read the play as a working out of the importance of the family weighed against the concerns of the city. For the city depends upon the family. It must contain many families so that their members can associate with one another as similar, if not perfectly equal, beings, and only then can they willingly submit to one of themselves. How to combine many individuals who are members of various families into a single whole is the riddle of the city. Creon seems not to notice that to rule involves offering one's skill as a solver of the riddle, and so he cannot even begin to consider how.

Both reverence for the gods and the ties of the family must be important elements in solving the riddle of how a city, which is a collection of many separate individuals, can be at the same time a whole. The city must respect the the fact that men and women are more than citizens, that in some sense they are independent wholes. Rulers are reasonable only superficially when they insist on the debt all men and women owe to the city. The forget that the city owes its existence to a human insight that no city can fully comprehend or sustain. Humans are the beings who sense what lies beneath the earth and what reigns above them. They are the beings who know that they are neither

the one nor the other, that they are by nature in between. The smooth sailing of the city sometimes depends upon obscuring this sense in order to support the authority of rulers. Established procedures and laws must often take precedence over the insights of individuals into the will of the gods. But no city can long survive without the shame and the reverence that lies deeper in human beings than their political allegiance. I do not have the solution to the riddle of the city, but I can say this: the power of the sense of shame and of reverence is a power that we too would be as vulgar and as foolish as Creon to ignore.

I have entitled this lecture "The Nobility of Sophocles' Antigone," and I do mean to call her noble. Through her daring and wrongheaded acts, she reminds us all of truths that we cannot afford to ignore. Creon's Thebes did not acknowledge her greatness in risking her life for a principle that would make her city more human, but we must not follow his example. Even the perturbed passions of a woman may have something to teach. If Sophocles had no more to teach us than this, it would be enough to justify our calling him wise.