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MARTHA C.
NUSSBAUM

*The Fragility
of Goodness*

LUCK AND ETHICS IN GREEK
TRAGEDY AND PHILOSOPHY

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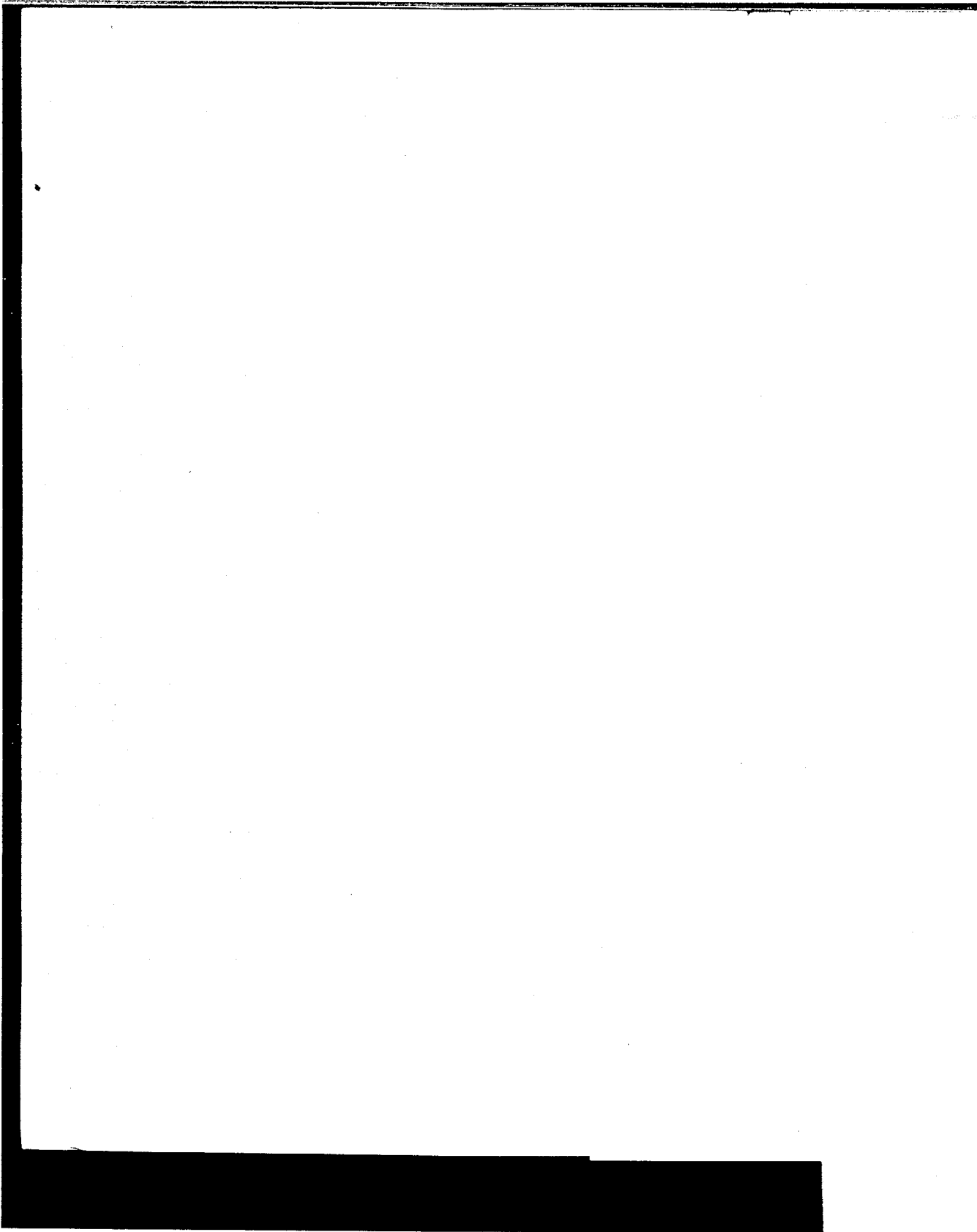
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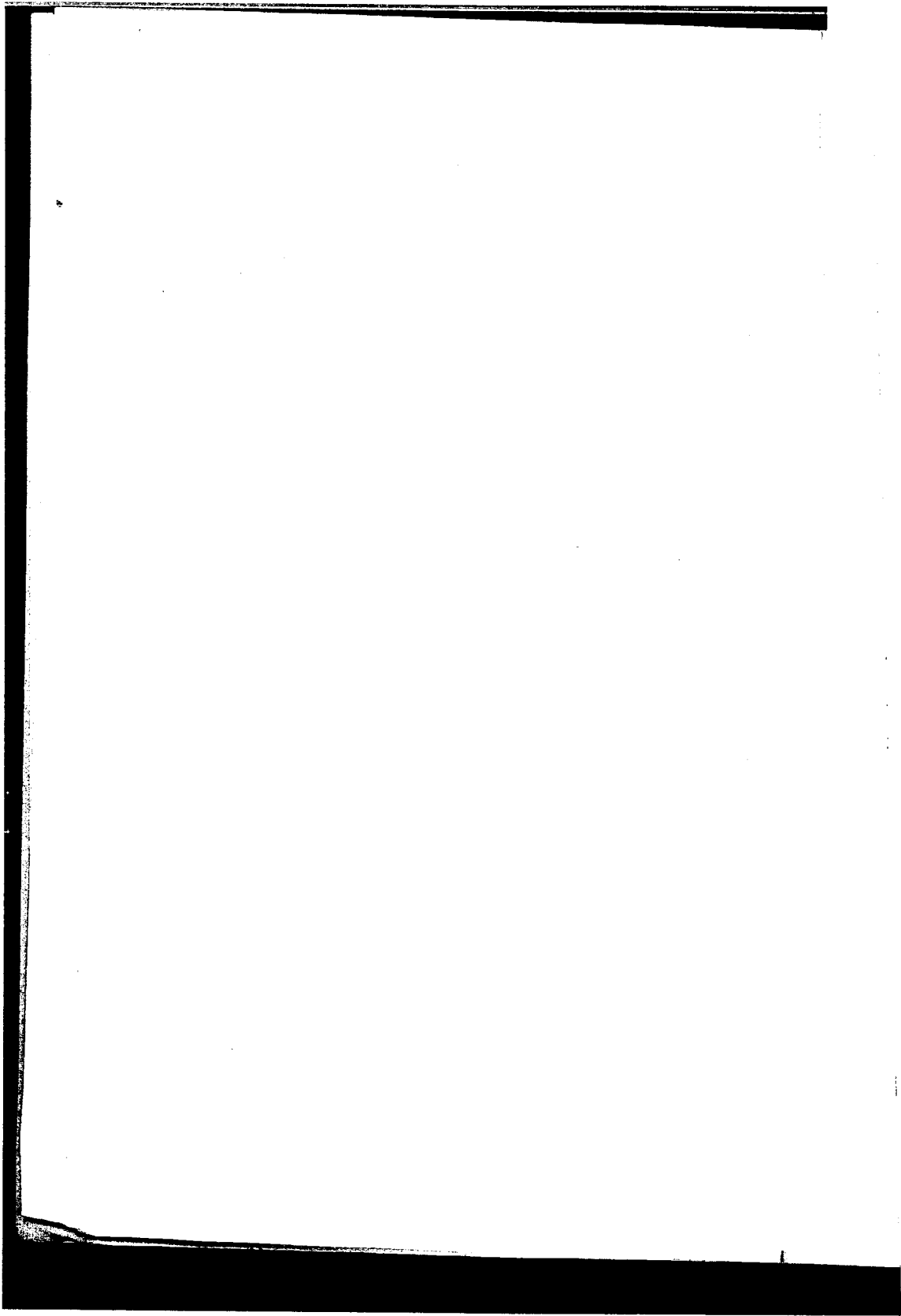


The Fragility of Goodness

This book is a study of ancient views about "moral luck." It examines the fundamental ethical problem that many of the valued constituents of a well-lived life are vulnerable to factors outside a person's control and asks how this affects our appraisal of persons and their lives. The Greeks made a profound contribution to these questions, yet neither the problems nor the Greek views of them have received the attention they deserve. This book thus recovers a central dimension of Greek thought and addresses major issues in contemporary ethical theory. One of its most original aspects is its interrelated treatment of both literary and philosophical texts.

The Fragility of Goodness has proven to be important reading for philosophers and classicists, and its nontechnical style makes it accessible to any educated person interested in the difficult problems it tackles. This new edition features an entirely new preface by Martha Nussbaum.

Martha C. Nussbaum is Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago.



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Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy

Revised Edition

Martha C. Nussbaum

University of Chicago



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"This is an immensely rich and stimulating book. This is partly because the author combines to a rare degree qualities not often found together: a scholar's understanding of the text with rigour of argument, and these together with an imaginative grasp of moral questions. But it is also because she has chosen to write a very ambitious book, to grapple with some fundamental, perennial issues. . . . And unlike most philosophy books, it is a delight to read. It should change the tenour of debate in more than one field."

- Charles Taylor in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*

"... intellectually demanding and richly rewarding...required reading for anyone interested in Greek philosophy or literature..."

- Bernard Knox in *The New York Review of Books*

The Fragility of Goodness is a marvelous book. It is alert to the fabric of human ethical experience in a way that is rare in our contemporary philosophical tradition. It is a gifted reaffirmation of the truth that there is, in our Greek inheritance, a quality of ethical reflection that is unsurpassed, and which is itself richly responsive to sensitive exploration of the kind which Nussbaum provides. . . . No one with an interest in Greek ethics can afford to miss this book, and no one who pursues moral philosophy will fail to profit from it. . . . a powerfully persuasive book."

- Derek Browne in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*

"This is an engrossing account and an important book. Its scope is very wide, in a world where it has become sadly unusual for a scholar to tackle both tragedy and philosophy in a single work." - Jasper Griffin in *The Times Literary Supplement*

"There are not many books which leave the reader with the sense of having had his perception of the subject altered. This is one of them." - Christopher Taylor in *Mind*

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For Rachel

Some pray for gold, others for boundless land.
I pray to delight my fellow citizens
until my limbs are wrapped in earth – a man
who praised what deserves praise
and sowed blame for wrong-doers.
But human excellence
grows like a vine tree
fed by the green dew
raised up, among wise men and just,
to the liquid sky.
We have all kinds of needs for those we love –
most of all in hardships, but joy, too,
strains to track down eyes that it can trust.

Pindar, *Nemean VIII*. 37-44

He will see it as being itself by itself with itself, eternal and unitary,
and see all the other beautifuls as partaking of it in such a manner
that, when the others come to be and are destroyed, it never comes
to be any more or less, nor suffers any alteration... In this place, my
dear Socrates, if anywhere, life is livable for a human being – the
place where he contemplates the beautiful itself... Do you think life
would be miserable for a person who looked out there and
contemplated it in an appropriate way and was with it? Or don't
you understand that there alone, where he sees the beautiful with
that faculty to which it is visible, it will be possible for him to give
birth not to simulacra of excellence, since it is no simulacrum he is
grasping, but to true excellence, since he is grasping truth? And as
he brings forth true excellence and nourishes it, he will become
god-loved, and, if ever a human being can, immortal?

Plato, *Symposium* 211B-212A

SOCRATES: Well, then, what is a human being?

ALCIBIADES: I don't know what to say.

Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 129E

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