

Chapter 1

Listening to Haemon *Citizenship in the Antigone*

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP in classics, philosophy, literary criticism, and political science, has been turning to Greek tragedy at the same time that deliberative democracy and civic engagement have emerged as important themes in contemporary political theory. This chapter connects these conversations by considering Sophocles's *Antigone* as a resource for contemporary scholarship on active citizenship and deliberative democracy.¹ My intervention in the long history of the play's interpretation is to bring attention to the themes of speaking and especially listening in the politics of the *Antigone*, as reflected in the character of Haemon and the recurring imagery of the play.

Although many have observed that the dominant metaphors of *Oedipus Rex* concern blindness and sight, less attention has been paid to the images of communication and miscommunication in the *Antigone*. This is unfortunate, because, as I have argued, speech and its political benefits were of such obviously central concern in Greek culture. By focusing on the themes of speaking and listening, I am drawn neither to Creon, nor to Antigone, but rather the often-overlooked Haemon. In the scholarship on the *Antigone*, very little attention has been paid to this character.² Although Haemon is secondary in terms of dramatic action, this chapter makes the case that he is central to the political implications of the play. Haemon offers the most complete account of citizenship as a practice of speaking and listening in the public realm.³ By the end of his confrontation with Creon, Haemon endorses a conception of practical wisdom in which the aim is to learn (*manthano*) by speaking with (*lego*) and listening to (*kluo*) others. A crucial step in Haemon's appreciation of the ethical and political value of excellence in speaking and listening is his sympathetic identification with Antigone, which itself mirrors the audience's own experience. The sympathetic portrayal of Antigone and the dramatization of Haemon's moral

coming-of-age together constitute a potential model of citizenship characterized by engagement in public conversation and supported by sympathetic identification with political outsiders.

By giving full attention to themes of speaking and listening and by seeing the *Antigone* from Haemon's perspective, my interpretation challenges and supplements the influential reading offered by G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel has interpreted the *Antigone* as a narrative of the reconciliation of conflict. As I will argue in chapter 3, Hegel thus believes that tragedy points to an essentially optimistic attitude toward history and the development of the political institutions of the modern state. Hegel's reading of the *Antigone* rests on several basic claims: first, tragic heroes embody a *pathos*, an ethical principle (such as divine or secular law) with which the audience can identify; second, the characters mistakenly interpret their ethical principles one-sidedly, resulting in apparent conflict and arousing the audience's sympathies; and third, tragedy points toward a moment of reconciliation in which a latent rationality is discovered beneath the surface appearance of conflict, arbitrariness, and injustice, resulting in a purgation of the tragic emotions. The meaning of the suffering involved in tragic conflict is revealed when we understand that it is part of historical progress.⁴ Many contemporary interpreters of Greek tragedy continue to see the play in Hegel's terms of ethical conflict. Nussbaum, for example, writes, "Both Creon and Antigone are one-sided, narrow, in their pictures of what matters. The concerns of each show us important values that the other has refused to take into account. On this issue Hegel's famous and frequently abused reading is correct."⁵ While Nussbaum goes to great lengths to distance herself from Hegel's theory of ethical reconciliation, she owes much to his narrative of ethical conflict between moral equals. Insofar as my interpretation acknowledges that Antigone is flawed and does not present a viable conception of citizenship, my interpretation, like Nussbaum's and Hegel's, departs from recent efforts to see her as a paradigmatic figure for rebellious politics.⁶

Hegel's interpretation has advanced the understanding of tragedy by recognizing the centrality of conflict and refusing to treat any character as a pure or perfect hero. However, reading the play with attention to themes of speaking in listening leads to significant revisions of Hegel's narrative. First, my interpretation changes the terms of the conflict. Instead of a conflict between equally legitimate ethical worldviews, I see the play as centering on equally deficient approaches to political communication. The appeals to ethical principles such as the family and the city are important to provide dramatic content to the conflict, but the real source of the tragedy concerns the characters' abilities to speak and listen effectively. More important, this chapter departs from Hegel's view

that the play points toward a harmonious reconciliation of opposites. The ultimate outcome of the play is not a sense that conflict has been eliminated or that order has been restored, but rather that active citizenship requires ongoing efforts to sympathize with and listen to others. Instead of the reconciliation of conflict through Antigone's punishment, the tragedy implies that conflict is part of the human condition and makes necessary an open-ended politics of sympathetic engagement in dialogue. To see the real importance of Antigone's status, my interpretation shifts the focus to Haemon and the process of political education, or *paideia*, he undergoes as he comes to both sympathize with Antigone and reject tyranny for active citizenship.⁷

Tyrannical Speech: Creon and the First Choral Ode

The very structure of the play invites the audience to think about the importance of listening. The audience is listening to the actors' words while watching the actions that they perform, all in the context of a civic festival in celebration of a culture that recognizes the centrality of speech. The narrative takes on a series of rhetorical forms: reasoned monological speeches, intense and expressive outbursts of passion, angry exchanges of insults and verbal abuse, and ever-so-brief moments of dialogue and deliberation. As the audience watches and listens, the content of the narrative centers on a series of breakdowns in communication between conflicting characters and values. The source of these breakdowns is not conflict as such but rather conflicts specifically concerning claims to being good at speaking and listening. At every level, the play invites the audience to think about the politics of listening as it engages in its own act of listening.

In this context, the moral status of Creon's rule and its relation to public discussion is at the forefront of the *Antigone*. Using a trope common in Greek literature, Sophocles uses the location of the opening scene to foreshadow the conflicts and issues that will become important.⁸ Here, the setting is outside Creon's palace at Thebes, in front of the palace gates. In contrast to the palace—an image of authority, power, and order—the opening conversation is between Antigone and Ismene, her sister. Both are members of a family that is not only cursed, but also of one that has been involved in an attack on the polis. And modern interpreters should not forget that Antigone and Ismene are, as women, not considered members of the public realm. Their conversation is forced from the public realm: "I sent for you to come outside the palace gates to listen to me privately" (19). Following the initial argument between Antigone and Ismene,

Creon is introduced by the Chorus: “He comes to set in motion some design—what design is it? Because he has proposed a convocation of the elders. He sent a public summons for our discussion” (160–62). In the opening image, Creon has claimed to be initiating a public discussion, yet Antigone and Ismene have been excluded from the conversation.

The audience at this point might be expecting to see some sort of deliberative process—an effort at mutual persuasion—take place. Creon, however, defies this expectation. Creon’s first lines are in the form of a monologue, and the monologue consists of his proclamation and a series of orders, all of which have, it appears, been decided in advance: “It has been proclaimed (*ekkekeruktai*) to the city that no one shall give him funeral honors or lamentation, but all must leave him unburied and a sight of shame, with his body there for birds and dogs to eat” (204–6, Jebb trans.). Creon ends the speech stating, “This is my will” (*emon phronema*) (207, Jebb trans.). Creon’s vocabulary, together with the monological form of his speech, suggests a preoccupation with willing and possessing, not listening to others. Creon is introduced as someone who speaks *to* the Chorus, rather than engaging *with* it in genuinely public conversation.

The basic conflict of the play and the central focus on the theme of speech is further indicated in the first choral ode, the so-called Ode to Man. The Ode begins by acknowledging the ambiguous quality of human nature: “Many are the wonders (*deina*); none is more wonderful (*deinoteron*) than what is man” (331–32). Next, the Chorus links human beings’ capacity for greatness to several important concepts that will prove to be important in the implied politics of the play: speech (*phthegma*), thought (*phronema*), and *orgas astunomous*, the inclination toward social life or law-abidingness (350–55). As the Chorus concludes, the Ode becomes not just an Ode to man simply, but rather to man as a political animal, a being capable of citizenship. This is emphasized by the recurrence of the root word *polis* in the contrast between the *hypsipolis* and *apolis* tendencies of human beings: “If he honors the laws of earth and the justice of gods (*theon dikan*) he has confirmed by oath, high is his city (*hypsipolis*). No city (*apolis*) has he with whom dwells dishonor prompted by recklessness” (368–72).⁹ The central issue is especially vivid in the Greek, in which the word *hypsipolis* is immediately followed by *apolis*, resulting in a repeated emphasis on the root word *polis*. Framed in this way, the central issue of the play becomes the identity of the polis and the requirements for membership in it, and the Chorus suggests that the identities of the *apolis* lawbreaker and the *hypsipolis* model citizen will somehow turn on the connection between speech and wisdom.

The Ode comes just as Antigone has been reported for breaking Creon’s edict. Although the Chorus has not yet met Antigone, and the

Ode is not structured as a direct commentary on the immediate events of the play, the initial suggestion is that Antigone is the *apolis* lawbreaker who has disobeyed divine justice and Creon the *hypsipolis* model citizen capable of speech and wisdom. Yet things may not be as simple as they seem. Aristotle observes that Greek tragedy is distinctive for its characteristic scenes of *peripeteia*, or “reversal,” and *anagnorisis*, or “recognition” (*Poetics*, 1452a21–b9). The audience, knowing that it is about to witness tragedy, is likely to see the Ode’s optimistic confidence as an ironic foreshadowing of the events to come. Rather than simply pointing toward Antigone, Sophocles’s repeated invocation of images of the polis should cause the audience a good bit of anxiety over the true identity of the *hypsipolis* and *apolis* characters. In the full context of the events to come, the concept of wonder (*deinon*) takes on an ambiguous, mysterious, and ominous connotation.¹⁰ This ambiguity is further reinforced since the Chorus never explicitly says that Creon’s law is divine, or that Antigone is *apolis*. The Chorus could be in fear of Creon, subtly trying to indicate that it believes Antigone is innocent while appeasing the King with appeals to law and order. Or perhaps the Chorus simply does not know whether Creon’s law has divine sanction, and the appeal to divine justice is more of a general platitude than explicit unequivocal support of Creon. By using ambiguous words like *deina*, Sophocles reinforces the audience’s feeling that what counts as good citizenship may be more complex than its usual conventions suggest. Despite its own intentions, perhaps, the dramatic effect of the Chorus’s speech is to set up questions regarding who is really the *apolis* lawbreaker and who is on the side of speech and *theon dikan*.

For Hegel’s answers to these questions to be valid, Creon must first be seen as defending an ethical principle that we find to be legitimate (though one-sided) and equal to that of Antigone. And it is true that Creon initially appeals to ethical principles that at least appear to be compelling.¹¹ The play is set immediately following a period of civil strife in Thebes. Polyneices had just led an army against the city and his own brother, Eteocles, the previous king. In this context Creon’s appeals to martial authority might have seemed a legitimate way of acting out his assigned role. Creon is at least apparently recognized by the Chorus as a legitimate ruler, suggesting that he has statesman-like powers and responsibilities that go beyond those of average citizens (158). Creon acts in this capacity in delivering his edict to ban the burial of Polyneices, and in so doing he appeals to values such as peace, security, friendship, and civic-mindedness (171–210). In his initial conflict with Antigone, Creon references “established law” (*nomous tous prokeimenous*, 481). And again, in the argument with Haemon, Creon invokes principles of authority and

obedience (665–80) that may have struck a chord with the classical audience, if not with modern readers. There is no indication that Creon abuses his power or profits from his office. At the very least, these qualifications serve to humanize Creon, giving his excesses a degree of complexity. They also establish that whatever sympathy will be established for Antigone will be qualified by concerns about the interests of the city and the principle of the public good. The audience has good reason to treat Creon sympathetically, at least in the beginning.

Although Creon's words are often compelling, however, they are betrayed by his actions. Creon's behavior confirms that his initial monologue betrays deeper problems in his approach to speaking and listening. Despite his self-conception as a legitimate ruler acting out his assigned role, these actions undermine Hegel's case that Creon represents legitimate principles taken to a one-sided extreme. Creon is suspect from the very beginning of the play and his tyrannical nature repeatedly reveals itself in the following events.

Creon's authority rests not only on his authority as a speaker, but also on the threat of force. Creon's name suggests *kreion*, a lord or master, but also *kreo-*, a prefix having to do with butchers and carving flesh. A number of characters clearly obey Creon out of fear rather than obligation to a legitimate authority. The Chorus assents to Creon's initial speech because, it says, "There is none so foolish as to love his own death" (220). The Sentry, who has no reason to fear Creon, is initially afraid to speak. His colleague demands that they make a report, causing them to "bow to the ground in fear" (270). The Sentry's fears are somewhat vindicated, as Creon dismisses him with a threat of violence if the perpetrators are not found (325–27). Antigone later asserts that the public is on her side but refuses to speak out of fear: "All that are here would surely say that's true if fear did not lock their tongues up. A prince's (*tyrannis*) power is . . . that he can say and do whatever he likes" (504–6). This assertion is reaffirmed by Haemon: "Your face is terrible (*deinon*) to a simple citizen (*andrei demotei*); it frightens him from words (*logois*) you dislike to hear (*kluon*)" (690–91).¹² Again, Creon threatens Teiresias with a "bad fall" (*deinoi ptomat aiskra*) for conspiring to prophesize against him (1046). Although the Chorus expresses agreement with Creon most of the time, this may be due to its fear of reprisal rather than any genuine sympathy with his claims to public-spiritedness and the rule of law. In all of these examples, Creon's rule is revealed to be consistent with his monological way of speaking, backed up by force and intimidation.

Creon also wields his power excessively. Even if the ban on burial could be considered legitimate, there is reason to believe that the punishment of death is excessive relative to the traditional norms of Greek

culture.¹³ By the end of the play, it is evident that Creon has committed a radical transgression of traditional norms. As Teiresias states: “[O]ne that belonged indeed to the underworld gods you have kept on this earth without due share of rites of burial, of due funeral offerings, a corpse unhallowed . . . These acts of yours are violence, on your part” (1071–75). Although Creon does not abuse his power in terms of profiting from his office and conflicts of interests, he wields power expansively. Creon’s power is not only excessive, but also arbitrary. Though he relents when questioned by the Chorus, Creon’s first instinct is to sentence to death not only Antigone but also Ismene (834–38). Creon’s false accusations of Teiresias suggest that he is willing to employ the force of the state without following the political procedures characteristic of the rule of law. As suggested by Creon’s identification of law with the will of the ruler in the Haemon scene, there does not appear to be any limit to his authority. Creon’s power thus goes beyond what one would expect from a legitimate constitutional monarch, in tension with his claims to consultation with Teiresias and the Chorus.

The source of Creon’s arbitrariness is a tendency toward anger, revealed repeatedly throughout the play. Creon repeatedly shows himself to be prone to anger, unable to restrain his passions as he confronts one character after another. When the Chorus initially wonders whether the gods have sanctioned the burial of Polyneices, Creon says, “Stop, before your words fill even me with rage” (280). In dealing with the Sentry (294–300) and Teiresias (1035–55), Creon suggests that there is a conspiracy against him, reflecting a sense of underlying paranoia and irrationality. While Antigone’s emotions derive from a perverted sense of familial love, Creon’s emotions are hateful, angry, and vindictive. And, worse, he wields political power at the same time. All the while, Creon ironically claims to represent the voice of reason against the passionate Antigone.

For Hegel to be right about Creon’s *pathos*, we would expect at least the outline of a theory of law—something analogous to Antigone’s speech in defense of divine law (495–515). As he introduces his edict, Creon identifies “skill in rule and law” with preserving the ship of state (173–91). However, the audience already has reason to treat Creon with an eye of suspicion, and its suspicions begin to be confirmed. Creon never defines what he means by “law.” Nor does he give any criteria by which his action might be recognized as lawful. Creon claims to have followed neither any particular political procedures nor any processes of deliberation in formulating his decree. Creon does consult the Chorus to make his proclamation, but he does so after having already decided his course of action, and the tone of this speech suggests more that Creon is pandering to the people of the city than that he is attempting to follow

any recognized procedures of deliberation. The closest Creon comes to a definition of what he means by “law” occurs in his discussion with Haemon, and it is noteworthy that it comes *before* Haemon decides to antagonize him. This is not a speech made out of anger, and we have every reason to believe that it is a reasonable statement of Creon’s theory of law and the state. Without any provocation other than Antigone’s act itself, Creon explains: “The man the city sets up in authority must be obeyed (*chre kluein*) in small (*smikra*) things and in just (*dikaia*) [things], but also in their opposites” (661–67). In Hobbesian fashion, Creon argues that the will of the king is so absolute that it defines the law not only for small and just matters, but also for their opposites: that is, it may potentially result in grave injustice. Creon uses the vocabulary of speech, *kluein*, but with a commanding and authoritative connotation: “*chre kluein*,” literally “it is necessary to listen.” For Creon, the vocabulary of speech is compatible with necessity, which can only be obeyed and is not subject to deliberation. For Creon, though the ruler is given power by the city, the law is simply identical to his arbitrary will, regardless of justice. Against the common (Hegelian) wisdom that Creon represents the law of the state, Creon appeals to an empty theory of law that reinforces his monological use of speech.

In Hegel’s narrative, Creon takes legitimate principles to a one-sided extreme, acting the wrong way for the right reasons. Instead of taking political values to an extreme, however, Creon’s actions reflect radically different principles of power and tyrannical rule. This is not just extreme action based on legitimate values, but rather a fundamental transgression. The Greek audience may have initially identified with Creon rather than Antigone because of his masculinity and his political position. Despite initial appeals to law, public-spiritedness, and obligation to the community, however, Creon goes on to exhibit all the characteristics of tyranny commonly found in Greek literature and political philosophy. Through ironic foreshadowing and early demonstrations of Creon’s motives and tendencies, Sophocles makes his character suspect and unsympathetic from the very beginning. It is true that Creon is not a figure of pure evil. Creon’s tyrannical tendencies come from very much human qualities that should strike a chord with the audience, qualities like passion, desire for power, and the tendency toward anger. These “tyrannical” qualities can exist in a democratic majority, not just an individual tyrant.¹⁴ One might expect a character like Haemon, himself an up-and-coming politician who may be tempted to emulate his father’s style of rule, to be vulnerable to these same tendencies. While Creon’s “true” motives are tyrannical and unsympathetic, they nevertheless have a certain less-than-fully-conscious element. The “humanness” of these qualities makes Creon’s character

believable and compelling without making him sympathetic on the same level as Antigone. The fact that Creon is so compelling only makes the project of democratic education all the more urgent.

Hegel is correct that Creon functions dramatically to introduce legitimate ethical principles that Antigone should take seriously. However, Hegel's interpretation overlooks two additional roles that Creon plays as a tyrannical character. First, Creon sets the stage for Antigone's suffering and the audience's sympathetic reaction to injustice. Second, by identifying Creon as one who is not, in fact, a *hypsipolis* citizen, Creon's tyranny forces the breakdown in civic discourse and forces a conflict over the civic qualities that would be part of an alternative genuinely political conception of citizenship. To return to the theme of speech, or *phthegma*, identified with citizenship in the first Ode, as it turns out, Creon is not excellent in speaking so much as he is in giving orders. The character of Creon thus by negative example raises the question of what it would mean to speak well, as a genuine citizen rather than as a tyrannical ruler. In the next section, I argue that Antigone is uniquely sympathetic, giving some insight into a Sophoclean model of public speech. But is she the *hypsipolis* hero, the Sophoclean alternative to Creon's tyrannical politics?

Tragic Sympathy: Antigone as Outsider

For Hegel, once Antigone's equal culpability is acknowledged, the audience can transcend its temporary state of sympathetic emotional arousal and attain a feeling of ethical peace and satisfaction. As Hegel puts it, "[O]nly then can our hearts be morally at peace: shattered by the fate of the heroes but reconciled fundamentally" (*LFA*, 1215). Is Hegel correct to rule out sympathy with Antigone as a final outcome of the play? If not, what might be the implications of the audience's identification with this problematic figure for constructing a viable model of civic dialogue? Like Creon, Antigone fails to present a viable model of civic discourse. In fact, aspects of her character, like Creon's, are responsible for the dramatic and political crisis of the play. However, Antigone's outsider status and her sympathetic qualities have unique implications for the politics of speaking and listening. The sympathetic identification that Sophocles establishes is complex and qualified (which makes it genuinely subject to inquiry in the deliberations of the audience), but it parallels Haemon's own experience and is crucial to understanding the political implications of Haemon's education.

Antigone's outsider status is dramatized throughout the play, beginning with the striking image of the palace and the women outside it. The audience should be struck by the contrasts between images of Creon's

hierarchical rule, embodied in the palace, and the powerlessness of the two women on the outside; of inclusion in the community, and the political exile that is to come; of the order and security of the community behind the gates, and the potential danger represented by the outsiders. Antigone's outsider status is reinforced by the simple fact of her gender and the way she so radically challenges the established conventions of gender roles and categories.¹⁵ Additionally, Antigone is the sister of a traitor and the daughter of incestuous parents. What makes the play such a dramatic accomplishment is that Sophocles manages to establish sympathy for a character that would otherwise be quite unsympathetic according to conventional standards.

Despite these challenges, Antigone is, in fact, sympathetic in a way that Creon is not. Antigone begins by appealing to sisterhood, an egalitarian form of familial love. Whereas Oedipus begins his tragedy by condescending to address the citizens of Thebes as "children" (*OT*, 1), his daughter opens this play with, "O dear sister" (*koinon autadelphon*). The language suggests sharing and equality, in contrast to Oedipus's paternalism.¹⁶ As the drama develops, Antigone appeals to a principle that would have been readily recognizable in the terms of the audience. Antigone hails from an aristocratic family that has been dishonored: "[F]or those two brothers of ours, in burial, has not Creon honored (*protisas*) the one, dishonored (*atimasas*) the other?" (22). Again, in her confrontation with Creon: "Yet how could I win a greater share of glory than putting my own brother in his grave?" (501–2). And when Haemon appears, Antigone appeals not to their love, but rather to his sense of honor: "Dear Haemon, how your father dishonors you" (572). The principle of *time*, or honor, resonated widely throughout Greek culture, from the heroic narratives of epic poetry to Aristotle's political philosophy.¹⁷ With no brothers left to defend the family honor, this role would have naturally fallen to Antigone, and her actions are understandable in this context. Antigone's actions thus express familial love: "My nature is to join in love, not hate" (525). To be sure, Antigone's claim is complex: she speaks of familial kinship, but displays contemptible treatment of Ismene; she defends a brother who is guilty of fratricide; and she betrays a quasi-familial connection to Creon.¹⁸ But this does not undermine the ultimate coherence of her value system. When she is sentenced, the Chorus remarks that Antigone goes to her death with "distinction and praise" (817). Like Creon, Antigone expresses a core value within the ethical system of the classical worldview.

Unlike Creon, however, Antigone never betrays her principles. Antigone is not hypocritical, but rather excessively headstrong in her convictions. To this extent, Hegel's interpretation of Antigone is correct.

Whereas Creon acts as tyrant when claiming to speak for the public good, Antigone's words and deeds consistently reflect her love for Polyneices and her sense of familial honor. Even in the problematic passage in which Antigone acknowledges that she would disobey only for Polyneices, and not on behalf of a son or husband, she still asks, "What law backs me when I say this? . . . That is the law under which I gave you precedence, my dearest brother . . . What law of God have I broken?" (907–21).¹⁹ Antigone's refusal to share her deed with Ismene contains a selfish element, but could also be read as an honorable and heroic sacrifice for the good of her family. Antigone appeals to a narrow, even perverse conception of love that unnaturally prioritizes her brother, but she is consistent. Antigone's sense of conviction explains the source of the tragedy, but it does not fully undermine the sense that her cause is just.

At this point, one may understandably object to the apparent modernism of an interpretation of Antigone as a sympathetic heroine. Seen in the context of Athenian religious practices, many interpreters see Antigone as a paradigmatic figure for traditional religious piety, not radical democracy. According to this view, Antigone's appeal to custom and the "ancestral" makes her, rather than Creon, the "conservative" figure of the play.²⁰ From this perspective, Antigone's allegiance with the dead rather than the living could suggest a reactionary faith in custom and tradition against the forces of modernism and secularism embodied in the figure of Creon. This is, notably, Hegel's view of Antigone. As he writes of the unwritten laws, "They *are* . . . I have to think of making laws nor of testing them . . . By acknowledging the *absoluteness* of this right, I am within the ethical substance" (*PhG*, §437, 261). Antigone represents, for Hegel, an ethics based on absolute obedience to the pre-political customs and institutions of the family.

I do not regard it as necessary to resolve this question. As a drama rather than a character study, Antigone's principles are not the full story when it comes to the political lesson of the play as a whole. Sophoclean tragedy is simply too ambiguous and paradoxical to be read as representing any particular ideology. At the very least, even if Sophocles intends to vindicate Antigone's basic values, his treatment of the unwritten laws is too brief to say anything definitive about their precise content and how that content might be known. As Patrick Dineen argues, the drama as a whole is too complex for Antigone to simply "stand for" Sophocles's own political view.²¹ The lesson of the play is not to be found in the values of one character or another, but rather in the larger structure of the narrative as the characters are brought into conflict. Antigone's position is ultimately vindicated as correct, but the character's function is more dramatic than moralistic. Antigone's role is not to definitively vindicate

democracy or conservatism, pious religiosity or civil disobedience, except perhaps in the broadest non-ideological sense. Rather, as an outsider figure, Antigone challenges Creon's tyrannical speech. She opens up holes in Creon's value system, arouses the emotions of the audience, and facilitates the expansion of its sympathetic capacities. But does Antigone present a viable model of political speech?

As much as Sophocles intends for us to sympathize primarily with Antigone, she is not faultless. Antigone is, after all, a human being inhabiting Sophocles's tragic universe, and human flaws are what make tragic heroes compelling and capable of cultivating sympathy. However, as Hegel will show, Antigone is one-sided and headstrong. Perhaps more important, Antigone does not have Creon's tendency to engage in lengthy monologues, but she proves to be equally incapable of engaging in dialogue. She tends to speak in passionate outbursts rather than reasoned deliberation. Her language results in a series of heated exchanges that are chaotic and back-and-forth, first with Creon (505–26), and shortly thereafter with Ismene (539–70). She engages in all manner of hyperbole and insults her interlocutors (“Now, if you think me a fool to act like this, perhaps it is a fool (*moro*) that judges me so,” 469–70). In forcing the dialogue to break down, Antigone seems to spread the chaos to the normally cautious and reserved Ismene as she becomes moved to confront Creon in increasingly harsh terms: “Will you kill your son's wife to be?” (568). In all of these instances, Antigone demonstrates that she lacks the qualities of character that Haemon will describe as essential to political life: sensitivity to others, openness to deliberation, and the ability to yield. Within the structure of the play and the context of Creon's tyranny, Antigone's problematic qualities force a dramatic and political crisis.

Although Antigone appeals to a different kind of law than Creon's (one that is, in the end, proven to be superior), she, like Creon, sees morality in a rule-like and legalistic fashion. For Antigone, moral matters are not open to listening to and learning from others. Instead, moral conflicts are black and white—either they involve universal laws and are not subject to deliberation, or they do not involve universal laws and deliberation about them is unimportant.²² Antigone assumes that the principle of familial loyalty can be applied in a simple rule-like fashion to require the burial of Polyneices. Yet even if one takes for granted the priority of familial loyalty, Antigone's legalistic approach fails to recognize the complexity of the situation and forecloses possibilities for deliberation. Polyneices, implicated in the death of Eteocles, was a traitor not only to Thebes, but also to his brothers and sisters. While honoring Polyneices, burial could be considered disrespectful toward Eteocles. Burying Polyneices also leads Antigone into conflict with Ismene: Antigone says that

Ismene will be hated (*ekthion*) for not supporting her (86). Antigone appeals to the familial principle as if it could only yield one outcome, but, even granting Antigone's values, the reality is more complex.

In Antigone's near-Manichean worldview, deliberation with others is irrelevant at best and possibly harmful. In the very first scene with Ismene the suggestion is that Antigone's mind is already made up; she shows a good-faith commitment to discussing neither her interpretation of the moral law, nor possible alternatives to outright disobedience. There is no suggestion of coming before Creon to reconcile their differences; disobedience is Antigone's first instinct, not a last resort forced by circumstances. Once brought before Creon, her attitude toward him is antagonistic; she shows no sign of openness to consider his position, or any desire to engage him as an equal. During this confrontation the Chorus remarks, "The savage spirit of a savage father shows itself in this girl. She does not know how to yield to trouble" (471–73).²³ Although the Chorus expresses sympathy with Antigone shortly before her sentence is carried out, Antigone immediately gives the Chorus reason to qualify its sympathy. After the Chorus praises Antigone, she responds by daring to compare herself to Niobe, a goddess. When the Chorus tries to qualify the comparison, Antigone once again becomes antagonistic, leading to the Chorus's final assessment that Antigone bears at least partial responsibility: "it is your own self-willed temper that has destroyed you" (876–77). Ironically, when the Chorus was speaking with Creon it hid its sympathies; when its sympathies were finally voiced to Antigone, she antagonizes it into a change of mind. This is not to say that the final position of the Chorus is unsympathetic, but its feelings are conflicted and qualified. Antigone's lack of skill and interest in listening to others takes on a degree of irony: while Sophocles has been surprisingly successful at forcing his audience to expand its sympathetic capacities for a challenging and unconventional character, Antigone has herself refused to undergo any such process of civic education.

The structure of the *Antigone* has set up a conflict not only in ethical worldviews, but also in approaches to speaking and listening. In the context of a civic event, a competitive festival that is itself judged according to deliberative procedures, the classical audience would likely be skeptical of both Creon's tendencies toward tyrannical monologue and Antigone's contempt for political engagement. However, in the midst of the breakdown of civic speaking and listening, the audience should find Antigone's consistent appeals to honor more sympathetic than Creon's tyrannical words and deeds. This undermines Hegel's theory that tragedy ends in a harmonious reconciliation of both sides of the conflict. Instead, the audience is left with conflicted sympathy for a heroine who, regardless of her problematic qualities, has suffered injustice in the midst of a

crisis of communication. A complete account of the larger lesson of the play should account for both the political importance of civic speaking and listening, and for the ultimate tragic sense of sympathy with Antigone. To better understand the political implications of the play as a whole, I now turn to Haemon, a character who combines sympathy for Antigone with a concern for virtuous citizenship and the civic skills necessary to support a flourishing polis.

From Son to Citizen: Haemon and the Ideal of Active Citizenship

According to Apollodorus's later version of the Theban history, Haemon is killed by the Sphinx, before Oedipus solves the riddle and prior to the events of the Sophoclean trilogy.²⁴ Though Haemon may at first glance seem relatively insignificant in the Sophoclean version, he is, in contrast to alternative versions, at least present. Whereas Sophocles's accounts of Oedipus and Antigone simply fill in gaps that existed in previous versions, his account of Haemon's coming of age, his relationship to Antigone, and his break from Creon may have actually required a more radical effort of invention. Perhaps the audience would have been aware of the imaginative leap Sophocles was taking. This is especially strange, because if one regards the play exclusively as a conflict between Antigone and Creon, it would have been dramatically unnecessary to develop Haemon. If Sophocles was taking a risk in telling Haemon's story, to get a complete picture of the political implications of the play as a whole interpreters should consider why Sophocles might have gone through so much trouble. My focus on Haemon may at first seem a bit unorthodox; he speaks, by my count, only eighteen times in the play, and he has only one extended speech. Moreover, Haemon lacks any distinctively heroic qualities comparable to Antigone's defiance or Creon's apparent public-spiritedness. Nevertheless, I hope to show that Haemon's character, or *ethos*, and his growth during the confrontation with Creon, provide critical insight into the political lessons of the play.

From the perspective of members of the audience, Haemon, of all the characters, may be the most like them. If tragedy is a form of cultural education, it is especially important that Haemon is most like those who are particularly educable and in need of education: the young (male) citizens. It is often said that Greek tragedy, in comparison to modern drama, is "idealistic" in its portrayal of its characters. Haemon may indeed represent a democratic ideal, not in that he possesses any distinct excellence, but rather in that he is the archetypal and quintessential "normal guy." In the social hierarchy of Thebes, Haemon may be an up-

and-coming politician, but he is neither ruler nor outsider. As I will show shortly, a critical step in Haemon's development is to consult fellow citizens as he forms his own opinions on the conflict between his father and his fiancée. Perhaps most important, Haemon, as a typical citizen, is, like the audience, capable of education, as he demonstrates in the confrontation with his father. Haemon's is thus a "common" perspective: both in the sense that it is ordinary, not radically different from most others, and in the sense that it may potentially be shared with that of the audience. The corollary to Haemon's lack of heroic qualities is that there is nothing in his station or personality that would separate him radically from his audience.

Haemon's apparent insignificance may itself suggest against overlooking him. Sophocles, of course, is famous for his paradoxes and reversals of expectations: throughout his work, we see rulers of cities who end up as slaves to fate, men who claim to see who are in fact blind, blind men who are in fact seers, manly women and womanly men. It is probably going too far to suggest that beneath Haemon's apparent normalcy lies the most extraordinary character of the play, but initial appearances are always deceptive in the Sophoclean worldview. One should recall that Sophocles was noted for having introduced the third actor to Greek theater. Haemon would not have been played by a third actor, but his importance would fit into a Sophoclean pattern of decentering the lead characters and encouraging the audience to listen thoroughly—including to the marginal characters we are most tempted to overlook—to fully understand the lessons drama has to offer. The temptation to ignore Haemon, then, should at least give us pause, and may perhaps be reason to pay him all the more attention.

Creon's nature as a tyrannical ruler reveals itself, interestingly, not in direct confrontation with Antigone but rather with Haemon, and it is during this same scene that Haemon progresses from dutiful son to tragically engaged citizen. The confrontation scene begins with the son fully intending to consent to his father's decision. The Chorus introduces Haemon with a question: "Does he come grieving for the fate of his bride to be, in agony at being cheated of his marriage?" (628–30). Initially, at least, Haemon displays an absolute willingness to obey his father: "Father, I am yours (*sos eimi*); with your excellent judgment you lay the right before me, and I shall follow it" (635–36). Haemon further explicitly states that, as far as he is concerned, his father's will trumps his personal desire to marry Antigone: "No marriage will ever be so valued by me as to override the goodness of your leadership" (637–38). At this point, Creon orders Haemon to break from Antigone and support her death sentence. Creon explains his command based on a traditional conception of

patriarchal familial authority that parallels his tyrannical rule of the city. Haemon has come to his father in a spirit of at least apparent good faith, but Creon already starts to show his lack of flexibility and tendency toward anger. Haemon's appeal to obedience may be just a rhetorical device designed to make his argument more appealing, but it also dramatizes a childish and incomplete conception of citizenship. Here Haemon demonstrates the typical virtues associated with childhood in a patriarchal family. He does not seem to be particularly concerned at this point with serious ethical deliberation. Haemon confronts Creon neither with his anxieties about the questions of justice that Antigone has provoked, nor with the perspectives he has encountered in conversations with other citizens. Whether or not Haemon's appeal to obedience is sincere, the audience's first image in the confrontation is of a deficient conception of citizenship as submission to Creon's tyrannical rule.

Haemon's central speech can in part be understood as outlining a new conception of ethical deliberation as an alternative to Creon's tyrannical politics and Antigone's antipolitical disobedience. Haemon appeals to the traditional virtue of prudence, with a particular focus on deliberation with and yielding to others. In contrast with Creon's image of absolute authority, Haemon presents Creon with an image of political rule that is more flexible and tolerant of other perspectives:

A man who thinks that he alone is right (*monos dokei*) [and not anyone else],²⁵ or what he says, or what he is himself, unique, such men, when opened up, are seen to be quite empty. For a man, though he be wise (*sophos*), it is no shame to learn (*manthanein*)—learn many things, and not maintain his views too rigidly. You notice how by streams in the wintertime the trees that yield (*hypekei*) preserve their branches safely, but those that fight the tempest perish utterly . . .

Yield (*eike*) something of your anger, give way a little. If a much younger man, like me, may have a judgment, I would say it were far better to be one altogether wise by nature, but, as things incline not to be so, then it is good (*kalon*) also to learn (*manthanein*) from those who advise well (*legonton eu*). (707–23)

This moral hierarchy is an almost exact paraphrase of advice that the poet Hesiod gives to Perses in the eighth-century B.C. poem *Works and Days*.²⁶ At issue in Haemon's speech is what it means to learn, or *manthanein*. The moral hierarchy established by Haemon in this passage provides the outline of a workable model of ethical deliberation and is the closest Sophocles comes to an explicit statement of his political lesson. Similar to the way

Plato distinguishes between the “best” and “second best” regimes, Haemon’s moral epistemology centers on a distinction between absolutely ideal knowledge and the best possible knowledge that is attainable by human beings.²⁷ Absolute knowledge would consist of direct access to wisdom by nature (the sort of wisdom attained by Plato’s philosopher-king). This is the sort of knowledge that Antigone claims to have of the unwritten laws. But Haemon acknowledges that it is unreasonable to expect any human being to attain such wisdom, fallible as we are and prone to confuse our particular passions and interests with universal truths. The second-best but most practical sort of knowledge is public knowledge, knowledge that is produced through good-faith deliberation with others. Haemon acknowledges that this sort of knowledge falls short of the ideal, but for Haemon (and later Teiresias), ethical choices have a higher chance of being made correctly if made collectively. The least dependable kind of knowledge, at least on complex ethical issues, would be that arrived at without engagement with others—the kind of knowledge that both Creon and Antigone, in different ways, use to guide their actions.

Instead of following his own immediate impulses toward anger and vindictiveness, Haemon counsels Creon that practical wisdom contains two crucial elements. First, wisdom requires yielding, *eike*, the willingness to overcome one’s own inclinations (such as Creon’s tendency toward anger). One might say that, in the broadest sense, Haemon accuses Creon of lacking the “deliberate” aspect of practical wisdom. Creon’s failure to yield is a recurring theme throughout the *Antigone*, and indeed throughout Sophoclean tragedy. Creon should have been open to changing his mind, literally removing from his soul (*metastasin thymoi*) his inclination toward anger. Unable to do so, he does not even meet the minimal baseline intellectual skills to begin to learn and act in a way that is deliberate, even in the broadest possible sense. Second, thorough deliberation, for Haemon, requires an other-regarding element, in which ethical deliberation produces wisdom in a collective and collaborative process. Creon must not only be deliberate, he must be so in a certain way, such that he is able to learn (*manthanein*) from others. Though he is king, Creon should not suppose that he alone is right (*monos dokei*) and no one else. Here Haemon suggests that he may be himself wiser than his father, but he also highlights Creon’s failure to engage others throughout the play. Creon has ignored Antigone and the people of Thebes, and he will go on to ignore the advice of Teiresias, the wise prophet whose counsel Creon ultimately refuses. Only by engaging others in ethical deliberation can one become *kalon*, good, noble, or beautiful.

At this point, the Chorus commends Haemon for speaking equally as well as Creon: “My Lord, if he says anything to the point (*kairion legei*),

you should learn (*mathein*) from him, and you, too, Haemon, learn from your father. Both of you have spoken well (*eu gar eiretai diple*)” (724–27). Creon, however, does not take well to Haemon’s conception of practical wisdom. If Creon has any conception of practical wisdom at all, it at least excludes deliberation with others who have some kind of conventional inferiority. Not only does he refuse to yield to Antigone as a woman, Creon also absolutely rejects any possibility that as an elder he might still be able to learn from the youthful Haemon. As the conversation degenerates, Haemon thus completes his transitions to adulthood and responsible citizenship. Haemon again repeats his finding that the people of Thebes support Antigone. When Creon refuses to yield, Haemon (in language strikingly similar to Aristotle’s distinction between political and household rule) invokes the concept of the polis: “There is no city possessed by one man only” (737).²⁸ Creon’s inability to listen to others, Haemon continues, could only be suited to tyrannical rule (*archois monos*) over a desert island (739)—not participation in the life of a city, which is pluralistic by nature. Creon’s rigidity and lack of sensitivity to others is displayed shortly thereafter. Haemon attempts to warn Creon that he will commit suicide: “Then she must die—and dying destroy another” (751). Instead of sympathy for his son, Creon’s reaction is to perceive Haemon’s threat as undermining his authority. Finally, Haemon makes one last appeal to listening as the central skill of ethical deliberation and political membership: “You want to talk (*legein*) but never to listen (*kluein*)” (821). Creon had earlier used the same word in a way that attempted to command obedience; Haemon suggests another kind of listening more appropriate to genuinely political rule. To return to the themes of the first Choral Ode, the man who was expected to be *hypsipolis*, the most suited for political life, is now revealed to be the one who is the most *apolis*, the most incompatible with polis and its civic norms. As the scene concludes, Creon’s ethical inferiority is fully exposed, and Haemon’s coming of age is completed. Haemon, more than any of the other characters, has learned the distinctions between passive yielding, tyrannical rule, and active citizenship. Above all, Haemon has learned what it means to be a member of a genuine polis.

Teiresias, foreshadowed in Haemon’s counsel to listen to those who advise well, further reinforces Haemon’s appeal to a moral epistemology that is built on listening to others. Teiresias repeats Haemon’s advice, imploring Creon to listen to others, learn, and yield. Finally, Teiresias concludes his speech by repeating Haemon’s conception of practical wisdom almost word for word: “I mean you well. I speak well (*eu lego*). But to learn (*manthanein*) from one who speaks well (*eu legontos*) is sweet, when he speaks to your benefit” (1032–33). As it turns out, Teiresias is the *hyp-*

sipolis citizen foreshadowed by the first Choral Ode and the good speaker suggested in Haemon's speech. But only after Teiresias departs does Creon, convinced by the Chorus, finally have second thoughts, but then it is, of course, too late.

Haemon's story adds to the Athenian culture of speech an emphasis not only on speaking but also on the corresponding value of listening. In breaking from and speaking out against his father, Haemon has learned about the assertive side of citizenship. But, for Haemon, practical wisdom is also critically dependent on the presence of others. We cannot achieve practical wisdom as individuals; we can do so only as participants in a common process of ethical deliberation. As a result, this conception of practical wisdom is less an art of speaking oneself than one of recognizing the good speaker. At times, this requires a passive approach to citizenship, yielding (*eike*) to others. While Creon is a good speaker, he is radically deficient in these skills. Creon's inability to listen is at the heart of Haemon's eventual ethical superiority following their confrontation. Haemon's youth prevents Creon from recognizing a potential source of wisdom. Creon in his anger and fear of conspiracy is also prevented from seeing that Teiresias may be the good speaker. While Creon is unable to listen, Haemon's claim that the city is on Antigone's side hinges critically on his superiority in listening: "But what *I* can hear" (*emoi d'akouein*, 692). Haemon engages the opinion of the demos, and even after having done so, he remains open to further listening by asking to hear Creon's side and addressing him with the respect due a father and a king. It turns out that the good speaker must also be a good listener; in order to have spoken well, Creon would have had to listen to others. The potential of speech to provide public goods can be realized only if citizens have corresponding abilities of listening to and understanding others. This is what separates practical judgment that is "deliberate" in the broad sense from thorough ethical deliberation in the more robust public sense, a theme to which I will return in chapter 2. Although Haemon does not provide a completely worked-out political philosophy, his attention to the political value of and the ethical skills required for thorough listening to others offers at least the intimations of an ideal of citizenship.

To return to the Hegelian interpretation, by making Antigone not only an equal protagonist but also an equal villain, one result of the Hegelian reading is a purgation of sympathetic emotions. By contrast, my view retains an enduring role for the tragic emotions, and for a continued experience of sympathy for Antigone. Haemon's emphasis on the political value of listening is paralleled by sympathetic experiences of both the audience witnessing the drama and Haemon within it. For a moral epistemology based in listening to work, especially important will

be the ability to see from alternative perspectives. And for such a moral epistemology to be as thorough as possible, it would have to include the perspectives of outsiders. These, too, are civic skills in which Creon is radically deficient. Creon fails to identify with the perspectives of others in large part because he follows the prejudices of his day, excluding Haemon because of his youth and Antigone at least in part because of her gender, reifying both of their statuses as outsiders. Creon fails to sympathize not only with Antigone, but also with Haemon; he fails to take seriously Haemon's suicide threat because he sees it from a purely personal perspective as undermining his sovereignty. Haemon, by contrast, has come to sympathize with Antigone. Moreover, he has done so despite her outsider status, his kinship bond to Creon, and his own inclinations toward dutiful obedience to the state. By dramatizing Haemon's moral and intellectual development along with the sympathetic portrayal of outsider characters, Sophocles suggests that part of becoming a good speaker is not just listening generally but also listening in particular to outsiders like Antigone, people who provoke moral crises in seemingly coherent worldviews. This, in turn, can be supplemented by the expansion of citizens' sympathetic boundaries.

That Creon's failure was due to his lack of the "passive" virtues, however, does not mean that yielding is always the correct outcome of thorough deliberation. This is critical in differentiating Haemon's conception of citizenship from Hegel's institutional politics. Haemon's maturity is marked not only by his ability to yield to the better speaker, but also by his ability to speak out himself. His speech on the virtues of learning from and yielding to others is, ironically, a bold act of self-assertion against the patriarchal and tyrannical rule of Creon. By speaking out, Haemon, moreover, completes a reversal of his fundamental values. He rejects his earlier conceptions of familial and political membership as obedience to authority, and reverses his position on the justice of Antigone's cause. The assertive side of Haemon's model of citizenship is reinforced by the fact that, though her methods remain problematic, Antigone's interpretation of the moral law is ultimately vindicated. The "correct" resolution to the conflict would not have required yielding to or even compromising with Creon, but rather a mutual consensus around the justice of Antigone's cause. Considering Haemon's "active" virtues and Antigone's vindication, rather than a good in itself, it is more correct to say that yielding is a means to better speech and action. That is, yielding aims at speech that has benefited from the collective wisdom produced in conversation with others and that is reinforced by sympathetic identification with those who have been previously excluded outsiders on the margins of the polis. Such speech could support engaged