Critical Exchange

Tragedy, education, democracy: J. Peter Euben's Political Theory

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A Record Unwritten

Almost two years on, it is still unfathomable to me that Peter Euben (1939–2018) is no longer on this earth. He was not my teacher or colleague, although I learned from him every day of my life, and the best of what I am as an academic I owe to him (he should not, however, be held responsible for the rest). He was my father. And the loss of a parent is the loss of a world. So I am indebted to Jill Frank as editor and contributor, as well as to the other contributors to this Critical Exchange, for their ability to capture different parts of him in words, to testify to what he leaves behind in us, and to evoke, by example and argument, his insistence that we reflect critically upon the kind of lives we lead.

In both his life and work, my father found solace in what could be brought into being when we gather together to commemorate a person's life, commitments, and deeds. He wrote that, in Homer's *Iliad*, 'the gods sometimes stand aloof from human life, looking down on mortals as creatures of a day, as leaves that bloom for a moment and then fall to earth unremembered and unmourned. But mortals are not like leaves. For they can achieve immortality in the stories told about them after their death; stories of what they did, how they lived and loved, whom they cared for, what they valued most' (Euben, 1985). In recounting an event, sharing a memory, or honoring an intellectual and political legacy, humans have a second life on the lips of their loved ones and comrades, as well as friends and colleagues.

I would like to end with a quotation from a work my father treasured, Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War*, and to which he turned when memorializing his sister, who died too young. It is a hymn of praise to those with the capacity to live life with energy and intensity and love of the world. Such people, Thucydides writes, 'have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands and times far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breath a record unwritten, with no tablet to preserve it, except that of the human heart' (1982, p. 43). So in remembering Peter Euben here, we not only commemorate him. We also conjure him so that, in a sense, we enable him to live on.

Roxanne L. Euben

Pearl Diving

[D]eath is always a tragedy because it represents the loss of someone who is irreplaceable.

J. Peter Euben, *Platonic Noise* (2003, p. 172)

J. Peter Euben opens *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* (1997) with an extended epigraph from an essay by Hannah Arendt in *Men in Dark Times* (1968). The epigraph elaborates a practice of 'thinking, fed by the present' that 'works with the "thought fragments" it can wrest from the past and gather about itself' (Epigraph). Arendt describes this mode of thinking as 'the gift of *thinking poetically*' (Arendt, 1968, p. 205). She attributes it to Walter Benjamin, calling him, in a metaphor borrowed from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the 'pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange' (p. 205). Euben returns to this mode of thinking in *Platonic Noise*, where he attributes it to Arendt herself, and specifically to how she approaches 'the Greeks,' calling her the 'pearl diver whose aim is not to resuscitate the past or renew extinct ages, but to introduce crystallizations of rare beauty and profundity into the lives we share with each other' (Euben, 2003, p. 63).

Euben's description of Arendt applies equally to his own practice of thinking. A 'pearl diver' in his own right, Euben, like Arendt, turns to classical Athenian history, poetry, and philosophy 'to introduce crystallizations of rare beauty and profundity into the lives we share with each other.' Elaborated in the contributions to this Critical Exchange, these crystallizations include meditations on political freedom (P.J. Brendese), mortality (Karen Bassi), education (Jason Frank), theory (Joel Schlosser), and also on 'the lives we share with each other,' which is to say, politics itself (Arlene Saxonhouse). Closing the Critical Exchange is Tracy Strong's celebration of Euben's immense capacity for friendship, and a farewell.

The contributions take up, among other things, the ways in which Euben, if ambivalently (2003, p. 41), distances himself from what he calls the 'tempered romanticism' of 'Arendt's Hellenism' (p. 63), or what others refer to (less temperately) as Arendt's 'polis envy' (Wolin, 2015, pp. 30–69, echoing remarks made by Jean Elshtain at the 1988 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, cited in Scott and Stark, 1998a, p. 174). Committed to prying loose not only 'the pearls and the coral' (Arendt, 1968, p. 205) but also the imperialism (Euben, 1997, p. 205) and inequalities (Euben, 1978) of 5th- and 4th-century Athens and their specifically American legacies (Euben, 2002), Euben is a pearl diver and a well diver as well. From the Greek *phrear*, signifying a tank, pit, cistern, or reservoir (Liddell and Scott, 9th edn s.v. *phrear*) for storage or sewage

(Berger, forthcoming), the well diver also pries loose crystallizations of ugliness. To Plato's Socrates in the *Republic*, the capacity to recognize both beauty and ugliness is the mark of musical literacy (402c) – another name for what Arendt refers to as 'the gift of thinking poetically' (emphasis omitted).

Euben's practice of thinking underwrites his view of political theory. Focusing on the specific socio-historical and cultural contexts of the 'rich and strange' crystallizations of beauty and ugliness he pries loose, Euben also treats the ancient texts he studies as provocations for the present. He does not, however, seek to establish them as 'useful, relevant, easily accessible … [or] practical' (2003, p. 7), for, to Euben, a 'demand' for relevance above all 'presumes that education is and should be defined by what I am or we are now, rather than by what we might become' (p. 8). In favor of 'relevance of result and in the long run, not of intention or in the beginning' even if that sounds 'paradoxical' (p. 8), Euben's political theory thinks 'through the present without being presentistic' (p. 62) and seeks to open 'the present for real thinking, if not real political struggles' by making 'the everyday seem anomalous' (p. 63).

One important way that Euben wrests the rich and strange from the past to make the everyday seem anomalous is by emphasizing the plurality that he finds in both Arendt's work on the Greeks (2003, p. 62), and in the ancient texts themselves. For Euben, as for Arendt and the Greeks, 'men [*sic*], not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world' (Arendt, 1998b, p. 7). Thus, one key site of this plurality – where it is the condition of action – is the public and political space of appearances. Another key site is dialogue, a site of what, borrowing from Mikhail Bakhtin, Euben calls 'polyphony' (1997, p. 198). Indeed, to Euben, '[r]ecognizing the pluralizing and diversifying capacity of dialogue may be a necessary condition for recognizing and respecting the plurality of others' (p. 37).

Treating multiple spaces as sites of polyphonous dialogue – political publics, the streets, classrooms, texts – and moving among them, Euben's political theory performs its own poetic pluralization by putting ancient texts of history and philosophy in dialogue with ancient tragedy and comedy, and by situating ancient texts of all kinds alongside contemporary texts and thinkers in dialogues of mutual illumination. The polyphony of Euben's political theory thus destabilizes distinctions between private and public, past and present, everyday and extraordinary. Refusing any celebrations of the "'I" against despotisms of the "we"' (2003, p. 3, quoting Roth, 2000, pp. 120, 108), while underscoring that many get 'left out of the "we"' (2002, 710), Euben's political theory performs its pluralization in dialogue with Socrates and Arendt, two of Euben's most frequent interlocutors. He does so through two invitations he issues regularly across his scholarship: one is to ask 'Socrates' question "How shall we live?"'(2003, p. 171), which Euben pluralizes and also collectivizes by changing Socrates' 'I' to a 'we'; the other is by way of Arendt's prompt, in *The Human Condition*, 'to think what *we* are doing,' which Euben modifies by italicizing Arendt's already plural 'we' (p. 62). In another exemplification of poetic thinking that creatively connects Socrates and Arendt,

Euben maintains that Socrates' question 'creates an unbridgeable gap between the demand to take one's whole life into account in everything one does and the need to decide, to act, to forget,' a gap that 'in the collective version of the Socratic question – how shall we live, and what shall we do? – provides the space for political theory' (pp. 171–72).

As the practice of thinking what *we* are doing, how *we* shall live, what *we* shall do, political theory, as Euben understands and also practices it, is a provocation to theorize *and* act. Taking up what he refers to as the 'Socratic challenge' (1997, p. 93) and collectivizing *it* by focusing 'on who is acting and the need to remain a we in order to act in the future' (2002, p. 710), Euben's political theory advocates 'that ordinary men [*sic*] can rule themselves wisely and that it is possible and perhaps necessary to have "philosophical" citizens' (1997, p. 93). Endorsing a 'philosophical citizenship and politicized philosophy,' Euben argues that such 'paradoxical notions are made conceivable by a democratic culture' (p. 107), which, he specifies, must be a 'radical (as distinct from liberal) democracy' (pp. xiii, 234). Euben makes his case for the 'strong continuities of sentiment and purpose' he sees between democratic politics and political philosophy and for his stronger claim that democratic political culture is a necessary condition for intellectual critique (p. 93) through Socrates and/at Athens. He focuses on two particular fifth-century Athenian democratic institutions – the *dokimasia* and *euthunai* – which 'institutionalized self-reflection and self-critique' (p. 92) and 'helped constitute a culture of scrutiny and accountability which was itself part of a democratization of power and responsibility' (p. 93). Taking these institutions to be exemplified in some, though not all, Socratic practices of philosophy as these are depicted in the dialogues of Plato, Euben stresses that in Athenian democracy's 'culture of accountability,' accountability means 'more than elites being held accountable by the people; it is the people being accountable to each other and to themselves' (p. 97, footnote omitted).

For Euben, democracy makes 'power responsible by making it accountable' (1997, p. 97) and does so in two directions: 'from practice to philosophy' and 'from philosophy to practice' (p. 203). Key here is co-creating what Euben, drawing on Cornelius Castoriadis, calls a 'philosophical agora' (p. 105). This co-creation, in Euben's view, is the vocation of political theory, 'the vocation of a teacher of democratic student/citizens' (p. 41), and also an effect of the pluralizing dialogues he sees *in* and creates *with* ancient tragedians, comedians, historians, and philosophers, for whom 'the point is to stimulate argument and debate, to have Athenians become more thoughtful about what they had done and could do in the future' (p. 205). This is also the point of Euben's scholarship and pedagogy in relation to his own readers and students and in relation to the ongoing present, as the contributions to this Critical Exchange make plain.

Across Euben's *oeuvre*, in his reflections on contemporary American literature as well as in his writings on the texts and contexts of ancient history, philosophy, and drama, 'political and theoretical vision' and 'democratic politics' go together (p. 94).

Claiming, moreover, that '[o]nly if we recognize how pervasive an influence tragedy was can we appreciate how much theory took its form, content, and status from the critique of tragedy' (1990, p. 47), Euben finds especially in Greek tragedy, but also in present-day novels and 'thought fragments' that perform a tragic function perhaps the most important '"theoretical" counterpart and critical complement in the culture of accountability' (1997, p. 93). This does not lead Euben to claim that Aeschylus or Sophocles, or Don DeLillo or Philip Roth, or Thucydides, Plato or even Socrates, for that matter, was a democrat. To Euben, this is not a particularly interesting thing to say. Instead, Euben advances a position of openness to 'the resources for democratic readings and culture contained in [Plato's] dialogues' (p. 226), in ancient history and drama, and in contemporary American letters.

With and against interlocutors ranging from Arendt, Strauss, and Bloom to Vlastos and Irwin, from Barber, Wolin, Castoriadis, Connolly, Mouffe, and Bakhtin, to Walzer, Habermas, and Rawls, from Pynchon, Roth, DeLillo to Morrison and also Nietzsche, Euben finds in the plurality of texts he reads, and against all 'deflationary reading' (1997, p. 208), including the 'unholy alliance' he targets in *Corrupting Youth* 'between those conservatives who rely on … one-dimensional readings of classical texts to justify the cultural power they deny having, and those of their multi-cultural critics, who accept their readings and reject those texts based on them' (pp. xiv, 208), the 'superabundance of energy and transformative impulses ancient critics and modern defenders associate with Athenian democracy' (p. 209, footnote omitted). Thus does Euben's own practice of reading, like his political theory, and like democratic politics itself, rely on and also produce plurality, temporal and spatial dislocation, polyphony, accountability, and also and therefore, responsibility. Together these comprise Euben's 'tragic sensibility' or, perhaps, more accurately, his 'tragi-comic' sensibility, which George Shulman calls Euben's 'Groucho-Marxism' (2020).

Euben has indelibly shaped political theory in content and form, and also in ethos. A pearl diver and a well diver, Euben is decidedly not a well faller, a figure in Plato's *Theaetetus*, who, as what Harry Berger, Jr., has called 'the flying philosopher' (2015, pp. 131, 206), scorns the affairs of the city, pays no attention to his next-door neighbor, and is so intent on knowing the things in the heavens that he fails to notice what is right at his feet and falls into a well (174a–d). Refusing all gestures 'of contempt toward the world of becoming' (Euben, 2003, p. 97), including the rationalistic, prescriptive, and universalizing arguments about the world of 'Being' scholars sometimes associate with Plato, Euben's political theory understands that to turn knowledge or people into abstractions and/or to project 'moralism onto them' (p. 2) in the name of such 'godlike knowledge' (2002, p. 710) is to offer 'the wrong kind of argument': for doing that 'encourages misology, which in turn promotes misanthropy' (2003, p. 143).

Not a gesture of contempt toward the world of becoming, Euben's political theory is also 'not a preparation for death' (p. 97). Euben does not deny that 'the real ending is death' (p. 97), and this shapes his political theory in content, form, and

ethos, to be sure. But his awareness that we will die simultaneously insists on 'an affirmation of life,' an affirmation he defines in terms of resistance: 'resistance means life: of a text, its readers/interlocutors, and its argument' (p. 97). As the practice of thinking what we are doing, what we shall do, and how we shall live, Euben's political theory puts resistance at its center. This resistance, 'of a text, its readers/interlocutors, and its argument,' underwrites Euben's commitments to polyphony in dialogue, temporal plurality, spatial dislocation, and, against what Bonnie Honig also rejects as 'mortalist humanism' (2013, pp. 26–33), his commitment to human mortality as well.

In *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt writes: 'Any period to which its own past has become as questionable as it has to us must eventually come up against the phenomenon of language, for in it the past is contained ineradicably, thwarting all attempts to get rid of it once and for all. The Greek *polis* will continue to exist at the bottom of our political existence – that is, at the bottom of the sea – for as long as we use the word "politics"' (1968, p. 204). Acutely aware of the 'power' (Euben, 2002, p. 711) of language and of how 'language and culture constitute each other' (Euben, 1990, p. 210), Euben maintains, referencing Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, that it is often 'the beauty of language [that] makes it possible to confront and feel … ugliness and injustice' (2002, p. 711). Bringing forth the beauty and ugliness of the Greek *polis*, Euben's political theory explores what sits at the bottom of our political existence. It does so not as a 'bottom feeder,' but rather by attending to how language, both powerful and precarious, is, to borrow words from Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, 'mostly … agency … an act with consequences' whose fate lies in 'our' hands, by which she means, as does Euben, those of present and future generations. Enlivening language in its institutional, cultural, and social multiplicities and through a plurality of tragic, comic, historical, philosophic, and, above all, poetic genres, Euben's political theory, in its synthetic creativity, affirms a political life in a philosophical agora that we might yet, with humanity, make together.

Jill Frank

Political Freedom

Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (2004, pp. 111–112)

Popular imaginings of freedom evoke the free market, empty green meadows and happy endings. Actual experiences of political freedom are burdened with thorny questions about how to live a fully human life in the company of others. Against sentimental, triumphalist, 'cue-the-music' visions of American freedom as purified

of history, J. Peter Euben challenges his audiences to consider freedom as imbued with tragic impurities. Of his classroom audiences he repeatedly asked: 'what freedom do you *think* you have?', and 'what are you going to do with your freedom?' Those with the courage to consider such questions can be threatened with a paralysis of analysis – a potential unfreedom unto itself insofar as it pre-empts action. Still other traps await those who presume that freedom amounts to little more than choosing from the menu of existing life options that come precooked by historically entrenched norms and social pedigree.

Against liberal traditions of negative liberty as *freedom from*, Euben's writing and teaching prompt a reconsideration of the resources that are required to make freedom meaningful, taking seriously the position of the emancipated bondsmen, whom Martin Luther King, Jr., likened to prisoners being released from prison without money to get to town (King, 1991, p. 271). To fortify political freedom with meaning and content, Euben insists that political theory's many analyses of *power over* be supplemented by theorizing freedom in terms of *power with*. Playing on the 'theorist' as the Greek *theōros*, loosely translated as 'one who travels in order to see,' Euben travels with a range of sources, authors and traditions in an effort to acknowledge the burdens of freedom, and thereby render freedom more bearable by engaging it collectively – thus making it more political (1990, p. 232). Euben draws sustenance from philosophical and literary texts spanning the ancient and contemporary worlds, whose authors speak to the entwined politics and tragedy of the human condition. Euben's literary sources are theoretical interlocutors beyond the familiar sense of tragedy as signifying a fated future or dramatizing unfortunate (if avoidable) outcomes. They serve a tragic function as a vehicle of democratic education capable of holding up a cracked mirror to the polity, with the power to disclose the very fictions about freedom that inhabit – and inhibit – their readers. In this function, contemporary, and especially American, literature is, for Euben, akin to the ancient Greek tragedies performed at the festival of Dionysus.

In what follows, I attend to the agonistic solidarity Euben finds in American literary texts in the face of political freedom's tragic impurities. In his writing and teaching about Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, Euben confronts the underside of American freedom as parasitic on a disavowed past of racial atrocity and bedeviled by an insufficiently examined legacy of Puritanism. The shadow cast by the nation's Puritan descent and its soiled imprint on American desire and political imagination are the corrupting impetus for *The Human Stain*, which Euben takes up in the opening of *Platonic Noise* (2003, pp. 1-5). Central to the narrative is the comeuppance of Coleman Silk, who, in an effort to enact freedom as *freedom from* historical conditions, disavows his African-American family and passes for a white Jewish intellectual. This staging allows the novel to reflect upon American freedom as the capacity to become white – an achievement figured in the novel as racial purity coextensive with freedom from the past.

Coleman becomes a classics professor, only to be undone by the charge of racism when he wonders aloud if two absent students are 'spooks.' The missing students turn out to be African-American, and Coleman is forced to resign his position. The ordeal kills his wife, who dies never knowing her husband's background. As Euben points out, in Coleman, Roth evokes Oedipus, the tragic archetype of heroic self-fashioning who was also convinced that his intellect would allow him to escape his past, and who likewise ran headlong into it. Yet Euben does not read *The Human Stain* as an Oedipus reboot, and there is more to the story than a generative interplay between classical texts and contemporary politics and theory. As a classicist, Coleman *really* knows Sophocles' *Oedipus*, but that knowledge cannot save him from his fate. Rather, what that knowledge and fate entail is elemental to the tragic sense of political freedom that Euben advances.

Euben writes that Coleman 'had decided to forge a distinct historical destiny, only to be ensnared by a history he had not counted on. And it could not be otherwise insofar as one's fate is constituted by one's past deeds and words, which forge an identity and character over time and through action' (2007, p. 3). The lessons Euben draws do not amount to a sentence of nihilistic determinism – they enjoin a deeply reflective modesty in the face of what we think we can know about the conditions of our lives that are 'never transparent to us' (2007, p. 8). The point is not that people do not, or cannot, change. To the contrary, we are embedded in a world in flux that is 'always out of joint because we are becoming someone other than we were a moment ago, though the trajectories of such changes are distinctive and allusive' (2007, p. 4). The problem is presuming that one can know future vectors of change ahead of time, a presumption that betrays an attachment to temporal purity and willfully neglects 'the untidiness of reality' (2007, p. 6) in the present. Thus, in view of what Roth calls our 'elemental imperfections' (Roth, 2000, p. 242), the title phrase of his novel – *The Human Stain* – is, as Euben elaborates, the desire for purity itself. The quest for, and belief in, purity amounts to a desire to escape the very humanity that makes freedom political. It is difficult to fathom a less tragic sensibility than the quest for purity, and Euben reads *The Human Stain* as a 'protest and polemic against purity: the epistemology of it, the culture of it, and the political consequences of it' (2007, p. 2).

Attachment to purity tempts a circular fate in the form of existential resentment toward a world that refuses to bend perfectly to our thoughts and will – an attachment bound to the interminable desire to escape the human condition whose limits stoke resentment anew. The fact that Coleman sees himself as a self-made man, untethered even to whiteness, ironically makes him all the more white – at least performatively. According to the mother Coleman metaphorically kills through disavowal, Silk always sought to escape his family and historicity. She declares, 'There was something about us that impeded you, and I don't mean color. You think like a prisoner. You do, Coleman Brutus. You're as white as snow and you think like a slave' (Roth 2000, p. 139). What his mother knows, and her brilliant son does not,

is that slavery can assume forms both embodied and psychic, that freedom has dangers of its own, and that when freedom is conceived in terms of *freedom from*, the past has a way of overtaking us and lying in wait to stage an ambush.

Euben resonated with these tragic insights and sensibilities and carried them into the classroom in the context of his course *Political Freedom*. There he challenged students to consider that we are never more like our parents than when we insist on our difference from them, and that they no doubt made the same assertion about *their* parents. Over the twenty years that Euben taught the course, it grew to be the largest class at the University of California-Santa Cruz, enrolling upwards of 650 students in 2001. With members of the surrounding community often in attendance, it was itself a political occasion: Euben would take students' questions, and, as in the Athenian assembly, insist that they argue and defend opposing positions in front of an audience of hundreds. In addition to figures like Plato, Arendt, Sophocles, Marx, and Malcolm X, Euben's syllabus for this course also included literatures ranging from Dostoyevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* to Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* and Derek Bell's *Space Traders*. In the course, the haunted, formerly enslaved characters and community of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* featured prominently. Euben introduced the text with reference to Euripides' *Trojan Women,* whose characters he presented as among the earliest expositors of *freedom with*.

Coleman Silk's mother's challenge that Coleman, though ostensibly free, thought 'like a slave' took on multiple valences in the context of *Beloved*. The novel's protagonist, Sethe, spends her days haunted by the ghost of the daughter she killed to spare her from the living death of slavery. Her friends tell her that her love is 'too thick,' that hers was a failure to 'love small' (2004, pp. 239, 260), and that she should restrain her attachments, since her loved ones could be taken from her at any minute. Better to love everything just a little, lest you be given over to despair in the wake of loss. To Euben, *Beloved* brought to light how the freedom to love wholeheartedly is haunted by the risky possibilities of being forever changed by loss and even irreparably broken. Still, he insisted, the admonishment to 'love small' begs unruly questions: what if the presumption that we have the power to choose whom, and how much, to love is itself a dangerous fiction? Given that humans are creatures of memory and desire, what does 'claiming ownership of [a] freed self,' in Toni Morrison's words, amount to? Raising and also resisting captivity to such queries, Euben read and taught Morrison as offering a powerful sense of solidarity and community diametrically opposed to the kind of freedom imagined and enacted by Coleman Silk, a freedom that entails a willingness to act with others on behalf of what he called, borrowing from Hannah Arendt, a 'public happiness' (Arendt, 1990, pp. 128, 133).

Euben discerned such a political freedom in *Beloved*. I quote at length, recalling Euben's insistence that the passage be read aloud out of respect for one of the twentieth century's great literary works:

> Sethe had had twenty-eight days – the travel of one whole moon – of unslaved life. From the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days. Days of healing, ease and real talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better. One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day. That's how she got through the waiting for Halle. Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself (2004, p. 111).

The political freedom Euben saw dramatized in Morrison's text is one in which the weight of histories and memories too heavy to bear in isolation can become occasions of possible healing brokered by the 'real talk' of putting one's story down next to that of others (2004, p. 322). For Euben, the art of storying one's struggles and insoluble contradictions through a shared language evinces the authority of authorship – a human expression of freedom to speak creatively to an unmasterable condition. This is a practice of freedom that is at once tragically modest and absolutely indispensable insofar as it enjoins a democratic political imagination, wherein stories of tragedy might not always be *mere* tragedies. In Euben's words, 'while it is true that a tragic sensibility precludes the idea of redemption, the beauty of its poetry provides a redemptive moment by transforming suffering and loss into a story of human endurance' (2003, p. 94). As Euben contended in the final lecture of the course, *Beloved* shows how the 'beauty of language makes it possible to confront and feel the ugliness and injustice of slavery while redeeming the human spirit in the face of gratuitous cruelty' (2002, p. 711).

In Euben's classroom, as in his scholarship, shared sorrow opens onto teaching, learning and mutual enrichment, in which there is a joint refusal to either be dominated by the past (for Euben, a counterpolitical nostalgia, trauma, self-immolating regret, haunted melancholia) or to forget it (an equally counterpolitical amnesia) (2003, pp. 14–39). Evoking a politics of agonistic solidarities within a community of others as key to claiming ownership of a free self, Euben intimates, Morrison's text conveys a tragic vision of political freedom as freedom *with*. Through their capacity to expand the lexicon of options available for how to grapple with freedom intellectually and decide what to do with it politically, others have the potential to unlock the talents and skills we might never have imagined or cultivated on our own. Euben speaks to this dynamic in *Corrupting Youth*, where he writes that 'slavery is dispersal; liberation being among friends,' and that 'independence presupposes mutual dependence, autonomy rests on what is shared, and freedom is a function of equality' (1997, p. 72). A terrible irony of tragedy is its capacity to be a brutal equalizer, while also showing us how our previous explanations of how the

world works no longer apply theoretically, which can make us receptive to new questions, political alliances and companions (2003, pp. 85–111).

Euben would often conclude *Political Freedom* asking, 'Who are your companions' on this journey? We might answer with a Socratic question: if freedom requires others to make it meaningful, how, then, to discern those who might be good traveling companions? In keeping with the notion that freedom is a practice, Euben lived the answer to this question on the page and in the classroom through the sustained, patient, critical responsiveness that made him an empowering exemplar of freedom with others (Coles *et al*., 2014, pp. vii-36). J. Peter Euben lives on as a powerful traveling companion for those who ask how we should think and act on behalf of freedom in our own tragic times, in solidarity with past travelers and with those yet to come.

P.J. Brendese

Practicing Death

J. Peter Euben's body of work provides lasting insight into the ways in which human mortality is a critical variable in analyzing both Greek tragedy and Greek philosophy. Euben helps us understand how the prospect of death is the source for constituting a 'self' in the company of others, for exploring life's ethical possibilities and conundrums, for understanding tragic spectators as survivors, and for approaching Platonic philosophy as a *post mortem* response to the death of Socrates.

Euben died before I had a chance to discuss with him Socrates' startling claim in the *Phaedo* that the philosophical life is the practice of 'dying and being dead' (64a). How is it possible to square this equation with Socrates' arguments for the immortality of the soul? Euben mentions this 'practice' in *Platonic Noise*, where he notes almost in passing that 'There is something unsatisfying about the *Phaedo's* "arguments."' (2003, p. 155). This dissatisfaction is grist for analytical philosophers, for whom it is the result of faulty logic. For Euben, reading the dialogue together with Don DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise*, it is the means of engaging with its narrative of 'hope and consolation' (2003, p. 156). As a response to what Zygmunt Bauman calls the human paradox of 'living with death' (1992, p. 12), Euben's conclusion that the *Phaedo* is aporetic attests to the extent to which death's prospect is 'unsatisfying'. In what follows, I continue my unfinished conversation with Euben about this paradox via a proposed ethical link between the critique of tragic imitation (*mimêsis*) in the *Republic* and the account of Socrates' death in the *Phaedo*, a link forged in the practice of 'likening oneself to another' (*Republic* 605b).

I want to begin, however, by acknowledging Euben's sustained commitment to interdisciplinary work long before 'interdisciplinarity' was co-opted by university administrators with their eyes on the bottom line. In traversing the boundaries

between classics and political theory, Euben took risks in the service of exploring the relationship between the emergence of democracy in Athens and the emergence of political theory in the west. In *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken*, Greek tragedy is the nexus of this relationship:

> Freed from the urgencies of making immediate decisions, as in other institutional settings, tragedy encouraged its citizen-audience to think more inclusively about the general pattern implicit in their actions. In this way it was a theoretical as well as political institution. (1990, p. 56)

Euben's work also anticipates the recent belated call to decolonize the classics, i.e., to put the discipline in its historical, ideological, and political place by de-centering its inherent biases. Euben insists upon the principle that one's 'critical standards. . . are derived from what one criticizes' (1990, p. 230) and thereby alerts us to the fact that arguing for the 'relevance' of the classics can be a way of corroborating its exceptionalism. In response, he posits a theoretical confrontation with the regimes of power and truth in Greek tragedy. In his succinct formulation, 'Tragedy is distinctive in its interrogation of the achievement to which it contributes' (1990, p. 35).

This distinctiveness is powerfully demonstrated in Euben's refusal to read the end of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as 'the triumph of speech, reason or justice' (1990, p. 88). Rather, he argues, the end of the trilogy forces us to go back to its beginning and to come to terms with the retributive murders – the serial deaths – that drive it. The process he describes is dialogical rather than teleological. As he concludes, 'the trials [people] experience are the most powerful teachers of political wisdom and the firmest support for political justice. Without them, intelligence and understanding are impotent' (p. 89). For Euben, living a political life is the antidote to the bare options of no life or a short life (I will return to this point below). And political theory is not a cold abstraction, but the basis – first among other things – for coming to terms with the causes and consequences of claiming, inhabiting, and losing an identity.

Euben's arguments in *The Tragedy of Political Theory* are made in alliance with 'those groups and writers who emphasize the decentralization of the state and economy, who are concerned with environmental and feminist issues, the right to unalienated labor, ethical pluralism, and human rights in opposition to the usual focus on the distribution of material goods by the welfare state' (1990, p. 11). His chapter on Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, read in light of Hannah Arendt's description of the plight of the modern exile, exemplifies this alliance. Long before the current immigration crisis, the play was for Euben a commentary on identity, tyranny, and displacement in a global context. As he shows, the price of Oedipus' theoretical knowledge (expressed in answering the riddle of the Sphinx) is to learn whose child he is and to become an outcast as a result. Oedipus thus characterizes the condition of being caught between a fixed identity (the claim of the tyrant) and an unstable one (Oedipus the king becomes Oedipus the beggar). In the language of

the play, he is at once the one man and the many men who are reported to have killed Laius at the crossroads. Euben argues that the promise of democracy – if not its reality – is mediated between these two forms of identity, i.e., between the singular and the plural. This promise is also mediated by the myriad ways in which citizens face their own deaths and the deaths of others.

At the end of *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the chorus state that Oedipus' life proves that 'no mortal should think that he is happy until he has passed the final limits of his life secure from pain' (*OT* 1529–1530). The bookend for this pessimistic view is found in *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles' last and posthumously produced play. There, positioned between the acts he unknowingly committed in life and the death he knows is imminent, the old and disabled Oedipus tests the validity of the adage – again stated by the chorus – that it is best never to have been born or, having been born, to die as quickly as possible (*Oedipus at Colonus* 1225–1240). Euben offers a response to this adage by reference to an epistemological conundrum that troubles both Sophocles and Socrates or, more broadly, both tragedy and philosophy (1990, p. 105):

> It is because [humans] are victims as well as shapers of their fate that human life retains an opacity immune to the greatest minds and most decisive actors. Recognition of this is, as both Sophocles and Socrates suggest, an acknowledgement of mortality and so the foundation of human knowledge.

Here Euben confirms the paradoxical quality of this knowledge, i.e., its basis in what is ultimately unknowable (the experience of being dead). He also suggests that epistemology and ethics – in both Sophoclean tragedy and Platonic philosophy – are founded on a seeming contradiction, namely, that death is at once an object of absolute ignorance (*amathia*) and of abiding fear (*phoberos*) (Plato, *Apology* 29a-b).

In contrast to Aristotle's belief in its mimetic mitigation in the *Poetics* (1448b), the fear of death is a principal source of Plato's critique of tragic *mimesis* in the *Republic* (386a–b). Illustrated by examples from Homer, this fear is induced by scenes of lamentation and frightful descriptions of the underworld (387a–c). Such poetry, Socrates tells Adeimantus, will weaken the guardians' courage and should be 'wiped out' in the ideal state (386c). This examination of proscribed poetry then leads to examples of lies about the words and deeds of heroes and gods that are 'harmful to those who hear them' (391e). Such lies are measured against political and ethical criteria and have the effect of undermining the hearer's self-sufficiency (*autarkês*, 387d) and self-control (*sôphrosunê*, 389d–e).

In these passages, stories about the deaths of others (Achilles in the underworld in the *Odyssey*, for example, 386c) are the primary stimuli to fearing one's own death. This connection is elaborated when Socrates discusses poetic depictions of a man's 'wailings and lamentations' over the death of a friend (387d–e), where eliminating such depictions in the 'purified city' of *Republic* 5 is an implicit means of deferring or forestalling lamentations over one's own certain death. As a defining event of

mortal life, the death of another person presents something of a paradox in which the experience of an absolute alterity (death) is the source of an ethical relation. This relation is the principal effect of witnessing the deaths of others in tragic performance, where the frame of the theatrical event both distills and mitigates its effects in the process of turning tragic spectators into survivors. In doing so, it validates Euben's insistence that the content of tragedy and philosophy cannot be dissociated from their form, i.e., from the fact that both the philosopher and the poet speak – as Socrates says in the *Republic* – 'as if he were someone else' (393c).

In the *Republic*, Socrates moves from the content of poetry to the various forms of poetic speech (*lexis,* 392c–398b), again beginning with examples from Homer. Such imitations include both the *schêma* (appearance or gestures) and the *phônê* (the sound of the voice) of this other person. *Mimêsis* thus refers both to what a human character says (the content of his or her speech) and to the physical attributes of his or her voice and appearance. It is under this description of 'likening oneself to another' that tragedy and comedy come to be banned from the city of *Republic* 5 (605b) while Plato's own mimetic prose is implicitly spared.

Scholarship on Book 3 of the *Republic* has focused on the question of the political and ethical effects of *mimêsis* in educating the guardians and on how to assess the mimetic qualities of Plato's own work. In conversation with Euben, I would like to pose a different question, namely, how do we get from averting the fear of death in the guardians to the expulsion of imitative poetry from the state? While we might agree that Socrates' assessment of *mimêsis* is idiosyncratic, this only reinforces its importance in Plato's account of philosophy as a way of life. Culminating in Socrates' sustained if 'unsatisfying' arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, and accompanied by myths of an afterlife in both dialogues, that account involves a complex interaction between the fact that humans are mortal (exemplified in confronting the fear of death) and the practice of *mimêsis* (described as likening oneself to another in body and voice).

The causes and consequences of the fear of death are central to the *Phaedo*, which takes place in an Athenian prison on the day Socrates is to be put to death. It is in the context of this pivotal event that Socrates makes the startling claim that the philosophical life is the practice of 'dying and being dead' (64a):

> Other people are likely not to be aware that those who pursue philosophy in the right way practice nothing but dying and being dead. Now if this is true, it would be absurd to be eager for nothing but this all their lives, and then to be troubled when that came for which they had been eagerly practicing for a long time (trans. Fowler, 1966, with some modifications).

While somewhat equivocal ('if this is true'), Socrates reiterates and expands upon this point further on in the dialogue (67e; cf. 81a):

> Those who philosophize in the right way practice dying, and death is less fearful (*phoberon*) to these men than to other men.

If, as Euben and others have demonstrated, Socrates' arguments for the soul's immortality are compromised in the *Phaedo*, the one indisputable fact is the certain and irreversible death of the human body. Somewhat paradoxically then, practicing death – as the practice of leaving the body behind – is both the antidote to fearing death and the point of ethical reckoning in Socrates' account of what it means to practice philosophy in the 'right way' (*Phaedo* 80d–81a).

In the powerful scene at the end of the *Phaedo*, Phaedo states that after Socrates had drunk the hemlock, 'I wept for myself (*emauton*), but certainly not for that one' (*ekeinon*)' (117c). Here weeping for oneself in the face of the death of another is expressed in the interplay of reflexive and demonstrative pronouns, where even Socrates can be referred to by the colorless 'that (other) one.' Phaedo further explains that he weeps 'in spite of myself' or, more literally, by forcing (*bia*) himself to weep. The act of weeping for oneself in spite of oneself both emphasizes Socrates' courage in refusing to weep in the face of his own death and, by contrast, the persistent fear of death among his companions. Here the act of weeping for oneself also demonstrates how the death of another person is the source of contemplating one's own death and, by extension, of evaluating one's own life.

Following the myth of the afterlife in the *Phaedo*, Socrates concludes that the man whose soul has not been corrupted by his body 'awaits the journey to Hades which he is ready to walk whenever destiny calls him' (115a). He then goes on to say – somewhat oddly – that destiny is calling him 'as a tragic man might say' (115a):

> Even now, as a tragic man might say, destiny calls me; and it is just about time for me to go take a bath; it seems better to drink the poison after having bathed, and not to give the women the task of washing a corpse.

This appeal to what a 'tragic man' might say is unique in Plato. In reflecting upon his own dead body as an object of care, Socrates engages in a form of alienation that is at once ontological (treating his living body as if it were dead), temporal (subverting the normal sequence of Greek funerary rites), and grammatical (referring to himself in the third person). Compounded by the fact that the historical Socrates was already dead by the time the *Phaedo* was composed, the dialogue presents the relation of the self to another – and the more challenging notion of the self *as* another – as a relation of the living to the dead. What a tragic man might say, in other words, refers to the ethical effects of 'likening oneself to another.'

In his chapter on the *Republic* in *The Tragedy of Political Theory*, Euben confronts this relation of the living to the dead, even though – or perhaps precisely because – 'likening oneself to another' is the basis of the Platonic *critique* of tragedy. Euben locates Socrates' banishment of tragedy from Glaucon's *kallipolis* within the dialogue's implicit indictment of that utopian ideal. In his reading of the

Phaedo in *Platonic Noise*, Euben describes this likeness in terms of a shared epistemological failure:

> Socrates' doubts about philosophy and his turn to poetry [in the *Phaedo*] may represent a recognition of the compatibility or even similarity between the two and suggest that he was too harsh in his condemnation of poetry and too confident in believing that philosophy could do what the poets could not – provide a full account of what they were saying (p. 139).

This failure, the consequence of attempting to give a full account of Socrates' death, sheds additional light on Socrates' identification with what a tragic man might say. In the end, Platonic (political) philosophy and Attic tragedy are in a relationship of likeness to one another, a likeness confirmed in the recognition of others and structured by what Euben calls 'the constant proximity of loss' (1990, p. 273):

> [Both tragedy and philosophy] confront the possibility that their fondest hopes may be exaggerated or even pernicious, raise a paean to reason only to answer with a chorus about reason's insufficiency, [and] assert the capacity and necessity of mind to interpret, shape, and control experience while recognizing the tyranny implicit in that hope (1990, p. 274).

The fear of death reinforces these competing claims and, in the process, mediates and diminishes the divide between oneself and others. The formal expression of this process and the source of its ethical content is scripted dialogue – the speech of the dead – that tragedy also shares with Platonic philosophy. Euben distills this process as follows, 'To be a member of a just community is to …give one a place and home where one's words and deeds are honored in life and commemorated in death' (1990, p. 43).

Karen Bassi

Democratic Education: Political Science, Philosophy, and Aesthetics

Soon after receiving his PhD in Political Science from the University of California-Berkeley in 1968, J. Peter Euben published an essay titled 'Political Science and Political Silence' (1970). Euben had been actively involved in the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley during his graduate years, and this remarkable essay grew out of his experience as a student activist studying political science in the 1960s. It also built upon the work of his 'Berkeley School' teachers – Norman Jacobson had published 'Political Science and Political Education' a few years earlier in the *American Political Science Review*, and Sheldon Wolin had just published the soon-to-be-canonical 'Political Theory as a Vocation' in the same journal (Jacobson, 1963; Wolin, 1969).

Like Jacobson and Wolin, and behind them Thomas Kuhn, Euben was concerned with how the reigning social scientific paradigms of positivism and behavioralism, with their rhetorical and heavily value-laden appeals to the politics of 'the real world,' on the one hand, and their reification of the data of existing 'democratic systems,' on the other, threatened, through the political education they provided, to become what Euben called 'a series of self-fulfilling prophecies' (Euben, 1970, p. 17). 'Social scientists actually help make their objects of study what they are,' he wrote, 'so that the studies of their manufactured material redundantly confirms their science' (p. 17). The problem of this recursive feedback loop – how we become what we study – was not simply epistemological or methodological, Euben insisted, but deeply political, because in its claims to be objective, value neutral, post-ideological etc., the emerging paradigms of the discipline naturalized the political *status quo*, quietly investing researchers and their students in a particular way of doing things politically and captivating them with a certain narrow picture of political reality. 'Normal science,' Euben argued, requires and must remain invested in 'normal politics' (p. 40). It was precisely the cost in this investment – its silence, its failure to engage and comprehend the radical challenges to the political *status quo* going on at the time on university campuses and in the surrounding world – that Euben addressed in this first published work. In his words, political science failed to provide a genuinely 'democratic education' because it blunted 'our sensibilities to any form of politics except the kind particularly suited to behavioral analysis': in pursuing the carefully calibrated measurement of political *behavior*, it was incapable of attending to the vicissitudes of political *action* (p. 45).

Already in this early text, then, Euben was concerned with a set of interrelated questions that would animate his work across his entire career: the complicated entanglement of power and knowledge, the urgent need to provide political perspectives beyond the horizon of consensus liberalism, the radical resources of popular culture (he began and ended even this most social scientific of his essays with an insightful reading of a contemporary play), and, perhaps most centrally, the meaning of a truly *democratic* education. This last term may conjure the civic-minded inculcation of democratic values – some nefarious neo-Rousseauian project of forming a virtuous people – but that is not what he meant by it. Euben shared his interest in democratic education with some of his teachers at Berkeley, but none of them explored the political and theoretical contours of this question with the breadth, nuance, and passionate complexity that Euben did in his research. He eventually found his primary resources for thinking through the problem of democratic education in his surprisingly accidental turn to the ancient Greeks once he started teaching at Santa Cruz. 'These seemingly archaic texts,' he would realize, 'could give you a radical perspective on the present' (In memoriam, 2018). The archive of ancient Athens became a potent way of fighting against what Euben – following Thomas Pynchon, following the second law of thermodynamics – called the entropy of a degraded, flattened, and homogenizing political discourse disconnected from

the political urgency of lived experience (Euben, 1990, pp. 289–291). If political science was failing the task of a democratic education, what resources could be called upon to extend and enrich it? I take this question, and Euben's spirited responses to it, to be a continuous preoccupation of his work, from his earliest writings on the methodological debates in contemporary political science, through his influential body of scholarship on ancient Greek tragedy and political theory, through his engagements with such contemporary novelists as Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo, and on to the unfinished book he was writing in the final years of his life on utopian literature and Thomas More.

Philosophy – the living of an examined life – was an essential part of what Euben meant by a democratic education. The dialogical reflexivity exemplified by the Socratic *elenchus* was for him a public and political practice of citizenship, not a form of moral individualism. It offered a shared orientation in taking critical responsibility for a common world. It modeled a form of public speech and engagement that was open to critical debate and discussion, but also to irony and estrangement, parody and paradox. The democratic education provided by what Euben understood as a public practice of philosophy did not offer what Wolin once called 'gifts to the demos,' principles or rules that saved the people from the difficult tasks and responsibilities of democratic judgment and democratic action (Wolin, 1996). It instead offered a more complex and many-sided view of the dilemmas that emerge from pursuing a collective life as free and equal citizens in a democratic polis.

Rather than conceive of philosophy as an activity reserved to the elite few, and set in a fundamentally antagonistic relationship to democracy – an antagonism often taken to be paradigmatically captured in the death of Socrates, which Euben returned to repeatedly across his work – he emphasized how philosophy itself, and political philosophy in particular, was created not simply as a sustained critique of Athenian democracy (a familiar point emphasized by theorists as diverse as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, and Jacques Rancière) but rather emerged from Athens's democratic practices and traditions themselves, which were powerfully shaped by tragedy (Euben, 1990). Euben explored the contours of what he called 'the strong continuities of sentiment and practice between democratic politics and Socratic political philosophy' (Euben, 1997, p. 35). The constituent parts of a democratic popular culture – agonistic contestation, frank speech, critique, popular judgment, and political accountability – provided the very conditions out of which the philosophical pursuit of the examined life could emerge as a meaningful practice. Like philosophy, democracy, Euben would write, 'continually returns to the conventional quality of its own conventions, generates a cultural logic that demystifies the authority of its own practices, and condemns its own denial of equality and inclusion. The philosophical ideal of an examined life should be understood,' he argued, as a 'philosophical articulation of more broadly democratic practices' (pp. 35–36).

Tragedy, which Euben influentially demonstrated to be a preeminently *political* institution, was an especially vital way for ancient democratic culture to cultivate a philosophical disposition, and therefore a democratic education, among its citizens. Tragedy engendered a theoretical perspective – captured in the shared etymology of theater and theory – a distance from the urgency of political decisions, to examine the dynamics and demands of popular political judgment itself. In a beautiful passage from *The Tragedy of Political Theory*, Euben wrote that tragedy 'was a part of the road building that defined a human space. By portraying the establishment and disestablishment of boundaries around and between sphere of activities, tragedy provided an opportunity for men (and perhaps women) to reflect on themselves as definers and redefiners, as boundary creators and boundary violators. Freed from the urgencies of making immediate decisions … tragedy encouraged its citizen audience to think more inclusively about the general pattern implicit in their actions' (Euben, 1990, p. 56).

If philosophy emerged out of the popular culture of a democratic tradition, then philosophy and its value for a democratic education was certainly not limited to the work of professional philosophers. Euben had spent time studying analytic philosophy at Oxford University, and I recall him telling me several times in conversation when I would compliment a colleague or their work as 'smart,' that I should be aware of how that term can be used to close down, narrow, and depoliticize theoretical discussions. For Euben, the work of philosophy in a democratic education was more often carried out in the radical resources of popular culture. Yes to ancient tragedy, but also to literature and poetry, cinema and oratory. This approach was exemplified in his research and the wide variety of works that he engaged, and also in his teaching. Those lucky enough to be students in Euben's famous and much-imitated course on 'Political Freedom' at Santa Cruz or Duke University, didn't always understand just how radically innovative his seamless combination of works by Arendt and Euripides, Morrison and Plato, Pynchon and King, Lorde and Dostoyevsky, actually was. Viewed broadly, Euben did much to open up the canon of political theory, even as he was also a staunch and distinctive defender of the productivity of the classical Western canon.

Euben's emphasis on the resources of popular culture doing the educative work of political philosophy had consequences beyond widening the scope of the political theory canon. It also had an impact on how Euben urged readers and students to engage with more traditional works of political theory themselves, and this is where Euben's understanding of the centrality of 'aesthetics' to a democratic education comes most clearly into view. Euben never offered an extended engagement with aesthetic theory in his work, but he didn't need to. Beginning with his early scholarship on Greek tragedy, Euben emphasized the limitations – at once interpretive and political – of reading texts simply for their propositional content, their explicit arguments, their straightforward claims that can be grasped, repeated, and paraphrased, without attending to their literary or rhetorical embeddedness. Euben was vividly attentive to the aesthetic, literary, formal, dialogic, and figurative

dimensions of the texts that he engaged, and intent on showing how attending to these dimensions invariably problematized or destabilized the seemingly self-evident or straightforward teaching or argument of the work. He did this most famously with his persuasive excavation of the 'Platonic' and 'Socratic' dimensions of a dialogue like the *Republic* or the *Gorgias*, but this is only one example of this kind of reading across Euben's work (Euben, 1990, pp. 235–280; Euben, 1997, pp. 202–228).

The critical perspective that works of popular culture could cast on a polity's own practices, illuminating how those practices were answers to questions that had been forgotten as questions, was duplicated within these works themselves as their explicitly stated arguments were continually challenged, questioned, and subverted by the literary or formal dimensions of the texts. As Euben would write in *Corrupting Youth*, 'it is not only a matter of what is said, but of how it is said, not only of explicit argumentation, but of the setting in which the argumentation is made, in the dramatic movement of dialogue, character, and form' (Euben, 1997, p. 216). Euben was a political theorist who demonstrated – time and again – that we simply do not understand the so-called argument of canonical works of political theory if we bracket entirely their formal, generic, tropological, in short, their aesthetic dimensions. To treat them otherwise is to 'miss how the tensions, contrasts, or even contradictions between text(s) and context(s), argument and drama, form and movement, and characters…create generative spaces from within which the issues and conclusions of the work are continually reframed' (pp. 208–209). Euben did not understand this as a contrast between surface and depth, low and high, and certainly not between exoteric and esoteric. Instead he approached these features of texts as shifting points of reference and perspective on the democratic and egalitarian surface of the texts themselves. The multiple points of view that Euben drew out of and circulated within his chosen texts enacted the work of a democratic education by demonstrating the complications of wrestling together with what he called the 'superabundance of energy' and 'transformative impulses' generated within them (p. 209). In this, Euben seemed to quietly echo the work of Walt Whitman, that other poet of democratic diversity and theorist of democratic aesthetics. For both of them, it was a way of wrestling with the very kind of energy and impulse that ancient critics and some of its radical modern defenders have always associated with democracy itself.

Jason Frank

The Political Theorist at Thebes

> The classicist's attitude toward the ancient world is apologetic or inspired by his purpose of proving that which is valued highly in our own time was valued

> by the ancients. The right starting point is the reverse: that is, to proceed from the recognition of modern perversity and then to look backward – many very shocking things in the ancient world then appear as profoundly necessary.
>
> Friedrich Nietzsche in 'We Philologists' (1990, p. 338)

Across his varied engagements with the ancient world, J. Peter Euben never adopted an apologetic tone. He wrote instead from a profound awareness of modern perversities: modernity's blind faith in progress; its fiction of a thinkable world; its triumphalist notions of liberal democracy; and its conquest of nature, both the non-human world around us and the enigma of the human soul. Against such perversities, Euben looked backward toward the Greeks to recover the 'shocking insights' that might appear 'profoundly necessary': radical democracy, the irreducible complexities of politics, the awesome and awful wonder that is the human being, and, perhaps the dominant *Leitmotif* of all his work, the tragic sense, a sense that Euben located again and again in the works of Sophocles and especially his Theban plays. All of this underwrites Euben's practice of political theory.

Hannah Arendt ends her *On Revolution* with a nod to the 'wisdom of the Silenus' sung by the chorus in *Oedipus at Colonus*:

> Not to be born prevails over all meaning uttered in words; by far the second best for life, once it has appeared, is to go as swiftly as possible whence it came. (Arendt, 1990, p. 285; Euben, 2003, p. 44)

In her gloss on this passage, Arendt writes that Sophocles 'let us know, through the mouth of Theseus, the legendary founder of Athens and hence her spokesman, what it was that enabled ordinary men, young and old, to bear life's burden: it was the *polis* …' (Arendt, 1990, p. 285). The polis and politics could bear this weight by holding open a space of appearances for beautiful and heroic acts to shine, if only for a moment. This space of appearances was the scene and substance for storytelling about the great deeds of political actors, for theater and also for theory.

The closeness of theory and theater has an important dimension for Euben: both involve performance. The performative dimension of theater is obvious, but Euben brings a sensitivity to the performative dimensions of theory that elicits nuance and complexity that can be missed when readers attend only to the argument and not to the structure of the argument, only to content and not also to form. Like Arendt, Euben does not just 'use' (or interpret) the Greeks; they serve 'as enabling devices rather than . . . a set of extrapolated items of knowledge.' For Euben, '[w]hat she [Arendt] teaches is as much a practice of reading as a set of doctrines or specific arguments' (Euben, 2003, p. 41). Recognizing the performative dimension of theory requires that we study what theory *does* – how it provokes response and contestation – and thus how theories are perhaps first of all speech acts in the world, and therefore themselves modalities of action.

On Euben's interpretation of *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles instructs us in reading this formal and performative dimension of theory by way of the action of the play, including by dramatizing the wisdom of the Silenus in multiple dimensions. Along one dimension, Oedipus seems to prove its veracity: Oedipus should never have been born. The play sings the lamentable fate of Oedipus and thus of all of us 'creatures of a day' destined to decline and die and lose everything in life that has meant so much to us (Euben, 1977). Yet Oedipus does not only corroborate the Silenus's wisdom. As Euben shows, he also implicates his apparent foil, Theseus, the founding king of Athens. 'Oedipus was once a prosperous and honored king,' Euben observes, 'as confident and capable then as Theseus is now' (Euben, 2003, p. 47). Theseus recognizes the mutability of fortune that Oedipus illustrates but the play does not indicate if he changes because of this recognition. Sophocles creates a tension between the examples of Oedipus and Theseus: he dramatizes the Silenus's wisdom by both illustrating it and revealing how it may or may not come to bear on his characters, and also, perhaps, on us.

The magnificent choral ode in which the Silenus's wisdom appears in *Oedipus at Colonus* holds this tension in stirring lyricism, both celebrating the strength, power, and beauty of Athens but also suggesting death and loss through its pastoral images (Euben, 2003, p. 48). A lament for the impotence of natality and old age, the play also depicts an intractable Oedipus gaining his revenge on the young. Oedipus refuses Polyneices' request for hospitality, keeps from his daughters the site of his grave, and ensures that Theseus accede to his requests. Although he suffers a horrific fate, when Oedipus approaches death he also becomes a guide and leader. He thus shapes the story of which he is the subject.

'The balance of proximity and distance from contemporary issues afforded by the theatrical experience,' Euben writes of Greek tragedy, 'provided a place and time for the Athenians to become spectators of themselves' (Euben, 2003, p. 61). Euben could also be describing his own practice of political theory and in particular the lessons he learned from Sophocles: an intense and affective humanism that calls out to readers and spectators across the distances of years and culture; and yet also a separation from the ongoingness of the present moment, a certain formality and stylistic rigor that lies far from the quotidian and possesses a sense of gravity, always leavened with playfulness and humor.

This balance of proximity and distance characteristic of Sophocles' plays also evokes the tragic sensibility of which Euben wrote so often. It opposes the obliviousness and self-forgetting exemplified by the metaphoric blindness of Oedipus, whom success and power made confident of his ability to solve any problem. Quoting Jonathan Lear, Euben comments that Oedipus was 'unable to recognize any dimension of his life's meaning other than the one he already knew.' In this sense 'he denied the possibility of tragedy until he was overwhelmed by it' (Euben, 2003, p. 61, quoting Lear, 1995, p. 50).

Oedipus's situation is also ours – and not just ours as human beings, but ours as political theorists. What Euben calls 'the tyranny of mind' dramatized by *Oedipus Tyrannos* foreshadows both the promise of political theory to reconstitute political discourse and life and the danger that theory's salvific power may lead us to miss its limitations and complicity. Political theory threatens to cordon off the demos from political thinking and, by seeking to solve political problems, to rob ordinary people of opportunities to deliberate about what matters most to their lives. Like Oedipus, a political theory certain of its own ability to solve the problems around it risks ignoring its own implication in these problems, and indeed, its constitutive position in the formation and continuation of these problems. Euben deploys Sophocles' plays not to point to solutions – Sophocles' reverence (Jouanna, 2018), say, or an ethical teaching about 'the fragility of goodness' (Nussbaum, 1986) – but to complicate what we consider problems to be and to dramatize the tensions still pervading contemporary political life.

Like the Oedipus plays, Sophocles' *Antigone* imparts a tragic sense about projects of political order. It does so by displaying the contestability of all political languages as well as the tragedy of what Euben might have called political monolingualism, a modern perversity of believing that the final vocabulary for politics has been established. Readers as far back as Hegel have illuminated the basic contradiction between Creon and Antigone but rather than return to this simple dialectic, Euben pluralizes the centers of the play, adding not just Antigone as a pole but the chorus and Athenian audience as additional loci of meaning. This approach figures an important dimension of Euben's political theory of Greek tragedy and the tragic sense in general, the idea of *polyvocality*: the plays contain many voices, positions, experiences, logics, and languages. Antigone is not alone: citizens support her and even male citizens in the audience, Euben supposes, would find much to admire in her words and deeds. Action requires a space of appearances and these others – minor characters, mostly – hold open such a space. They make possible both Creon and Antigone.

The language of tragedy also constructs a political order. Human beings make language – one facet of the many wonders hymned in the choral Ode to Man, which provides a third locus of Euben's reading of *Antigone*. These wonders, *deina*, inspire both awe and fear: the word holds the paradoxes of political language within it. As Euben puts it, '*deinon* indicates mastery and control, resourcefulness and daring, culture and civilization. But it can also mean what is terrible and fearful, monstrous and evil, self-annihilating and powerless in the face of implacable fate' (Euben, 1997, p. 172). Human beings are not merely natural: we disturb the earth and make a home; we modify our own nature by creating languages and political communities. We hold the promise of political order as well as the explosive unpredictability that means that any political order is bound to fail. In the Ode, this paradox appears in the pairing of technical mastery and power – the forces of today's progress and development – with the unconquerable and undiscovered country of death. Human

mortality and the weight of history admit no escape. For all our power, we cannot guarantee a future in which we will exist, nor can we point to any political system that has mastered the flux of human speech and action.

The Thebes of Sophocles' Theban plays was not identical to Athens, but it was not opposed to it either. In Froma Zeitlin's phrase, Thebes is 'the other place' (Zeitlin, 1986, p. 126), a place where, as Euben writes, 'Athens plays out the dangers of self-assertion' (Euben, 1990, p. 99). 'Tragedy,' Euben asserts, 'was a mode of political education for Athens, dramatizing both the cultural accommodations upon which Athenian democracy rested and the structural consequences of the political developments and choices that had occurred or were occurring' (p. 143). Dramatization plays a key role here: tragedy puts into motion the actions of different political languages and by doing so illuminates the always contestable nature of these languages and thus of politics itself. This is not to say that Greek tragedy is always political, but rather that Greek tragedy does political work, that its form has a politics in the sense of staging for the audience a political experience.

Sophocles' *Antigone* confronted its audience with political pathologies that they knew well. The shock of the play's conflict and violence warns against 'distinctions between rhetoric and logic, philosophy and poetry, communicative discourse and the language of disclosure, the strategic and substantive dimension of speech, politics as the art of the possible and as the pursuit of the impossible, and the will to truth and the will to power' (Euben, 1990, p. 176). Thus, Euben reads *Antigone* not to give up reason or deliberation, but to inhabit both the playfulness and the power of democracy and to sharpen the trenchant agonism of democratic life. His political theory reminds us that democratic citizens remain perched on a razor's edge, that the assurances of stability and security promised by the modern state are illusory, and that the promise of progress and development cannot absolve us of our human stains nor free us from our ineluctable mortality (Euben 2003, pp. 1–5).

To return to Nietzsche, we might say that Euben's reading of Sophocles is more monumental than critical: the plays exemplify a kind of theory Euben deems necessary in the present age. They should stimulate our own creative efforts and serve life through inspiring action. Nietzsche warned against the analogical thinking that often accompanied monumental history, the impulse toward likening one's own situation to that of the past (Nietzsche, 1997, pp. 69–70). Euben too insisted on the strangeness of the Greeks while also pursuing the 'usefulness of anachronism' (Leslie, 1970) and the rhetorical and political possibilities that Sophocles' example seeds. The power of Sophocles' dramas can strike us in ways contemporary political theory's chastening of emancipatory hopes and beliefs cannot. Confronting contemporary political theory's skepticism about studying antiquity, Euben argued not for relevance, but for the Greeks' disruptive potential. By doing so, Euben illustrated the 'road not taken' (Euben, 1990) for political theory itself, eliciting new explorations in ancient political theory and beyond (e.g., Frank, 2018; McIvor, 2016; Schlosser, 2020; Shulman, 2008).

Sophocles and Sophocles' Oedipus were among the most important of Euben's interlocutors, but he almost always paired them with Plato and Plato's Socrates, in particular the Socrates of Plato's *Apology.* Reading Socrates against the grain, Euben never granted the conventional interpretation of Socrates as the founder of a reason-centered philosophy, antithetical to the generative poetry of the dramatists and to the Athenian democracy. For Euben, Socrates' philosophy bears a family resemblance to political theory in ways that illuminate the latter's enduring dilemmas. Here, too, Socrates' strangeness, a strangeness shared by Euben's Greeks in general, serves to inspire as well as to unsettle. In these closing words from Euben's introduction to the epochal *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, he reminds us of the enduring provocation that Sophocles' and Socrates' questions pose for the vocation of political theory.

> It is no accident that who Socrates was and what he was doing confused even his closest friends. Nor is it accidental that his explanation and example of political philosophy in the *Apology* leaves us uncertain about what political theory is, who could and should practice it, where 'it' should be practiced, and how 'it' should be judged. Political theorists no longer question their place in the academy, or express unease about their own professionalism or specialized languages. This is a troubling development. It is troubling not only because of the politics implied by such accommodations, but because it cuts contemporary theorists off from the political impulses of their greatest forebears. And this is an incalculable loss in our attempts to make sense of the political and intellectual crises of our times. (Euben, 1986, pp. 41-42)

Joel Alden Schlosser

Tragedy, Loss, and the Democratic Citizen

For someone whose interactions with others were so often marked by laughter, by irony-tinged observations, by jokes that even by his own admission were groan-inducing, J. Peter Euben found his theoretical voice in the language of tragedy, especially ancient tragedy. From his first edited volume, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (1986) through to his sole-authored *Platonic Noise* (2003), the tragic vision served as a touchstone for Euben to engage with the challenges of politics, democracies, and, in particular, the life of the citizen. It is ancient tragedy, as Euben taught his readers and his students, that could educate citizens to understand the limits of human knowledge and human power and yet not leave them immobilized by such an awareness. Indeed, he argued, this tragic sensibility was elevating and necessary for citizens of a democratic polity.

Central to Euben's appreciation of tragedy are the lessons that tragedy teaches about loss. Loss, though, ought not to be paralyzing, but should serve as a prelude to new beginnings. Acknowledging the Socratic dictum that philosophy is preparation for death, Euben affirmed that political theory begins in a sense of loss – not so much of a person (though that too), but of the certainties that may have previously sustained us. 'People are and were driven to theorize by a need to make sense of a world that suddenly appears out of joint as they come to feel displaced in it' (Euben, 2000, p. 61). Tragedy creates that sense of displacement, when it forces its audiences to reassess, re-think what has been previously blindly accepted, when the traditional, the accepted, the 'normal' no longer provide a firm foundation. Admittedly, such displacement is painful, as is the ascent from the cave in the parable of *Republic* VII, as is all education. But it is also the source of enlightenment. Unlike the ascent from Plato's cave, though, it does not lead to a resolution with the discovery of some permanent Truth with a capital 'T.' Rather, the pain that comes from tragedy leads to the recognition of how uncertain our capacity to know is, taking us beyond complacent acceptance and to the critical perspectives that characterize the practice of political theory and, in turn, to our lives as democratic citizens. Euben connects his understanding of the practice of political theory as a response to loss to life in democracies, for democratic regimes require resistance to certainties and a refusal to impose uniformity on the members of the polity.

Euben was not arguing that political theory (or democratic life which, for him, often embraced one another) is in itself tragic – hardly – but that tragedy has the potential to draw out the fullness of our humanity. The appeal of the tragedians for Euben, then, is that they are 'suspicious of any theoretical impulse. They warn about the tyranny of the mind with its passion to transform enigmas into problems with solutions, dissolve mystery and impose one voice on debate' (Euben, 1990, pp. 30–31). Tragedy teaches the absence of finitude and certainty and, in turn, the plurality of human life. It reveals the threats to that humanity when we accept uniform solutions that may satisfy the mind's tyrannical impulse to ignore divergent perspectives and the contingencies that constitute the world in which we live. Our politics must, as Euben saw it, acknowledge and work with and within those contingencies, while avoiding the appeal that certainties hold for us. Democracy demands such a perspective – and our humanity demands it.

The loss that gives political theory its tragic character is, then, the loss of certainties, which can mean – indeed does mean – the loss of patriotic attachment. This sense of loss leads political theory to search for stability in a shifting world even as it comes to understand the undeniability of uncertainty. In Euben's reading of the *Antigone*, for example, the person of Creon embodies the 'problematic status of the passion for order' (Euben, 1997, p. 175), for a structure (in Creon's case) of the laws of the polis that rejects ambiguity. The action, the words and the songs of the play capture the destructive force of that desire for such order and the dismissal of what is ambiguous. The suffering of the two main characters and of the city of

Thebes unsettles its audience and brings to its viewers, as Euben wrote, a 'self-awareness' and a skepticism of 'anyone claiming to have a monopoly on wisdom,' thereby increasing the audience's 'commitment to the communal basis of truth' (p. 175). The tragedy teaches what happens when 'the passion for order becomes all-consuming and all encompassing,' bringing audiences to 'appreciate more the necessity and pleasure of disorder, of knowledge that cannot be captured or snared' (p. 175). The desire for order is tyrannical and it is this desire that tragedy warns against and that democracy must reject.

The awareness that we cannot achieve the order and certainty that a character like Creon craves forces us to accept ambiguity and instability. The power of tragedy is that such an awareness and acceptance can lead to new beginnings or, as Euben phrased it, 'a reweaving of the fabric into new shapes and patterns' (p. 175). Thus, while loss is at the heart of the tragic sensibility that Euben enjoined, loss does not foster immobility or the incapacity to act, precisely because loss – in his understanding – is also the opportunity to encounter a new beginning. In particular, the loss of a world that no longer satisfies the longing for a clear articulation of such values as the so-hard-to-define justice forces the theater-goer – the one who observes and is, thereby, the 'theorist,' *theoros* – to recognize the complexity and ambiguities that mark our common humanity. We come to recognize the benefits that emerge from engaging with that multifaceted world, where justice is not one thing, where it is not flattened by precision. We are instead enriched by an awareness of the openness of a world awaiting our reconstruction.

In writing of the critical sense of loss that tragedy invokes, Euben was insistent that it not be understood as a nostalgia, a longing for what has been in the past. In Euben's writings, the past is never romanticized. As he warned in *Platonic Noise,* while 'loss…animates political theory as an enterprise and forms its problematic,' it also 'threatens political and theoretical agency by tempting thinkers into nostalgia or certainty' (Euben, 2003, p. 10; Euben, 1990, pp. 34–37). This point takes Euben back to the 'wonders' ode or the so-called 'Ode to Man' of the *Antigone*, a passage to which he turned several times in his works for its warnings about the potential dangers of human arrogance (Euben, 2003, chs 5 and 7; Euben, 1997, pp. 171–176). It is a choral ode that celebrates the accomplishments of humans as they confront a disorderly natural world with the technical arts: the construction of boats that tame the waves, the plows that wear away at the earth, the nets that catch the birds on which man feasts, and speech that founds cities. Rather than read this song as a celebration of the human spirit of conquest and innovation (as it is so often read), Euben excavates its ambiguities so that it becomes *both* a celebration *and* an affirmation of the limits of those technical skills, in order to highlight aspects of human life that remain resistant to technical control.

Resistance to what he saw as a stifling nostalgia meant that the ancient Greece to which Euben repeatedly returned and from which he received much of his inspiration was not to be understood as a realm of 'serenity, proportion, and

rationality' (Euben, 1986, p. x) that so many others found. It was rather one of 'turbulence, dissonance, and an ambivalent morality that plagues action and passion' (p. x). In his landmark work, *The Tragedy of Political Theory*, for instance, Euben paired three tragedies with three prose texts in order to illustrate how works traditionally understood as 'theoretical texts' (Plato's *Republic* and *The Apology of Socrates* and Thucydides' *History*) re-enact the quandaries portrayed on the tragic stage, rather than offer unambiguous responses to those quandaries. Thus, the trilogy of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* creates ambiguities about the exercise of justice in a multifaceted world of male and female, fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, gods and humans that are reflected in the uncertainties posed in the *Republic* about the 'precariousness' of justice (Euben, 1990, p. 39). Or, after reading Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* as a play about identity, as Oedipus searches for who he is (as do we throughout our lives), Euben then examined Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and found there a work that also explores in depth the challenges of discovering the 'who' of who we are.

The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the prose dialogues of Plato make us aware of the contradictions within ourselves, what distinguishes us from others, and at the same time how we nevertheless are tied to one another through the communities in which we live. Likewise, for Euben, Euripides' *Bacchae* is a tale of dismemberment, not only of the body of Pentheus, but of the city itself. Such dismemberment appears as 'dismembership' in the stories that Thucydides tells when describing the chaos of the plague at Athens or the upheaval at Corcyra. The unsettling with which tragedy leaves us re-appears in the philosophical and historical texts so that these different forms of expression provide the education that democracy needs if it is to resist the tyrannical forces that emerge with the complacent acceptance of long-held convictions and the impulses to impose an implacable order on the natural and political world.

For Euben, tragedy, history, and philosophy all enact their own relevance and enlighten modern readers or audiences, making 'the everyday seem anomalous' (Euben, 2003, p. 63). With such claims, Euben emphatically distanced himself from those who found in the writings of the ancient Greeks the grounds for conservatism and elitism. For Euben, the ancients do not teach the lessons of the 'gentleman' engaged in political life, nor do they pursue perennial universal truths available to the philosophers who abstain from the corrupting influence of political life. Rather, they become resources for 'corrupting youth,' as Socrates did, by undermining the certainties that feed youthful tyrannical impulses for power over others. The ancient texts educate their readers to be citizens of a vibrant democratic culture, precisely by undermining those certitudes that conservative theorists may have found or looked to find in the writings of a Plato or Aristotle.

The lessons about loss as the basis of political theory, learned from ancient tragedy, inform Euben's readings of other authors as well. In *Platonic Noise*, for example, Euben draws on Machiavelli to highlight how renewal as a political

response to loss permeates the Florentine's writings. And he turns to Philip Roth's *Human Stain* as an introduction to the book, since Roth's novel centers on a character who appears Oedipus-like in his claim to a freedom, self-knowledge and self-fashioning that, of course, cannot be fulfilled. In the final chapter of *Platonic Noise*, Euben brings DeLillo's *White Noise* into conversation with Plato's *Phaedo* and the problematic way in which anticipation of death and its sense of loss foregrounds the challenges of identifying the 'stories,' the actions, the choices that define who we are.

Though, for sure, the tragic sensibility gleaned from ancient tragedies motivated much of Euben's writing, one widely read piece, included as Chapter 4 of *Platonic Noise* and entitled 'Aristophanes in America,' allows comedy to enter Euben's purview (see also Euben, 1997, ch. V, titled 'When there are Gray Skies: Aristophanes' *Clouds* and the Political Education of Democratic Citizens'). With the essence of tragedy ringing even throughout this essay, Euben finds the power of comedy – both ancient and modern (in this case, the TV comedy *The Simpsons*) – to lie in its capacity to destabilize fundamental assumptions about nature and conventions. Thus, comedy, like tragedy, leaves us with a sense of loss that remains critical to our capacity for renewal. Similar to tragedy, comedy does not provide solutions, but plays 'a significant interrogatory role in our public life' (Euben, 2003, p. 84), and for that reason deserves our attention.

At the conclusion of Plato's *Symposium*, the narrator of that dialogue reports that, after the long night of speeches and drinking, Socrates had gotten (the language actually is 'forced') the tragic poet Agathon and the comic poet Aristophanes to agree that the same man could write both comedy and tragedy (223d). After Agathon and Aristophanes fall asleep, Socrates continues to spend the rest of the day as usual – which, we might add, would have been enacting at the same time the arts of the comic and the tragic poet through his destabilizing questions that corrupted the young of Athens. Euben, who often imagined Socrates as his model, enacted those arts as well throughout his writings and his life. If, in his writings, he seemed more drawn to the enormous power of ancient tragedy to reveal the sense of loss that is central and necessary to our existence as human and political beings, in his personal interactions, when Euben told his bad jokes and laughed at himself for telling them, the humor of comedy conveyed the lessons about loss that he drew from the tragedies he studied.

Arlene W. Saxonhouse

The 'Undiscover'd Country'

We do not know all that happens when a person dies. And to that extent, death is white noise. But it is not only white noise. What we do know is that those who have

died are only as erased from ourselves as if they had moved to another place. That that place is 'the undiscover'd country, from whose bourn/ no traveller returns' (*Hamlet* 3.1.1772) may puzzle our will, but it should not blind us to the fact that the dead remain with us. Indeed, as Thomas Pynchon, a favorite of Peter's, writes in *Gravity's Rainbow,* 'The dead are as real as the living' (2013, p. 153).

If a person is what he does, then Peter as what he has done continues to grace our lives. And I think here not only, perhaps not even particularly, of his books and articles – such as Keats says, are 'a joy forever … [and] will never pass into nothingness' – as is also, for many, his teaching – these are or were all available to many, but I think rather of his singular acts, which remain in the memory and life of one or very few.

Peter was the first person to show me that I did not have to be alone in the world I had chosen. In the *Lysis*, Socrates says to Lysis and Menexenus: 'If then, you two are friendly to each other, by some tie of nature, you belong to each other' (Plato, 1955, 221e). How does a tie of nature come about?

There is a passage in *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahr* where Goethe imagines a situation in which a young man wants to get across a raging river (1995, ch. 18). There is no bridge. He undertakes to make the crossing and soon finds himself in danger of drowning – just at that point, a hand reaches down from the other side and pulls him to shore. He has crossed successfully but only because there was someone already on the other shore. What happens to the relation of that someone and the river crosser?

I have known Peter since 1968, to be exact, fifty years until his death. Our first encounter was his doing – as he was not a man who waits for you. We were both to publish in a book of 'Dissenting essays in political science' called *Power and Community* (Green and Levinson, 1970). The essays in the volume were circulated to all the authors – I got one response. It was from Peter: he took apart the essay and showed how to put it back together so that it made, at least, some sense. I was stunned – no distant person had ever spoken to me with that degree of substantive care. Here, I suddenly realized, was a person not only *to* whom I might talk but *with* whom I might talk. I realize also that he did not know who I was – we had never met: this was sheer caring, what Heidegger calls *Fūrsorge*. I borrow from an essay by Babette Babich (2018): *Fūrsorge*, Heidegger argues, is a particular kind of caring – it is a caring that has as telos helping the other to become more of who he or she is, which is quite different than simply telling them what is right. It is as simple as helping a child to tie a double knot rather than tying her shoes for her. It is as complex as the teaching and learning that allows one to become what one is – that hand from the other bank – *genoi 'oios essi mathón* is the line from the second Pythian Ode of Pindar, a poem that Peter used in his great article 'Creatures of a Day' (Euben,1977). (Those who do not become what they are, who are creatures of a day, says Pindar, 'bob like corks.')

Peter pulled me across a river. Friendship was never a question. As Emerson said, 'It is one of the blessings of old friends that you can afford to be stupid with them' (1911, vol. V, p. 32). With this, it appears that Peter embodied the most central quality of friendship as Aristotle understood it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: he desired the good for my sake, as well as for his (Aristotle, 1934, 1157b30-33). Such men, as Aristotle says in that passage, are rare.

I have said something about Peter as a *philos*, I should say something about him as a *sophos*. In an important way, Peter the political theorist is one with Peter the friend. I quote from *The Tragedy of Political Theory*: 'In the *Oresteia* each side, force and principle, required the reciprocating presence of the other to create a whole that gives meaning and place to both' (1990, p. 204). This is important for it informs the passionate concern Peter had for politics. He understood that while we obliged to strive for justice, that nothing that we achieve may count as finality, as a once and for all solution. The citation above is informed by his reading of the *Eumenides* (1990, ch. 3). For the first time in western, perhaps world, thought, a capital matter is to be decided by a jury assembled *ad hoc* from ordinary citizens. Yet at the counting, the votes for and against Orestes are equal, and the matter is only decided by the almost capricious intervention of Athena, the goddess with no mother whose vote for acquittal had led to the tie. She says:

ἀνὴρ ὅδ' ἐκπέφευγεν αἵματος δίκην:
ἴσον γάρ ἐστι τἀρίθμημα τῶν πάλων

'This man is innocent of shedding blood/ for the numbers are equal' (Aeschylus, 1926, ll. 752–753). The word given as innocent, ἐκπέφευγεν, carries the meaning also of escaping.

The pro-Orestes Apollo disappears. The Furies are *barukotos* – heavy in wrath – and threaten retaliation. They must be persuaded – which Athena then accomplishes in almost 250 lines of exchange, close to a quarter of the whole play. Aeschylus – and Peter – understood that in a democratic society, the pursuit of justice always rests on the possibility of persuasion, hence our being as speakers, hence on the possibility of reconciliation from the acceptance of each party as sharing with the other, hence on the possibility of friendship. Justice rests on the possibility of friendship.

Arendt was fond of citing an epigram of René Char: 'No will nor testament gives us our inheritance' (2006, p. 3). The achievement of Peter's work is to have called this into question. He has given us the Greeks, not as an antiquarian, not as a monument, but as the source of a critique for us. I cite Peter again: 'I have indicated the ways in which the form, content, and performance context of Greek tragedy anticipated the need and contours [of a theory responsive to our present condition]. I have also indicated the ways classical political theory filled in those contours while changing its shape. We are the executors and executrixes of that legacy and

inheritance' (1990, p. 308) And so he has – as their executor, he makes us with him their executors and executrixes, and so he remains with us.

I close with a poem by Catullus:

> Multas per gentes et multa per aequora vectus
> advenio has miseras, frater, ad inferias,
> ut te postremo donarem munere mortis
> et mutam nequiquam adloquerer cinerem,
> quandoquidem fortuna mihi tete abstulit ipsum,
> heu miser indigne frater adempte mihi.
> nunc tamen interea haec, prisco quae more parentum
> tradita sunt tristi munere ad inferias,
> accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu
> atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale.

And, for those of us whose Latin is less than it once was, in a slight modification of Anne Carson's translation (2009):

> Many the peoples, many the oceans I crossed –
> I arrive, brother, at these poor ceremonies
> so I could give you the last gift owed to death
> and talk (why?) with ever speaking ash.
> Now that Fortune tore you from me, you
> oh poor brother (wrongly) taken from me,
> now still anyway this – a gathering of friends
> [*as we all are here gathered*]
> – a gathering of friends
> handed down as the sad gift for burial –
> this accept! Soaked with tears of a brother
> and into forever, brother, hail but not farewell.

Tracy B. Strong

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