The “great debate” between the Zeus-born twins Amphion and Zethus in Euripides’ *Antiope* has attracted a great deal of attention, and there is broad consensus concerning its general course and many points of detail.1 The debate occurred early, probably in the first episode, and may have had no direct consequence for the plot; it offered a contrast of βίοι—values and lifestyles promoted and exemplified by the two young men. Fifteen or more fragments totaling more than 60 lines enable us to form a fairly clear impression of these βίοι; luckily, assignment to one or the other of the twins is attested or safely deduced in all but a few cases, and the two sides are about equally represented. The contrasting ideals are often identified as versions of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Zethus advocates hard work, manly strength, care of property, and the ability to help oneself and one’s family and friends both privately and publicly. Amphion appreciates music and pleasure, and generally the finer things in life. In some fragments assigned to him, we see a tension between the desire to avoid the trouble of public life and the belief that his intellectual excellence does in fact benefit the city; this can be more or less satisfactorily explained by external testimonies (collected as F 182b ii in Kannicht 2004) to the effect that the focus of the contest shifted from music to the basis of wisdom and utility of excellence.

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1 The editions of Kambitsis 1972, Kannicht 2004, and Collard 2004 are indispensable. Collard (2004: 266–268) ably summarizes what is known about the debate and provides a wealth of information in his commentary on individual fragments. In this essay, translations of *Antiope* are his. Although I venture to disagree with him on various points, my debt will be obvious; this also seems a fit occasion to thank both him and Martin for honoring me with the invitation to join them in the work on *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays II*. 
Many details of the debate can be interpreted politically, and political interpretation becomes unavoidable in what is taken as the second stage of Amphion’s response. About this, naturally, there is much less scholarly consensus. Still, most interpretations share a broad outline, which goes something like this: After Amphion makes a favorable first impression with a musical performance and conversation with the chorus, Zethus enters and attacks music, along with what he sees as the typical vices of its practitioners. Amphion not only defends his craft, but accepts Zethus’ criterion of utility and asserts that his ideal wins on this count, too. According to a probably justifiable inference from Horace (Epist. 1.18.43–44), he then graciously defuses the conflict and yields to his brother’s immediate request that he join him in the hunt.

It is hardly surprising that some see this course of events as an unambiguous victory for Amphion: how could Euripides not prefer the musician’s point of view? Others are more cautious about the notion of a victor but still, in effect, side with Amphion when they say that he takes the argument onto Zethus’ own ground. Once attention is focused on whether music and intellect really provide the benefit Amphion claims for them, Zethus and his ideal are left without much interest or appeal. In this essay, I dispute two widely if not universally shared assumptions underlying this general approach. The first is that Zethus promotes community service. The second is that Amphion, who unmistakably refers to an ideal of ἀπραγμψΓΥΣΡrΓΚσύνη, “quietism,” is somehow at odds with the political life imagined as the background to the debate, while his brother is not. In my view, Zethus, who nowhere invokes the traditional aristocratic claim of usefulness (encoded, for example, in χηνοστός and related words), falls pointedly short of an ideal of service. While Amphion, on the other hand, endorses ἀπραγμψΓΥΣΡrΓΚσύνη, it is far from clear what he means by this ideal. It follows that Zethus should not be constructed as the opposite of just one type of quietist. On the contrary, I suggest, his ideal represents something an Athenian might well have recognized as another variety of quietism. Or rather, both he and Amphion have the potential to be selfish élitists, though each of course sees himself in a more favorable light.

Aside from the concluding argument for Zethus as a potentially selfish elitist, the present essay concentrates on clearing away obstacles (as I see them) to a just interpretation of the debate. In a companion piece, I plan to use further details of the background, scenic form, plot, and language to develop my own view of the twins and the political significance of their debate. To anticipate the conclusion of that argument somewhat,