



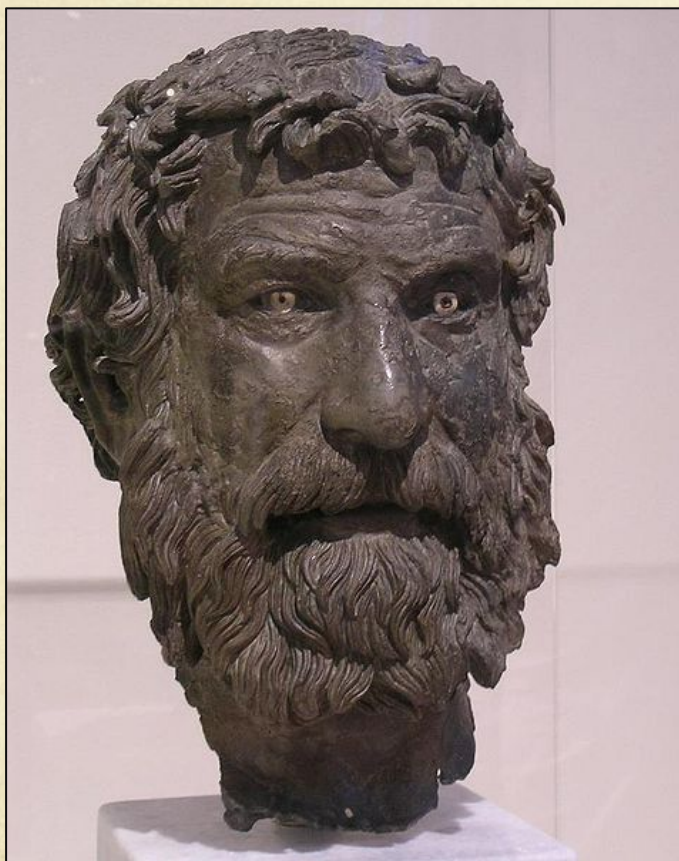
The Tablet of Cebe

Bruce MacLennan

History of *The Tablet of Cebes*

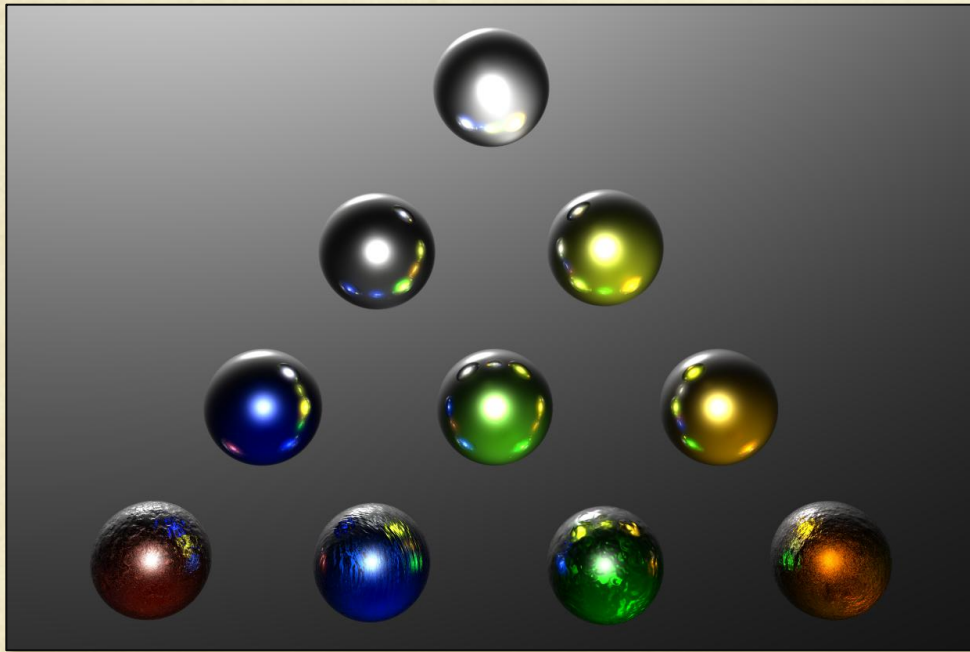
- Text seems to date from 3rd cent. BCE to 2nd cent. CE (probably 1st BCE to 1st CE)
- Earliest manuscripts from 11th cent. CE
- Gives an allegorical interpretation of a tablet set up in a temple of Kronos
- A mandala with characteristics of a labyrinth
- Presents *way* for living well and *path* of spiritual initiation
- Cebes is mentioned only in the title

Cebes of Thebes




- Lived 469–399 BCE
- Disciple of Socrates
- Pythagorean initiate
- Pronounced “KEH-base”
- Might have written original version of *The Tablet*, or set up the original tablet, or neither!

Hermeneutic Levels

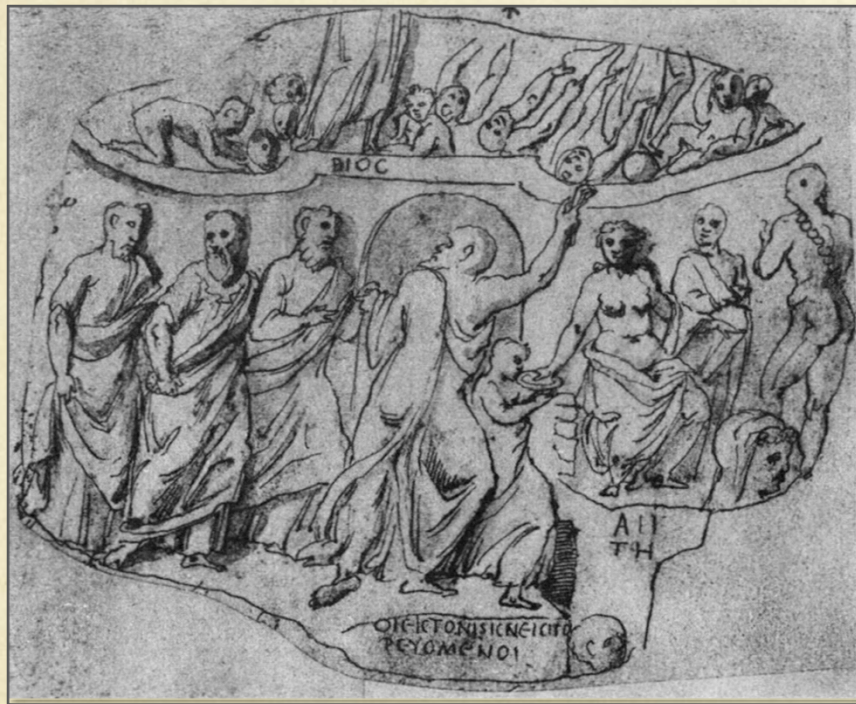


- Anagogical
- Symbolical
- Allegorical
- Literal

Reconstructed Images

The image features a light beige, textured background. On the right side, there is a large, dark, irregular ink blot. Scattered across the entire surface are numerous small, solid black dots of varying sizes, which appear to be digital noise or artifacts. The text "Reconstructed Images" is centered on the left side in a black, serif font.

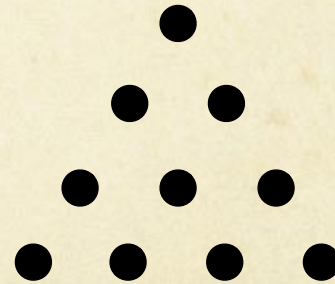
Drawing of Ancient Relief



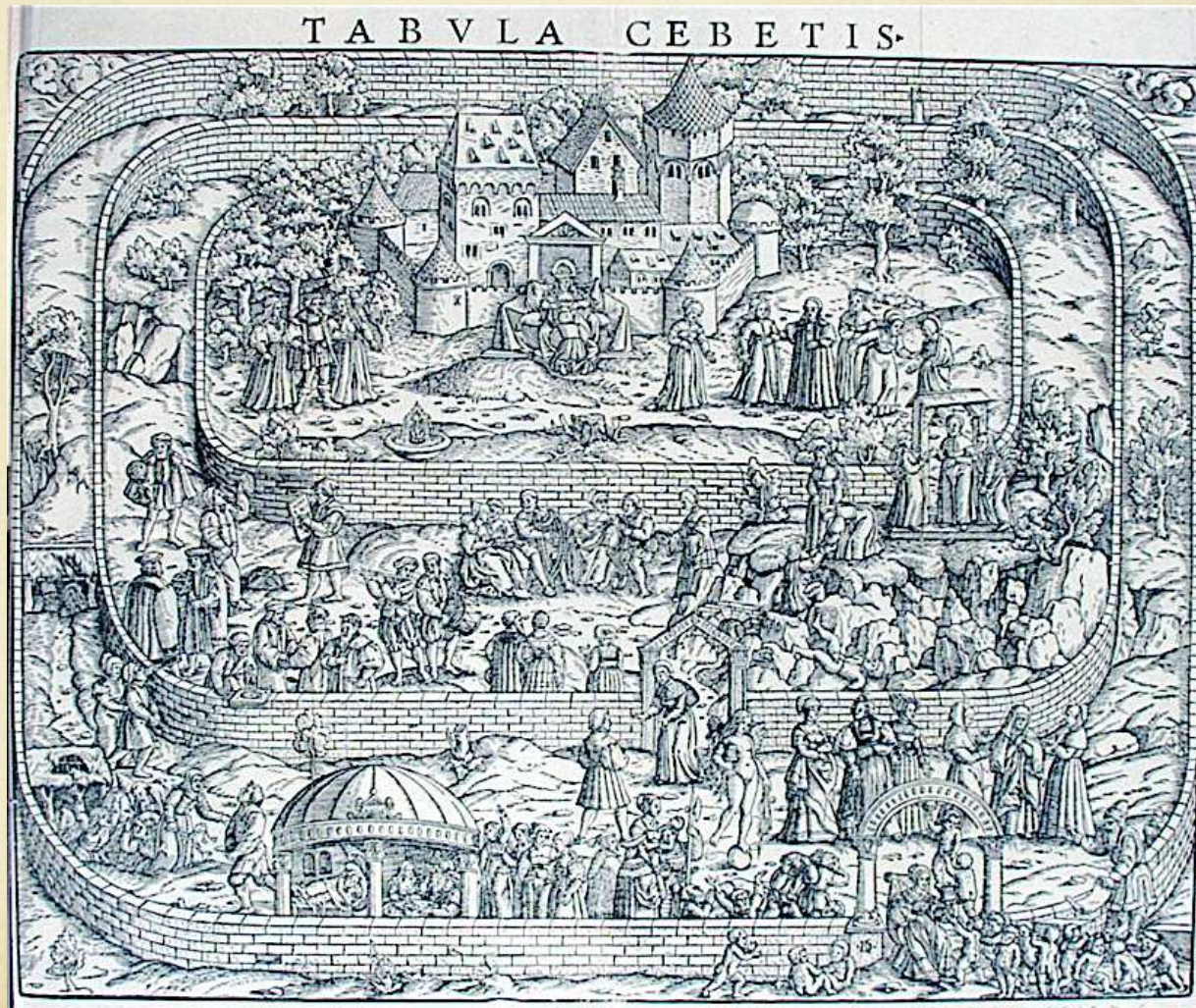
- Depicts fragment of ancient marble relief
- Agrees with description in *Cebes' Tablet*
- Two drawings made of relief in 16th century
- Original relief has been lost



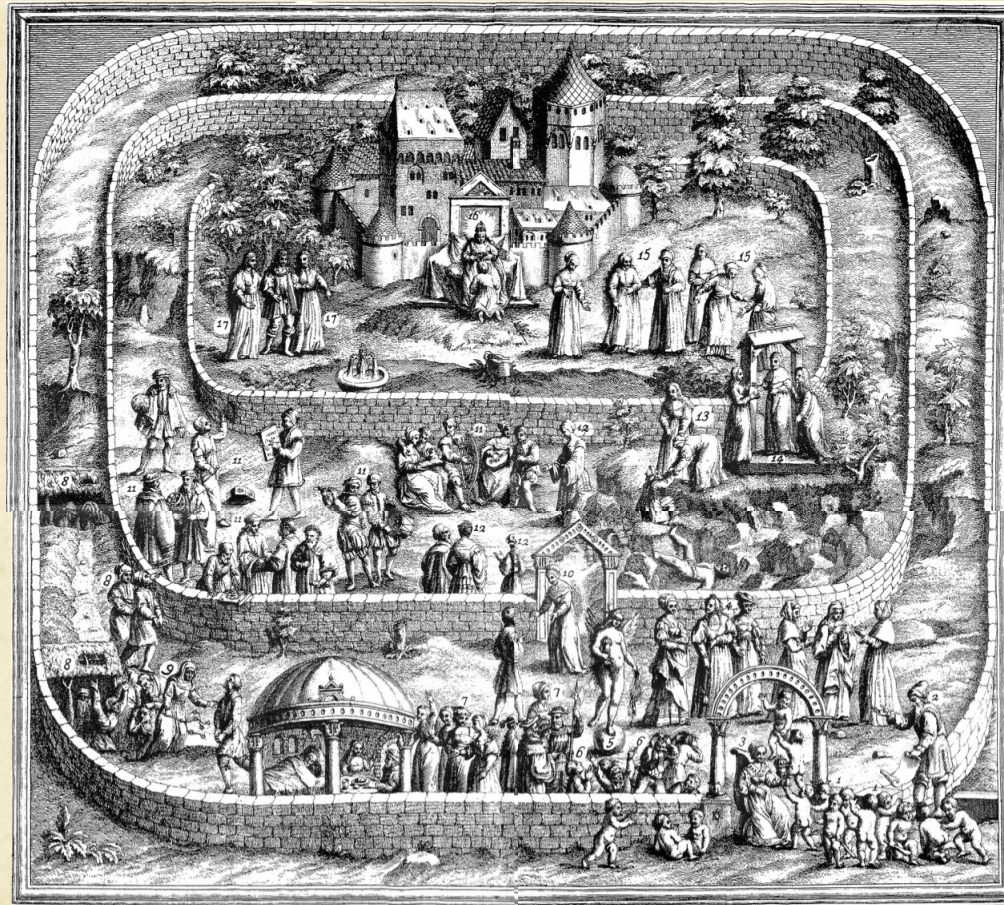
M. Merian
1638



D. Kandel (1547)



Cornelio Pepoli (1771)



1 Turba di coloro che entrano nel Mondo.
 2 Il Genio.
 3 L'Impostura.
 4 Scuol di Meretrici.
 5 La Fortuna.

6 Turba de Inconsiderati.
 7 Alta Cumma di Meretrici.
 8 Luoco di Miserie.
 9 La Penitenza.
 10 Sapienza Menzognera.

TAVOLA
 III
 CEIETE

11 Spuolo de Follz Amatori
 del falso sapere.
 12 Altre Meretrici.
 13 Continenza e Toleranza.
 14 La Verace Sapienza.

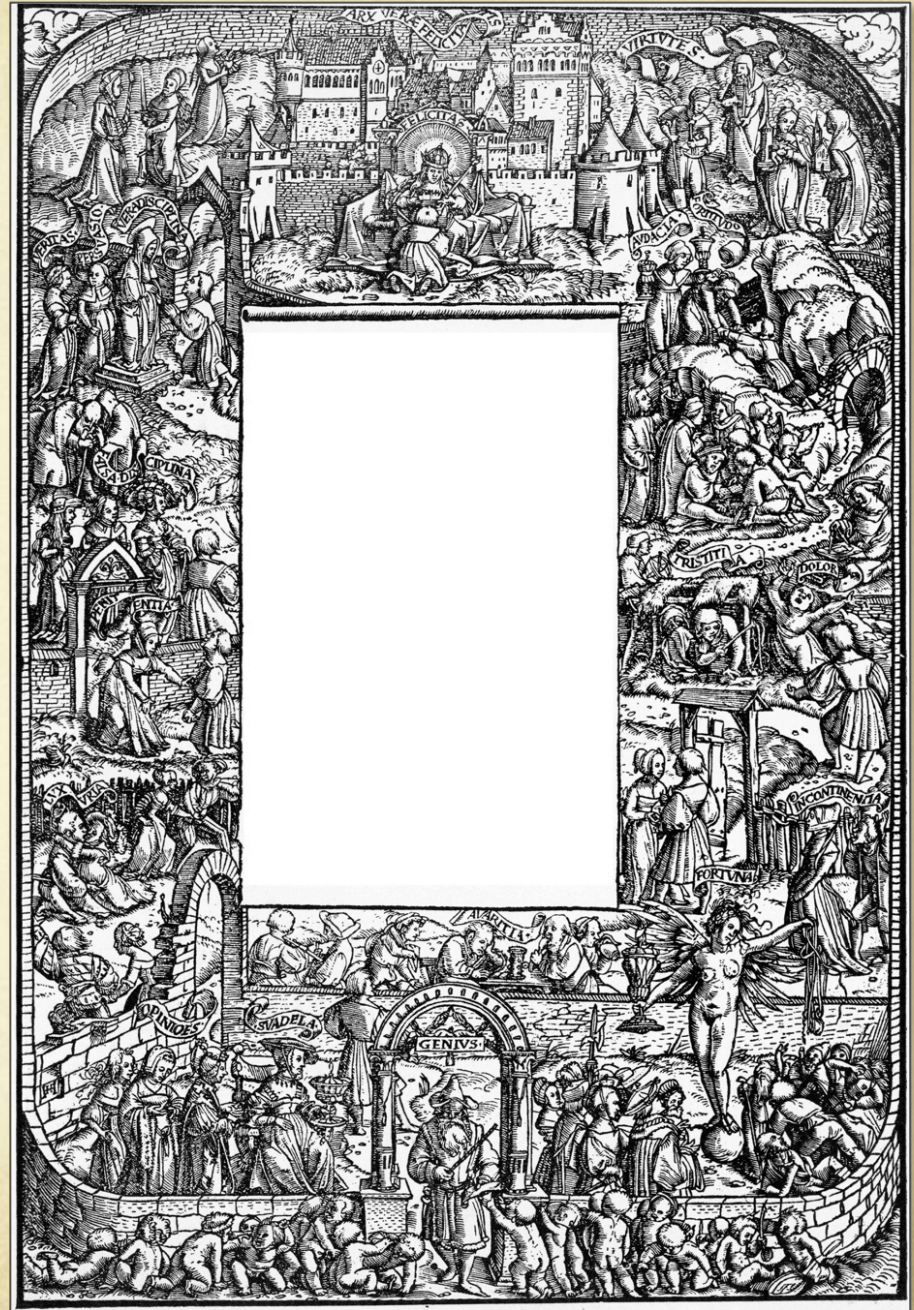
15 Drappello di Virtù.
 16 La Felicità.
 17 Le Virtù che mostrano al Beato
 gl' infelici.

Hans Holbein the Younger

1497/8–1543

Border for a title page (1521)

Engraved by Knackfuss



The Tablet and its Interpretation



The Old Man in the Sanctuary of Kronos

While Kronos' fane with solemn step we
trod,

And viewed the votive honors of the God,

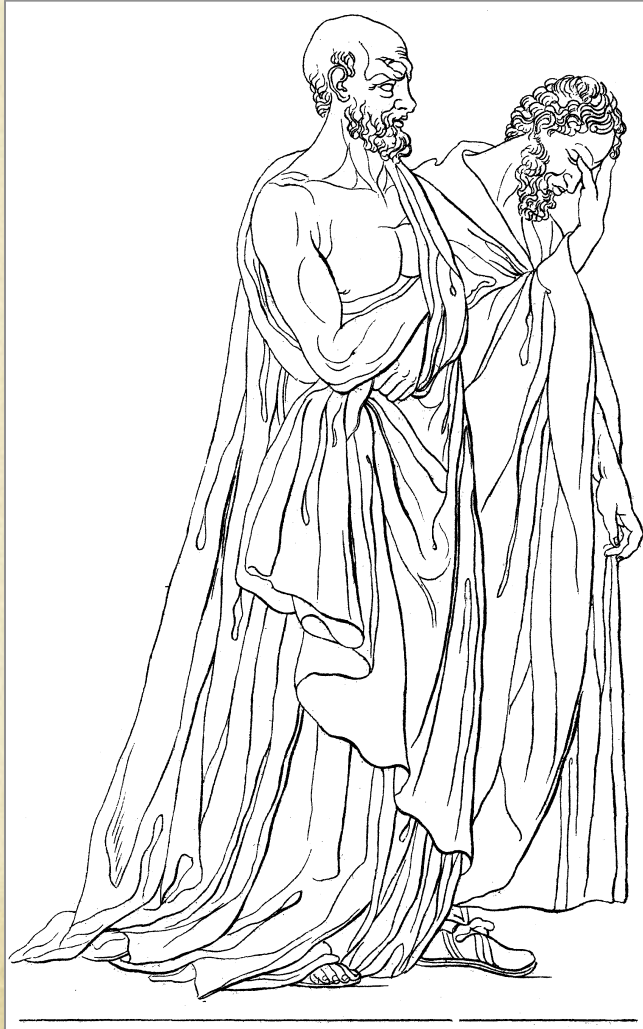
A pictured Tablet, o'er the portal raised,

Attached our eye; in wonder lost, we
gazed.*

*verse translations after Thomas Scott, 1754.



The Sage



A Foreigner, long since, whose
noble mind

Learning's best culture to strong
genius joined,

Here lived, conversed, and
showed th' admiring age

Another Samian or Elean Sage.

He reared this dome to Kronos'
awful name,

And gave that portrait to eternal
fame.

Such Wisdom flowing from a
mouth but young

I heard astonished, and enjoyed it
long.

The Riddle of the Sphinx



*Father, if leisure with thy Will conspire,
Yield, yield that comment to our warm desire.*

Free to bestow, I warn you first, beware:
Danger impends, which summons all your care.

Wise, virtuous, blessed, whose Heart our
precepts gain,

Abandoned, blind, and wretched, who
disdain.

For know, our purposed theme resembles best
The famed *Enigma* of the Theban pest.

Th' Interpreter a plighted crown enjoyed,

The stupid perished, by the Sphinx destroyed.

Count folly as a Sphinx to all mankind,

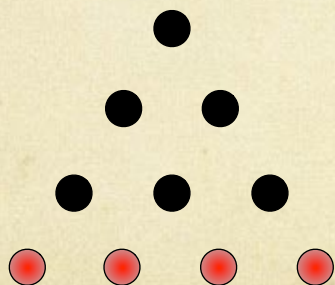
Her Problem: How is Good and Ill defined?



With opposite effect, where thoughtful Skill
Discerns the boundaries of Good and Ill,
Folly must perish; and the' illumined Breast
To Virtue saved, is like th' Immortals blessed.

The First Ring

The Realm of Life, serving the Body





The Daimôn of Mankind

Behold Life's penciled scene, the Natal Gate,

The numbers thronging into mortal state.

Which Danger's Path, and which to Safety
bears,

That ancient *Daimon of Mankind* declares.

See him aloft, benevolent he bends,

One hand is pointing, one a Roll extends,

Reason's Imperial Code, by Heav'n impressed

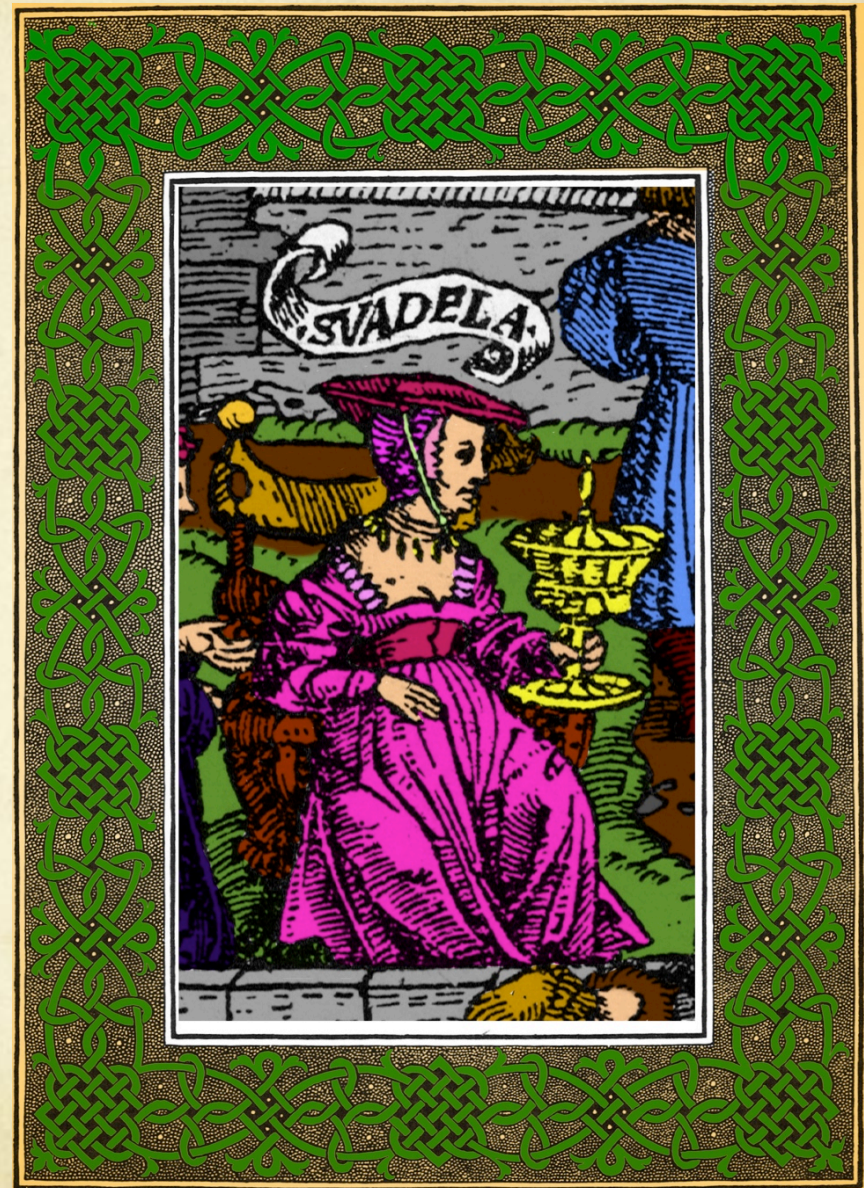
In living letters on the human breast.

Delusion and her Potion

Her faithless hand presents a crystal
bowl,
Whose poisonous Draught intoxicates
the soul.
Error and ignorance infused, compose
The fatal beverage which her fraud
bestows.

*Is that the hard condition of our birth?
Must all drink error who appear on Earth?*

All; yet in some their measure drowns
the mind,
Others but taste, less erring and less
blind.





Opinions, Desires, Pleasures

All promise joy, we rush to their
embrace,

To bliss or ruin here begins our
race.

Happy, thrice happy, who entrust
their youth,

To *Right Opinions*, and ascend to
Truth,

Whom *Wisdom* tutors, whom the
Virtues hail,

And with their own substantial
Feast regale.

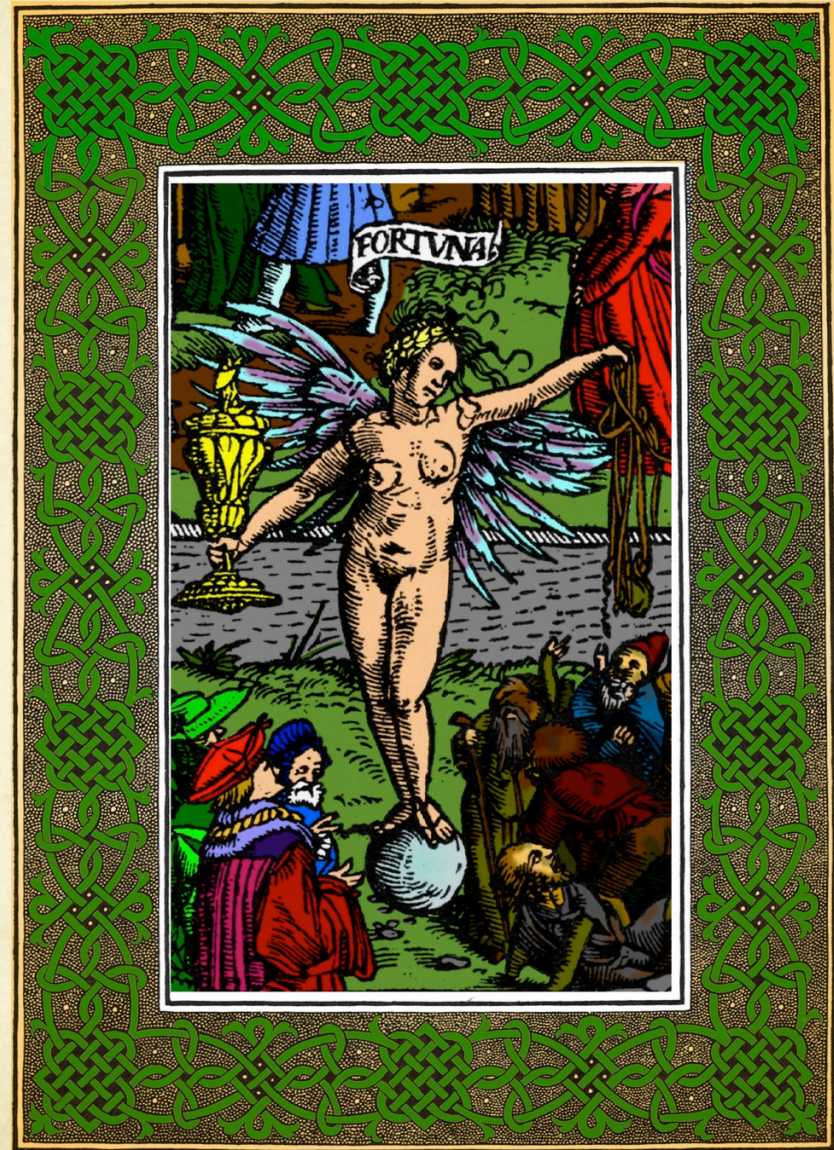
Fortune

Fortune, blind, frantic, deaf, with
restless wing

The World she ranges, and her
favours flings:

Flings and resumes, and plunders
and bestows,

Caprice divides the Blessings and
the Woes.





The Unforeseeing

*What mean those multitudes around
her? Why*

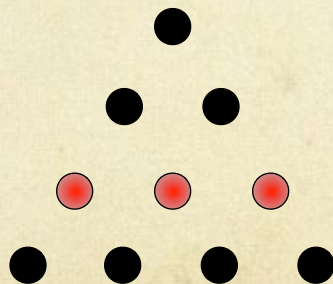
Such motley attitudes perplex the eye?

*Some, in the act of wildest rapture,
leap,*

*In agony some wring their hands, and
weep.*

The Second Ring

The Realm of Indulgence, serving the Lower Soul





Indulgence

There stationed to what end?

In watch for prey,

Fortune's infatuate favorites of a day.

These they caress, they flatter, they
entreat

To try the pleasures of their soft
retreat,

Life disencumbered, frolicsome, and
free,

All ease, all mirth, and high felicity.

Waste, Greed, and Flattery

A short illusion his imagined feast,
Himself the game, himself the
slaughtered beast.

Now, raving for his squandered
wealth in vain,

Slave to those tyrant frauds he
drags their chain,

Compelled to suffer hard and
hungry need,

Compelled to dare each foul and
desperate deed.



Lack of Self-control

Seeing glitt'ring visions in
succession rise,

He laughs at Socrates the chaste
and wise.

Till, sobered by distress, awake,
confused,

Amazed, he knows himself a
wretch abused.





Punishment

High-brandishing her lash, with stern regard,

Stands *Punishment*, an ever-waking Ward;

While sullen *Melancholy* mopes behind,

Fixed, with her head upon her knees inclined;

And, frantic with remorseful fury, there

Fierce *Anguish* stamps, and rends her shaggy hair.



Repentance

Unless, rare Guest, *Repentance* o'er the gloom

Diffuse her radiance, and repeal his doom.

She comes! meek-eyed, arrayed in grave attire,

See *Right Opinion*, joined with *Good Desire*,

Handmaids of *Truth*; with those, an adverse pair

(*False Wisdom's* minions, that deceiving fair)

Attend her solemn step; the Furies flee.

Come forth, she calls, come
forth to liberty,

Guilt-harassed thrall, thy
future lot decide,

And, pond'ring well, elect my
future Guide.

Momentous option! choosing
right, he'll find

A sovereign Med'cine for his
ulcered mind;

Led to *True Wisdom*, whose
cathartic Bowl

Recovers and beautifies the
soul.

Misguided else, a counterfeit
he'll gain,

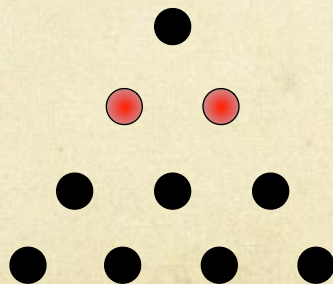
Whose Art is only to amuse
the brain;

From vice to studious folly
now he flies,

From bliss still erring, still
betrayed by lies.

The Third Ring

The Realm of False Wisdom, serving the Upper Soul



False Wisdom



Styled *Wisdom* by the crowd, the thinking few

Know her disguise, the phantom of the true,

Skilled in all learning, skilled in every art

To grace the Head, not meliorate the Heart.

The saved, who meditate their noble flight,

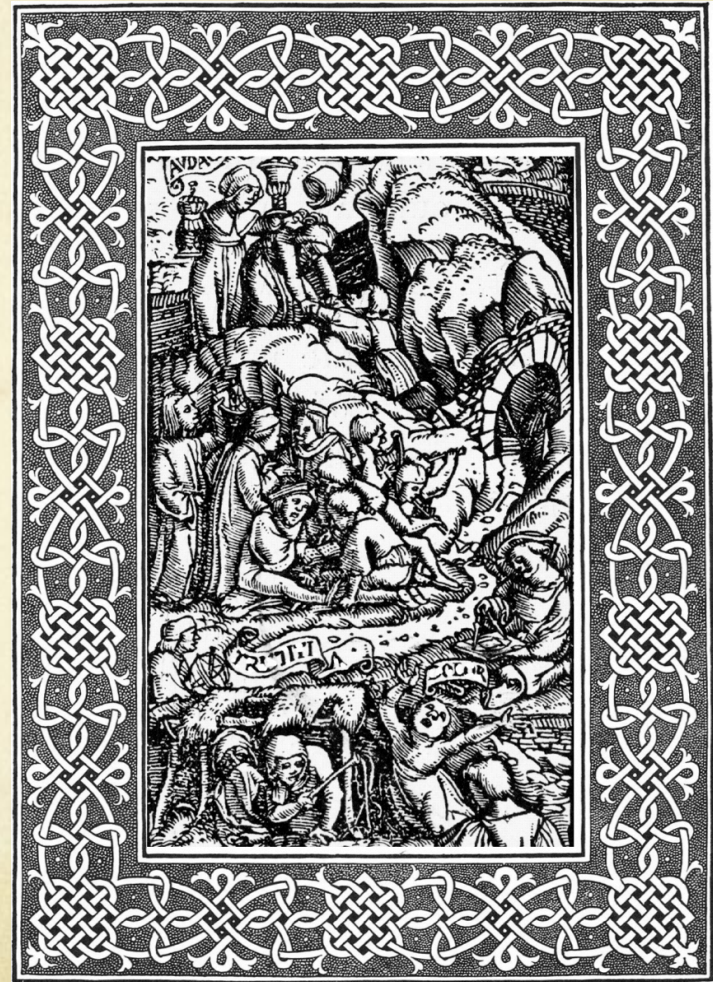
From a bad world, to *Wisdom's* lofty height,

Just touching at this inn, for short repast,

Then speed their Journey forward to its last.

Fierce syllogistic tribes, a wrangling race,
Bards rapt beyond the Moon on fancy's wings,
And mighty masters of the vocal strings,
Those who on labored speeches waste their oil,
Those who in crabbed calculations toil,
Who measure Earth, who climb the starry road,
And human fates by heav'nly signs forebode,
Pleasure's philosophers. Lyceum's pride
Disdainful soaring up to heights untried.
All who in learned trifles spin their wit,
Or comment on the works by triflers writ.

Lovers of False Wisdom



Lingering Effects of Delusion's Potion

Still these ingenious heads alas! retain

Delusion's Dose, still the vile dregs
remain

Of ignorance with madding folly
joined,

And a foul Heart pollutes th'
embellished Mind.

Nor will presumption from their souls
recede

Nor will they from one vicious plague
be freed,

Till, weary of these vanities, they've
found

Th' exalted Way to *Truth's* enlightened
ground,

Quaffed her Cathartic, and all cleansed
within,

By that strong Energy, from pride and
sin,

Are healed and saved. But loit'ring here
they spend

Life's precious hour in thinking to no
end;

From science up to science let them
rise,

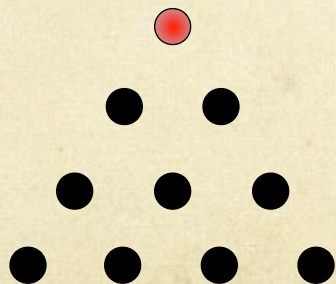
And arrogate the swelling style of wise,

Their *Wisdom's* folly, impotent and
blind,

Which cures not one distemper of the
Mind.

The Fourth Ring

The Realm of True Wisdom, serving the Nous



The Difficult Path

Survey this solitary waste, which rears

Nor bush nor herb, nor cottage there
appears.

At distance see yon strait and lonely Gate

(No crowds at the forbidding entrance
wait)

Its avenue a rugged rocky soil,

Travelled with painful step and tedious
toil.

Beyond the wicket, tow'ring to the skies

See Difficulty's cragged mountain rise,

Narrow and sharp th' Ascent, each edge a
brink

Whence to vast depth dire precipices sink.



Self-mastery and Perseverance



The pow'rs of *Self-control* and
Patience, there

Stationed by *Wisdom*, her
commission bear

To rouse the spirit of her fainting
son

Thus far advanced, and urge and
urge him on.

“Courage!” they call, “the
coward’s sloth disdain,

Yet, yet awhile, and noble toil
sustain.”

Revealing the Hidden Way

These generous Guides, who
Virtue's course befriend,

In succor of her Pilgrim, swift
descend,

Draw up their trembling charge;
then, smiling, greet

With kind command to rest his
weary feet.

With their own Force his panting
breast they arm,

And with their own intrepid
spirit warm;

Next, plight their guidance in his
future Way

To *Wisdom*, and in rapt'rous view
display

The blissful Road (there it invites
your eyes)

How smooth and easy to the foot
it lies,

Through beauteous land, from all
annoyance clear

Of thorny evil and perplexing
fear.

The House of Happiness and the Virtues

Wisdom, Truth, and Persuasion

In station at th' effulgent Portal, see
A beauteous form of mildest majesty.
Her eyes how piercing! how sedate her mien!
Mature in life her countenance serene:
Spirit and solid thought each feature shows,
And her plain robe with state unstudied
flows.
She stands upon a cube of marble, fixed
As the firm rock, two lovely Nymphs betwixt,
Her daughters, copies of her looks and air,
Here candid *Truth*, and sweet *Persuasion* there:
She, she is *Wisdom*.



Purification

The First Degree of Initiation

Certain her Way, and permanent
the Deed

Of gift substantial to her friends
decreed.

She gives the confidence erect and
clear,

She gives magnanimous contempt
of fear,

And bids th' invulnerable Mind to
know

Her safety from the future shafts of
woe.

There standing, she presents her
potent Bowl,

Divine Cathartic, which restores
the Soul.

Illumination



The Second Degree of Initiation

So *Wisdom*, by her Rules, with
healing Art

Expels *Delusion's* mischiefs from
the Heart;

Thus purged, her pupil through
the Gate she brings,

The *Virtues* hail their Guest, the
Guest enraptured sings.

Perfection: Crowning by *Happiness*



The Third Degree of Initiation

Now, with a Crown of wond'rous
Pow'r, her hand

(Assistant, round her, all the Virtues
stand)

Adorns her Hero, honorable meed

Of conquests won by many a valiant
deed.

Lord of himself, the Victor now
contains

Those hostile monsters in his pow'rful
chains.

The Crown



But, say, what salutary Pow'r is shed

*By the fair Crown, which decks the
Hero's head?*

Most beatific. For possessing this

He lives, rich owner of man's
proper bliss:

Bliss independent or on wealth
or pow'r,

Fame, birth, or beauty, or
voluptuous hour.

His hope's divorced from all
exterior things,

Within himself the fount of
pleasure springs,

Springs ever in the self-approving
breast,

And his own honest Heart's a
constant feast.

Return to the Outer Rings

The *Virtues* lead him back to observe those left behind



All-pow'rless they to burst the galling
band,

To spring aloft, and reach yon happy
land,

Entangled, impotent the Way to find,

The clear Instruction blotted from
their mind

Which the good Daimon gave; guilt's
gloomy fears

Becloud their suns and sadden all
their years.

He sees his better state

Confounding good and evil, like the throng,
His life, like theirs, was action always wrong.
Enlightened now in the true bliss of man,
He shapes his altered course by
Wisdom's Plan;
And, blessed himself, beholds with weeping eyes
The madding world an hospital of sighs.



He fares where'er his wise volition leads.
Where'er it leads, Safety attends him still:
Nor safer, should he on Apollo's Hill,
Among the Nymphs, among the vocal
Pow'rs,
Dwell in the Sanctum of Corycian Bow'rs.
Honored by all, the friend of humankind,
Beloved Physician of the sin-sick mind;
Not Aesculapius more, whose power to
save
Redeems his patient from the yawning
grave.

He is safe from evil

*But never more shall his old restless foes
Awake his fear, nor trouble his repose?*

Never. In righteous habitude inured,

From passion's baneful anarchy
secured,

In each enticing scene, each instant
hard,

That sovereign Antidote his mind
will guard.

Those are th' *Opinions*, who have
guided right

The inexperienced to the Plain of
Light;

Returning, new adventurers to bring,

The blessings of the last-arrived they
sing.

Opinion's foot is never found

Where *Knowledge* dwells, 'tis
interdicted ground,

At *Wisdom's* Gate th' *Opinions* must
resign

Their charge, those limits their
employ confine.

The Opinions



The Charge of the Daimon

The Daimon bids those entering life to hold

A Spirit with erected courage bold.

Never (he calls) on *Fortune's* faith rely,

Nor grasp her dubious gifts as property.

Let not her smile transport, her frown dismay,

Nor praise, nor blame, nor wonder at her sway

which reason never guides; tis fortune still,

Capricious chance and arbitrary will.





The Gifts of False Wisdom

So in the sciences, though, rudely
taught,

We may attain the little that we
ought;

Yet, accurately known they might
convey

More Light not wholly useless in
its Way.

But Virtue may be reached,
through all her rules,

Without the curious subtleties of
schools.

The Old Man Concludes



Strangers, these Lessons, oft revolving,
hold

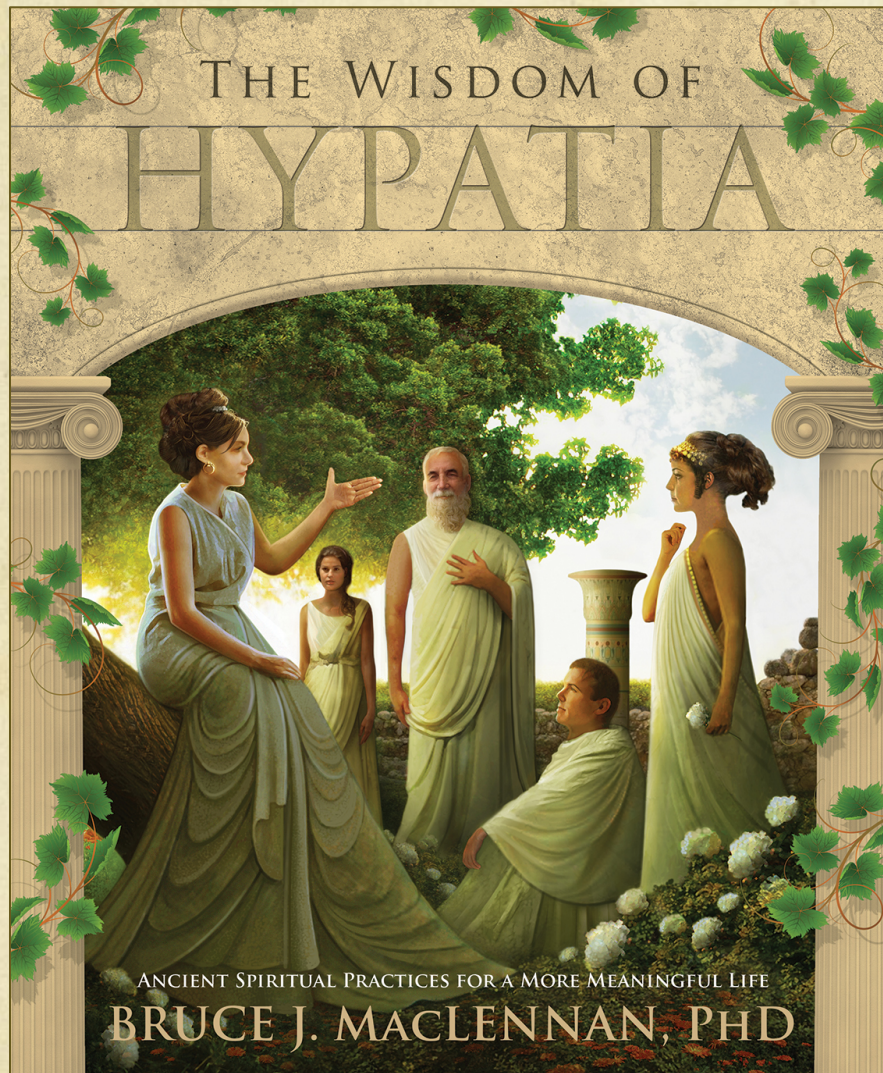
Fast to your hearts, and into habit
mold;

To this high scope Life's whole
attention bend,

Despise ought else as erring from your
end.

Do thus, or unavailing is my care,

And all th' Instruction dies away in air.



The Book

- Teaches *practical* Neoplatonic spiritual path:
How to live a more meaningful life
- Nine-month plan of study
- Progresses through “three degrees of wisdom”
- Numerous exercises
- WisdomOfHypatia.com