

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-73647-3 - The Intellectual Revolution: Selections from Euripides, Thucydides and Plato: Second Edition

The Joint Association of Classical Teachers' Greek Course

Excerpt

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Part I **Euripides**

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1. One of Medea's rejuvenation spells

Introduction

Theseus and Herakles argue about the nature of the gods:

ΘΗΣΕΥΣ

οὐδείς δὲ θνητῶν ταῖς τύχαις ἀκήρατος
οὐ θεῶν, ἀοιδῶν εἴπερ οὐ ψευδεῖς λόγοι.
οὐ λέκτρ' ἐν ἀλλήλοισιν, ὧν οὐδείς νόμος,

συνῆψαν; οὐ δεσμοῖσι διὰ τυραννίδας

πατέρας ἐκκληίδωσαν; ἀλλ' οἰκοῦσ' ὅμως

ἽΟλυμπον ἠνέσχοντό θ' ἡμαρτηκότες.

ΗΡΑΚΛΗΣ

ἐγὼ δὲ τοὺς θεοὺς οὔτε λέκτρ' ἄ μὴ θέμις

στέργειν νομίζω, δεσμά τ' ἐξάπτειν χεροῖν

οὔτ' ἠξίωσα πάποτ' οὔτε πείσομαι,

οὐδ' ἄλλον ἄλλου δεσπότην πεφυκέναι.

δεῖται γὰρ ὁ θεός, εἴπερ ἔστ' ὀρθῶς θεός,

οὐδενός· ἀοιδῶν οἶδε δύστηνοι λόγοι.

THESEUS

No man is untouched by chance,
nor any of the gods, if what the poets say is true.
Have they not made marriages unsanctioned by
law?

And humiliated their fathers, binding them in
chains –

all to seize power? But these criminals, tolerating
their crimes,

continue to live in Olympos just the same . . .

HERAKLES

I do not think that the gods yearn for unlawful
marriages,

and I never believed, nor will believe
that chains were fastened on their hands,
nor that one god is master of another.

For god, if he is truly god, needs nothing.
These are just the sorry tales of poets.

Herakles 1313–46 (passim)

This selection

Introductory passage: *Medeia* rejected (*Medeia* 16–575 (*passim*)) page 7

Target passage: *Medeia*'s revenge (*Medeia* 772–end (*passim*)) page 28

Euripides, the tragedian

Euripides (Εὐριπίδης) was an Athenian, who was born about 485 and died in 406. He was associated with the sophistic movement, and is said to have scandalized his audiences with his exploitation of new ideas (vigorously parodied by Aristophanes in his *Frogs*, in which Aeschylus and Euripides have their plays closely, if comically, examined). It was possibly this unpopularity which caused him to leave Athens for the court of King Arkhelaos in Macedonia in 408, where he later died.

He is said to have written ninety-two plays in all, of which eighteen (if one discounts the authenticity of the *Ῥήσος* (*Rhesus*) survive in full. In a possible chronological order, with Greek titles followed by the most common ones used in English, they are: Ἄλκηστις (*Alcestis*), Μήδεια (*Medea*), Ἴππόλυτος (*Hippolytus*), Ἑκάβη (*Hecuba*), Ἀνδρομάχη (*Andromache*), Ἡρακλεῖδαι (*Heraclidae*, or *Children of Hercules*), Ἰκέτιδες (*Suppliants*, or *Suppliant Women*), Ἡρακλῆς (*Hercules*, or *Hercules Furens*), Τρωάδες (*Troades*, or *Trojan Women*), Ἠλέκτρα (*Electra*), Ἑλένη (*Helen*), Ἴφιγένεια ἢ ἐν Ταύροις (*Iphigenia in Tauris*), Ἴων (*Ion*), Φοίνισσαι (*Phoenissae*, or *Phoenician Women*), Ὀρέστης (*Orestes*), Ἴφιγένεια ἢ ἐν Αὐλίδι (*Iphigenia in Aulis*), Βάκχαι (*Bacchae*), Κύκλωψ (*Cyclops*). His often sceptical handling of ancient myths and his interest in human psychology produced many plays which have a modern ring to them.

Euripides and his times

You may have already met, in *Reading Greek*, Sections Five to Seven, something of the common reaction of distrust of the sophists and their disruption of conventional values. Their questioning of the basis of traditional beliefs and their assumption that anything which concerned human existence – religion, state, justice, moral values – should become the subject of rational debate were obviously deeply disturbing. Euripides takes these issues out of the sphere of philosophical discussion and gives them dramatic representation.

Euripides' interest centres on the relationship of man to man, not to the gods. He moves away from the picture that you have met in the story of Adrastus (*Reading Greek*, Section Nineteen), written by Herodotus, a near contemporary of Euripides, which shows a universe in some way divinely ordered, in which individual fates are worked out. Euripides analyses human nature, its instincts, passions and motives: he shows us men and women confronting the problem of evil, not as an alien thing imposed upon them from outside, but as a part of themselves.

Closely associated with the growth of sophism was that of rhetoric: if absolute standards can no longer be used to judge right and wrong, the ability to argue a case and persuade becomes paramount. The importance of the ability to speak well is something with which you are familiar in the ordinary institutions in Athens, the assembly and the law-courts. This is exploited in the way the characters present the situations in which they are involved.

Background to the *Medeia*

Jason was the son of the king of Iolkos, but his kingdom was usurped by his uncle Pelias. When Jason tried to reclaim it, his uncle sent him first on a quest to prove the validity of his claim: this was to find and bring back the golden fleece from Kolchis, a land at the far end of the Black Sea.

Jason and his companions set out in the ship *Argo* and after many dangers reached Kolchis. Here Jason had to perform a number of tasks to win the

golden fleece: he had to capture and yoke a pair of wild, fire-breathing oxen, plough a field with them and sow the ground with dragon's teeth, then survive the onslaught of the armed men who sprang up from them.

After that, he still had to kill the unsleeping snake which guarded the fleece. But the king's daughter, Medeia, fell in love with Jason and helped him to perform these tasks by her magic powers. They then fled together from Kolchis with the fleece and Medeia dismembered her own brother, scattering his limbs in the sea, to delay their pursuers.

Jason and Medeia returned to Iolkos and took vengeance on his uncle Pelias; Medeia persuaded Pelias' daughters that she could rejuvenate their aged father by magic, if they cut him up and boiled him in a cauldron – but she did not restore him to life.

After this, Jason and Medeia fled from Iolkos and settled in exile in Corinth, where they lived for some time and two children were born to them. It is the disruption of their relationship that provides the action of the *Medeia* – for Jason now proposes to abandon Medeia to make a politically advantageous marriage with the daughter of Kreon, king of Corinth.

Medeia

In the *Medeia*, Euripides is interested in presenting conflict in the way the central characters see the situation. Jason takes what he sees as a clear, rational line: he sees himself as σωφρων and acting with the best of intentions – but is he just rationalizing a selfish position?

Medeia shows the violence of the frustrated, of a woman whose life is forced by convention to centre on her marriage and who has no other support. But the mythical background is very important, for Medeia is not merely a woman but a barbarian with magic powers. The force of her emotion is coupled with a capacity for, and ruthlessness in, action.

In the *Medeia*, the conflicting claims of reason and emotion are represented not merely in the clash between Medeia and Jason, but in the duality of human nature itself within Medeia. Medeia wants to hurt the man who has abandoned her and if the best way to do that is by killing her own children, then ultimately she is prepared to do it – even though she recognizes that she is allowing her emotion to override her reason, and that the cost will be bitter-sweet indeed.

Metre

Apart from 472–93, every line in this selection from the *Medeia* is in the standard conversational metre of Greek drama, the iambic trimeter.

The line can be thought of as similar to a slightly extended Shakespearean line:

But ló, the dáwn, in rússét mántle clád (*Hamlet*)

There are five stresses (syllables marked by accents). Imagine:

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But *ló*, the *dáwn*, in *rússet mántle* fairly *clád*

with six stresses, and this gives a rough idea of the Greek rhythm. In fact the Greek line is to be thought of as being divided not into six but into three, hence the name 'trimeter' – as it were

But *ló*, the *dáwn*, | in *rússet mánt* | *le* fairly *clád*,

where | divides each *metron*.

And the rhythm is dictated not by a pattern of stresses but by a pattern of long and short syllables (— indicates 'long' and ~ 'short').

— — ~ — — ~ — — ~ — — ~

Think: blank dum-dee-dum blank dum-dee-dum blank dum-dee-dum, where 'blank' is a long or short syllable.

νῦν δ' ἔχθρὰ πᾶν | τα, καὶ νοσεῖ | τὰ φίλτατα (1)

The third element in each *metron* is invariably a short syllable. The second and fourth are usually long syllables as above, but can be divided into two short syllables, except for the last, which may be long or short.

~ — ~ — — ~ ~ — — — ~ —

γάμοις ἰά | σων βασιλικοῖς | εὐνάζεται (3)

Such division is called 'resolution'. Most of the resolutions in this selection are like line 3 – resolutions of the second element of the middle *metron* (6, 30, 114, 134, etc.). But there are some with resolution of the fourth element:

— — ~ — — ~ — ~ ~ ~ — — ~ —

ζεύγλησι καὶ | σπεροῦντα θανά | σιμον γύην (159)

and one where that occurs in the first *metron*:

~ — ~ ~ ~ ~ — ~ — — — ~ —

τί δεῖ με πατέ | ρα τῶνδε τοῖς | τούτων κακοῖς (437)

The first element in each *metron* may be a long or a short syllable. There are no occasions in this selection where the first syllable of a *metron* is resolved.

Further reading

D. Mastronarde, ed., *Euripides Medea* (Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Powell, ed., *Euripides, Women and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Introductory passage: Medeia rejected (Medeia 16–575 (passim))

The nurse wishes Jason had never sailed to fetch the golden fleece. (1–15)

NURSE I wish that the Argo had not
flown over the waves to the blue Clashing-Rocks
and that in Pelion's groves the hewn pine-trunk had never fallen
and the heroes' hands had never touched the oars
to seek, for Pelias, the golden fleece.
For my mistress then would not
have sailed to the towers of the land of Iolkos
struck in her heart with love for Jason.
Nor would she, after persuading the maiden daughters of Pelias to kill
their father, be dwelling now in this land of Corinth
with husband and with children, finding favour
in her exile with the citizens to whose land she has come
and serving Jason in everything.
For this indeed is a woman's greatest source
of security: when she does not have differences with her husband.

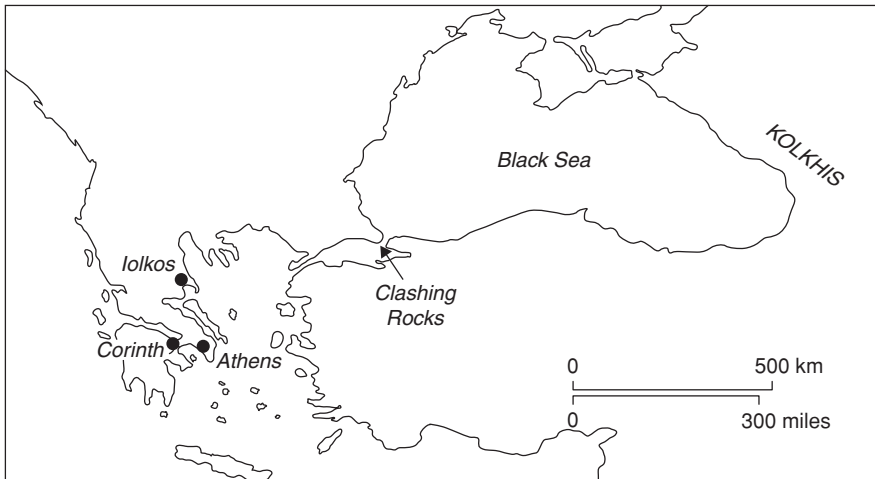
1 *Now everything has changed; Jason is going to leave Medeia for a king's daughter. Medeia is bitter and despairing. (16–33)*

ΤΡΟΦΟΣ νῦν δ' ἔχθρὰ πάντα, καὶ νοσεῖ τὰ φίλτατα.
προδοὺς γὰρ αὐτοῦ τέκνα δεσπότην τ' ἐμὴν
γάμοις Ἰάσων βασιλικῶς εὐνάζεται,
γῆμας Κρέοντος παῖδ', ὃς αἰσυμνά χθονός·

- 1 ἐχθρὰ πάντα: supply ἐστὶ
νοσεῖ I am sick, ailing. Why singular?
τὰ φίλτατα: 'what is dearest to her', i.e. the
bonds of love which once held their marriage
together
- 2 προδοὺς: agrees with Ἰάσων (l. 3). The nurse
shows her loyalty to Medeia in expressing
this attitude to Jason
δεσπότης (δεσποτιδ-, but acc. s. δεσπότην), ἡ
mistress (3a)
- 3 γάμοις, γῆμας (4). γῆμας is aor. act. part. of
γαμέω. The repetition of the idea and the
emphatic placing at the beginning of

- successive lines stress the nature of Jason's
betrayal
- *Ἰάσων (Ἰάσον-), ὁ Jason (leader of the
Argonauts) (3a)
- *βασιλικῶς ἢ ὄν royal, kingly. γάμοις...
βασιλικῶς lit. 'a royal marriage' i.e. 'a royal
wife'
- εὐνάζομαι (pass.) I sleep with (+ dat.)
- 4 *Κρέων (Κρεοντ-), ὁ Kreon (3a) (tyrant of
Corinth)
- παῖδ': gender?
ὃς: to whom does the word refer?
αἰσυμνάω I rule over (+ gen.)
*χθῶν (χθον-), ἡ land, earth (3a) (i.e. *this* land)

- Μήδεια δ' ἡ δύστηνος ἠτιμασμένη 5
 βοᾷ μὲν ὄρκους, ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιᾶς
 πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ θεοὺς μαρτύρεται
 οἷας ἀμοιβῆς ἐξ Ἰάσονος κυρεῖ.
 κεῖται δ' ἄσιτος, σῶμ' ὑφεῖσ' ἀλγηδόσι,
 τὸν πάντα¹ συντήκουσα δακρύοις ἰχρόνον. 10
 ἐπεὶ πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἦσθητ' ἠδικημένη,
 οὔτ' ὄμμ' ἐπαίρουσ' οὔτ' ἀπαλλάσσουσα γῆς
 πρόσωπον· ὡς δὲ πέτρος ἢ θαλάσσιος
 κλύδων ἀκούει νουθετουμένη φίλων,
 ἦν μὴ ποτε στρέψασα πάλλευκον δέρην,
 αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτὴν, πατέρ' ἀποιμώξῃ φίλον 15
 καὶ γαῖαν οἴκους θ', οὓς προδοῦσ' ἀφίκετο
 μετ' ἀνδρὸς ὅς σφε νῦν ἀτιμάσας ἔχει.
- 5 *Μήδεια, ἡ Medeia (1b) (daughter of the king of Kolchis; she saved Jason and married him)
 *δύστηνος ον wretched, unhappy. (The adj. is one of a 'two-termination' group, i.e. it has the same ending for m. and f., and a separate one for n.)
 ἠτιμασμένη and ἠδικημένη (l. 11): the perf. pass. part. emphasizes not the event in the past but Medeia's *present* state as a result of Jason's actions
- 5–8 'Oaths' and 'the pledge of the right hand' recall marriage vows. At a wedding the father would give away his daughter; the act is confirmed by the handshake between father and bride, who herself plays no part. Medeia was not given away by her father; she is appealing (unconventionally) to oaths made by Jason to herself
- 6 βοᾷ μὲν ὄρκους: 'she cries aloud "oaths!"'
 ἀνακαλεῖ: 'keeps on making an appeal to...'
- 7 *πίστις, ἡ pledge, assurance; good faith, trust (3e)
- 8 οἷας is an exclamation. 'What a...!'
 ἀμοιβή, ἡ recompense (1a)
 *κυρέω I meet with, find (+ gen. (as here) or dat.); happen, come to pass; turn out, prove to be
- 9–15 Medeia's emotional state is described through its physical manifestations
- 9 κεῖται: 'she is lying' — but ἐπεὶ in l. 11 makes us see it as 'she has been lying'
 ἄσιτος ον without food (two-termination cf. δύστηνος (l. 5))
- ὑφεῖσα: aor. act. part. nom. fem. s. ὑφίημι (ὑφε(ι)-) I give up, surrender
 *ἀλγηδών (ἀλγηδον-), ἡ pain, suffering (3a)
 10 συντήκω I cause to waste away. The expressed (metaphorical) object is χρόνον, but we understand also Medeia herself as wasting away
 11 ἐπεὶ: since the time when...
 *πρὸς (+ gen.) at the hands of
 ἦσθητ' ἠδικημένη: 'she perceived [herself] having been wronged', i.e. 'that she had been wronged'
 12 *ὄμμα (ὀμματ-), τό eye (3b)
 ἐπαίρω I raise
 *ἀπαλλάττω = ἀπαλλάσσω I remove x (acc.) from y (gen.); remove; free x (acc.) from y (gen.); dismiss
- 13–14 The sea and sea-cliffs are traditional illustrations of elements to which humans appeal in vain
- 13 *πρόσωπον, τό face (2b)
 *πέτρος, ὁ stone (2a)
 θαλάσσιος α ον of the sea
- 14 κλύδων (κλυδων-), ὁ wave (3a)
 *νουθετέω I warn, rebuke; chastise
 φίλων: obj. of ἀκούει
- 15 ἦν (= ἔάν if) μὴ ποτε 'except that from time to time'
 *στρέφω I turn, twist
 πάλλευκος ον completely white
 δέρην, ἡ neck (1a). What is the effect of the mention of Medeia's 'white neck' set against the 'rock and sea-surge' (ll. 13–14)?
- 16 ἀποιμώζω I lament for; ἀποιμώξῃ: aor. subj. act. The construction, with the ἄν contained in ἔάν, is indefinite



2. The Black Sea

17 προδοῦσα: is this the Nurse's word or Medeia's? Does it reflect on the same word in l. 2?

ἀτιμάσας ἔχει '[he] has dishonoured'; the expression is equivalent to a perfect tense (cf. note on l. 5)

18 *σφε (enclitic) her, him (acc.)

2 *Medeia has learned a hard lesson. She is in a dangerous mood. The children arrive with the Paidagogos. (34–48)*

TP.	<p>ἔγνωκε δ' ἡ τάλαινα συμφορᾶς ὕπο οἶον πατρώας μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι χθονός. στυγεῖ δὲ παῖδας οὐδ' ὄρωσ' εὐφραίνεται. δέδοικα δ' αὐτὴν μὴ τι βουλευῆσι νέον· δεινὴ γάρ· οὔτοι ῥαδίως γε συμβαλῶν ἔχθραν τις αὐτῇ καλλίνικον οἴσεται. ἀλλ' οἶδε παῖδες ἐκ τροχῶν πεπαιυμένοι</p>	20 25
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19 ἔγνωκε: what is the effect of using the perf. here, not the aor.?

(Six lines which appear in the manuscripts at this point are believed not to be part of Euripides' original version.)

20 οἶον: i.e. οἶόν ἐστι 'what sort of thing it is'
* ἀπολείπομαι (pass.) I am deprived of x (gen.)

μὴ is pronounced with the α of ἀπολείπεσθαι as a single syllable ('synzesis'). It is striking that the Nurse says 'what it is *not* to be deprived', rather than 'to be deprived'

21 *στυγέω I hate, loathe
*εὐφραίνω I cheer, gladden; (pass.) I enjoy myself, make merry

22 *δέδοικα I am afraid (perf. of δεῖδω)
*βουλευῆσι I plan, devise; give counsel, advise
*νέος αὐτῶν untoward, unexpected

23 δεινὴ γάρ: understand ἐστὶ
*οὔτοι indeed . . . not. The sentence is one of strongly ironic understatement
*συμβαλῶν (συμβαλ-) I engage in x (acc.) with y (dat.)

24 καλλίνικος, ὁ victory, glory of victory
*φέρομαι I win, carry off (fut. οἴσομαι)
25–7 The arrival of the children seems to bring some relief to the Nurse's gloom. But with the children comes their Tutor, and he will reveal that things are even worse

25 οἶδε: ὅδε suggests 'this at which I am pointing', so effectively 'here are' τροχός, ὁ hoop (sc. 'playing with') (2a)

στείχουσι, μητρὸς οὐδὲν ἐννοούμενοι
κακῶν· νέα γὰρ φροντὶς οὐκ ἀλγεῖν φιλεῖ.

26 *ἐννοέομαι (and ἐννοέω) I have in mind,
consider, reflect

27 *ἀλγέω I feel pain, grieve, suffer

3 The Paidagogos hints to the Nurse that something new has come up. (49–62)

ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΟΣ

παλαιὸν οἴκων κτήμα δεσποίνης ἐμῆς,
τί πρὸς πύλαισι τήνδ' ἄγουσ' ἐρημίαν
ἔστηκας, αὐτὴ θρεομένη σαυτῆ κακά;

30

TP.

τέκνων ὅπαδὲ πρέσβυ τῶν Ἰάσονος,
χρηστοῖσι δούλοις ξυμφορὰ τὰ δεσποτῶν
κακῶς πίτνοντα, καὶ φρενῶν ἀνθάπτεται.
ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐς τοῦτ' ἐκβέβηκ' ἰαλγηδόνας,
ὥσθ' ἴμερός μ' ὑπῆλθε γῆ τε κούρανῶ
λέξαι μολούση δεῦρο δεσποίνης τύχας.

35

ΠΑ.

οὐπῶ γὰρ ἡ τάλαινα παύεται γόων;

TP.

ζηλῶ σ' ἐν ἀρχῇ πῆμα κοῦδέπω μεσοῖ.

ΠΑ.

ὦ μῶρος, εἰ χρὴ δεσπότης εἰπεῖν τόδε
ὡς οὐδὲν οἶδε τῶν νεωτέρων κακῶν.

40

28 Take οἴκων κτήμα closely together: 'house-
possession'. The Tutor's address to the
Nurse, taking a whole line, is formal and,
seeing that the noun in the voc. is abstract
(κτῆμα – 'piece of property'), patronizing

29 The Tutor comments on the lack of
propriety in the Nurse being out of doors
on her own. He emphasizes it in the
unusual expression τήνδε... ἐρημίαν and
by reinforcing the idea with αὐτὴ...
σαυτῆ (l. 30). Medeia will (ll. 74–5)
apologize for similar behaviour
ἐρημία, ἡ solitude (1b); ἐρημίαν ἄγω I am
alone

30 θρέομαι I cry loudly

31 μόνος ἡ οὐ on [her] own away from (+ gen.)
*θέλω I wish, want (= ἐθέλω)

32 The Nurse's line of address is also formal,
but less stilted

ὅπαδός, ὁ attendant (2a)

*πρέσβυς, ὁ old man (3e)

33 '... the affairs of their masters, turning out
badly, [are] a disaster'. Note that the long
-α of ξυμφορὰ establishes it as a feminine
noun, not an adj. agreeing with τὰ
δεσποτῶν

*ξυμφορὰ ἢ (1b) = συμφορὰ ἢ an event,
usually (as here) a bad event, a disaster

34 *πίτνω I fall, happen, turn out (= πίπτω)
φρένες -ων αἰ (here) = 'feelings'

*ἀνθάπτομαι I take hold of, attack; grapple
with, engage in (+ gen.)

35–7 The stage represents the outside of a house.
The Nurse cannot speak to us, the
audience, except by coming out of doors.
This necessity is covered by an
explanation founded in Greek practice –
conveying bad news to the elements, and
perhaps thereby averting the evil

*ἐς τοῦτ' ἐκβαίνω lit. I come to this of, i.e.
such an extreme of x (gen.)

36 *ἴμερος, ὁ longing, yearning; desire, love (2a)
ὑπέρχομαι (ὑπελθ-) I come upon, steal over

37 *μολῶν οὕσα ὄν coming, going (aor. part. of
βλώσκω (μολ-)); μολούση: take
(illogically) with με in previous line

38 γάρ, as often, conveys the sense 'is this
because...?'

γός, ὁ weeping, wailing (2a)

39 *ζηλῶ I admire, esteem happy; (sc. 'in your
ignorance'); envy, vie with
ἐν ἀρχῇ sc. ἐστί