

NOTHING MORE TERRIBLE THAN HUMANITY:
OBSTINACY, WITHDRAWAL AND DESIRE IN SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE*

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ABSTRACT

This study contests the view that Sophocles' *Antigone* is "unphilosophical," and argues that addressing the contest of ideas is central to the play. It is thus an inquiry not only into the play itself but its relationship to ancient Greek philosophy. The author develops a new account of the relationship between Antigone and Creon, not as mere opposites, but as having an analogical relationship to one another. He contends that the play advances a view of rational and human limits that is congenial not only to Aristotle's view of poetry, but to his whole philosophical approach. He also suggests, however, that the play adumbrates a heroic vision of humanity's need to use violence that is not so easily reconcilable with existing philosophical approaches, but that nonetheless constitutes a significant reflection on the human situation that is "philosophical" in its own right.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Chapter 1: The First Stasimon.....	12
Chapter 2: The Analogical Relationship between Antigone and Creon.....	20
Chapter 3: Hegel’s Interpretation.....	30
Chapter 4: The Tragedy of Dionysus and the Critique of Apollonian Rationality.....	35
Chapter 5: The Tragedy of Philosophy.....	45
Chapter 6: The Philosophy of Tragedy.....	62
Bibliography.....	78

FOREWORD

Because I believe that a translation is already the beginning of an interpretation, all translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. In order to promote accessibility, I have followed the custom of transliterating individual Greek words or phrases, but, in order to avoid awkwardness, passages quoted at length appear in Greek.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the revival of the study of Sophoclean drama in the nineteenth century spurred largely by Schlegel, Hegel and Nietzsche, Sophocles' *Antigone* has been the object of almost singular respect.¹ Although innumerable scholars concur in their admiration, this agreement has done nothing to bring about consensus or even similarity in interpretations. Indeed, the multifariness of divergent readings has led some commentators to the conclusion that seriously treating the contest of ideas in Sophocles' plays was not the interest of the playwright. This view takes at least two forms: first, Sophoclean drama deals in ideas not for their own sake but in order to produce dramatic effect, and, second, that the playwright aims to suspend a certain kind of ratiocination in order to reveal a more original kind of thinking.² These views could not be further apart. One says that the ambiguity in the plays and in the disparity in the interpretations of the plays discredit their apparently intellectual content, while the other argues that the plays aim to save intellectualism by peeling away an unhealthy, excessive form of its exercise.

There is *prima facie* textual evidence for some version of the latter view in the words of Haimon to Creon, which are reiterated by Teiriasias at the moment of

¹ G. Steiner, *Antigones*, (New York: Oxford, 1984), 1-19. J. Wilson, *The Hero and the City*, (Ann Arbor, 1997), 1-5.

² For the first view, see D.A. Hester, "Sophocles The Unphilosophical," *Mnemosyne* 24 (1971): 11-59. For the second, see M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* 45: *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (ed.), (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1984), 222 and also M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, (Cambridge, 1986), 51-82.

Creon's *peripeteia*. The first view, in contrast, is difficult to accept, given not only the prominence of ideas within Sophoclean drama but also the consistency with which they are pursued, if not always with a consistency of meaning. There is no need to deny the plurality of plausible interpretations or the often confused and contorted way ideas are articulated within the text. The dramatist of ideas is not under the obligation to provide the equivalent of a complete, and completely consistent, philosophical treatment. We must also not press the false choice between dramatic effectiveness and ideational aptitude. These are the misunderstandings that all too often underlie the attempt to divorce Sophoclean drama from the world of ideas.³ These words of Creon about the beginning of his leadership of the city might as well be an identification of the task of tragedy, to show *personae* and the principles that inform those *personae* in action, that is, under dramatic test: 'It is impossible to learn anyone's *psyche*, *phronema*, or *gnome*, until he appears under test in power and authority'⁴ (ἀμήχανον δὲ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐκμαθεῖν ψυχὴν τε καὶ φρόνημα καὶ γνώμην, πρὶν ἂν ἀρχαῖς τε καὶ νόμοισιν ἐντριβῆς φανῆ, 175-77). A fortiori, it is not clear that our distinctions between drama and thought would have been intelligible, much less acceptable to the ancients. If one were to ask Plato,

³ Hester, 45-7, in fact, implies a belief in both the notion that Sophocles' lack of a complete philosophical system entails the exclusivity of dramatic effect and the development of ideas and that the contest of ideas is peripheral.

⁴ All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

for instance, if he were a philosopher or a writer of dramatic dialogue, he undoubtedly would have been nonplussed by the question.⁵

The attempt to understand the ideas behind Sophocles' plays is hardly new, dating back to the work of Plato and Aristotle and even before the 5th century, the ancient practice of euhemerism and other forms of allegorizing prehistoric myth had been applied to Homer. It also has a rich history in German Idealism, beginning with Hölderlin, and continuing with Hegel, Schelling, Freud, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. The variety of their interpretations is one of the reasons adduced in support of the argument against the practice of exploring the ideas underlying the dramatic, and if it cannot be shown that they are either implausible or reconcilable, and that any commentator may read in whatever intellectual perspective he desires by

⁵ Despite the supposedly 'ancient' quarrel between poetry and philosophy that Plato mentions at *Republic* 10.607b5, and his suggestion that the philosopher-king would disallow poetry in the ideal city (3.398a6-7), he also indicates that there is a kind of poetry—more dry and less pleasurable—that would be helpful: αὐτοὶ δ' ἂν τῷ αὐστηροτέρῳ καὶ ἀηδεστέῳ ποιητῇ χρώμεθα καὶ μυθολόγῳ ὠφελίας ἕνεκα, ὅς ἡμῖν τὴν τοῦ ἐπεικοῦς λέξιν μιμοῖτο καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα λέγοι ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῖς τύποις οἷς κατ' ἀρχὰς ἐνομοθετήσαμεθα, ὅτε τοὺς στρατιώτας ἐπεχειροῦμεν παιδεύειν (We shall use a more dry and less pleasurable poet and myth-teller ourselves for our own well-being, who would imitate the style of the excellent (tragedian) and would speak in those patterns that we legislated at the outset, when we were attempting to educate soldiers). Indeed, Plato has his own myths and his 'philosophical' dialogues are also, in their own way, dramatic. We may even be inclined to accept Nietzsche's finding of: "die ungeheure Begierde als Wurzel dieses Angriffs...selbst an die Stelle des gestürzten Dichters zu treten und dessen Ruhm zu erben" (the overwhelming desire at the root of this attack to assume the place and the fame of the overthrown poet). Later in the same work, Nietzsche argues that Plato imitates the orator, the sophist, and the dramatist in his own work. It appears, then, that the attack is in terms of content rather than form.

philosophical caprice, the argument against such interpretations would be decisive.⁶ Because this has not been demonstrated, there is no need to work through each of the different readings. It is, however, appropriate to contend with the contortions of the text itself, and I endeavor to address some of those issues below.

The view that the idea of checking ratiocination lies behind the *Antigone* is defended by Heidegger, and, more recently, by Winnington-Ingram and Nussbaum.⁷ By “checking ratiocination,” I mean the idea that Sophocles’ play points to the limitations of human calculative rationality and the need for a different, more limited kind of thinking. Nonetheless, Heidegger’s interpretation is not supported by a thoroughgoing investigation of the text, and, for Winnington-Ingram and Nussbaum, that interpretation is something of a passing remark more than a sustained hermeneutic framework. It remains to investigate the totality of the play with respect to the question of intellectual withdrawal. By withdrawal I mean a response to limitations of human judgments that results in making the self-assuredness in the actions that follow from those judgments more tentative. I do not mean that the actor should never be assertive, but only that she should be, in principle at least, willing to be more flexible. Nor do I mean that Creon and Antigone specifically should have been less assertive. The conclusion of withdrawal comes only after the action of the play, and not by the characters themselves, at least not before they act, but by them

⁶ Hester, 46.

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 39: Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (ed.), (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1989), 118. ; R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation*, (Cambridge, 1980), 91-116; Nussbaum, 80-2.

(and by us) only after the action of the play is complete. I want to argue that the play suggests the need for such withdrawal and I want (unlike Winnington-Ingram and Nussbaum) to read the play with this central focus, and (unlike Heidegger) to carefully read the whole play in this way. I also want to argue, however, that the play advances an understanding of human nature as violent and that this problematizes the possibility of withdrawal.

My first point of departure is the famous first stasimon of the play, and its suggestion that humanity is the most *deinos* of all. The praise of man's accomplishments coupled with the adumbration of the sometimes hidden snares may suggest a need to curb his excesses. The Chorus' conspicuous invocations of Dionysus, which I shall discuss in detail below, likewise bring to light elements that rational man ignores at his own peril. Since it is nearly impossible to conduct an investigation such as the one here undertaken without considering the views of Hegel, I devote the third chapter to (at times) defending and (at others) questioning the plausibility of his view. It is ultimately found wanting not because of an inappropriate "conceptualizing of the protagonists,"⁸ but because it calls for the rationalistic advance of mediation while the play calls for withdrawal.⁹ This is not enough, however, to avoid the strength of his position, which I argue is only possible by seeing that Creon and Antigone are not in absolute opposition, but partake in a metaphorical similarity that is not subject to mediation. Finally, it will be necessary

⁸ C. Segal, "Sophocles' Praise of Man and the Conflicts of the *Antigone*, *Arion* 3 (1964): 46.

⁹ Nussbaum, 72-76.

to consider whether the play does not contain a more rigorous critique of Apollonian, masculine, rationality than has been previously recognized.

CHAPTER 1: THE FIRST STASIMON

The first point of departure and the *locus classicus* for beginning an investigation into the *Antigone*'s treatment of rationality in terms of assertion and withdrawal is the Chorus' seemingly gnomic "praise of man" in the first stasimon. By the early 5th century, the epithet *deinos* (332) had become a central and identifying trait of Athenian orators and political leaders. The first instance in extant literature is Hdt. 5.23, where a Persian general uses the word (fittingly in conjunction with *sophos*, which here must mean something like cunning wisdom), to describe the potential treachery of a Greek vassal in Thrace. In Sophocles' later *Philoctetes*, it describes the exemplar of cunning and treachery *par excellence*, Odysseus (again alongside *sophos*, 440), in a less than flattering, if not inexhaustibly wicked, role.

Liddell & Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* (New--9th--edition, 1940) places *Ant.* 332 in a class of instances where *deinos* means strength or power, in distinction to the class of instances I have just been considering. Without question, the praise of man in the first stasimon points to one who is amazingly strong and powerful beyond expectation (*hyper elpida*, 366). Nonetheless, it is important not to divide these two classes of the word's meaning too sharply, since the class appropriate to orators and politicians undoubtedly also invokes the idea of strength in an intellectualized fashion. In the first stasimon, moreover, the chorus praises both the intellectual and physical strength of the human race, and *sophos*, which seems to be something of a watchword for the politician/orator class of instances, also appears (365).

The chorus certainly directs our attention to, among others, Creon, as a politician and orator who checkers his appearances with words that are supposed to undergird the health of city but end up undermining it.¹⁰ It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, however, that they must also be thinking back to the reign of Oedipus and his perspicacious ability, which represented the height of human achievement, although it turned out to be capable of lapses in vision, and, indirectly, to Antigone, whom the chorus calls the harsh daughter of a harsh father (τὸ γέννημ' ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς τῆς παιδός, 471-2).

A number of questions present themselves here, which have rightly interested scholars for quite some time: Is Antigone or Creon the tragic hero(ine) and protagonist of the play? Are Antigone and Creon equally culpable for the tragic action? To what extent are the two masculine or feminine? What is the significance of their connection with the fifth century debate between *physis* and *nomos* (roughly, nature and law)? I shall take up some of these questions below, but it is enough for now to notice that both Creon and Antigone may lay claim to the possibilities of a *deinos anthropos*.

Beyond, or perhaps behind, political/rhetorical and strength/power senses of *deinos*, it can have a more basic meaning as terrible or wonderful, even wondrous or strange, incomprehensible. Some English translations of the *Antigone* say “wonderful”, while others say “terrible,” and still another, perhaps the most interesting attempt, says both. “Wondrous” and “strange” also appear in published

¹⁰ Winnington-Ingram, 125.

translations.¹¹ This poses a significant problem, not unlike the one about the meaning of the play more broadly that I considered in the introduction: How can a word that mirrors itself, that is its own antonym, mean anything at all? It would not merely be an issue of multiple meanings, betokening a suppleness one may admire in rich and evocative literature, but of opposing meanings threatening the ability of the word to say something.

Unless, that is, if it is possible to understand the opposing meanings in terms of a higher unity of meaning, and I think that this is possible with *deinos*. There are 12 instances of the word *deinos* (including this one) in the *Antigone* and 36 in the plays that comprise the Oedipus cycle. In none of the other instances is it possible to translate the word as “wonderful.” If it is possible to translate it that way here, one must also remember that it is an exceptional case and one might suspect that elements of its usual meaning in Sophocles might still be present, hedging, as it were, the positive nature of the ode. We would probably do best to leave *deinos* in Greek, while keeping in mind the variety of things it indicates.

Having observed the range of the word’s meaning, we would now do well to consider the rest of the “ode on man” to see if there is anything further that we can learn. The following sentence mentions the kinetic force of man’s nature with the verbs *chorei* (he passes beyond the gray sea, 334-5) and *apotruetai* (he rubs away the

¹¹ R.C. Jebb translates “Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man;” Grene also says “more wonderful,” in the 2nd edition of Grene & Lattimore, which E. Wycoff in the 1st ed had rendered “stranger;” Fagles has “numberless wonders, terrible wonders.”

Earth, 337-8). The sixth line generates a feeling of the agonistic struggle between man and the Earth with the assonance on the alpha-privative in the first two instances and part of a prefix with similar force in the third (*aphthiton*, *akamatan*, *apotruetai*, 337—it is “undiminished, unwearied Earth” that he rubs away). In this struggle, man and earth are worthy adversaries, for although the former continuously plows away the latter remains unwearied, and the struggle between the two seems to be without end. What is more, the Earth is *theon tan hypertatan* (336), which means not only that she is the eldest among the gods, but also that she is the greatest among them (and this is the most original sense). Man is the most terrible in the sense of his restlessness arising on account of his perpetual dissatisfaction with his present place, his ostensible home. This gives rise to what is most wonderful about him, the ability to move beyond his present confines to what lies ahead, which, in turn is not without danger, since the word used for man going beyond the grey sea (*peran*, 334) can also mean going beyond in the sense of exceeding the proper place of man, as at *OT* 74.

In the following lines, the chorus expands upon the venturesome character of man in an increasingly violent sense. The issue of a home or a place to dwell is conspicuous in these lines, seeming to distinguish man from other animals. The chorus evokes a distinction among categories of being with words like *phulon* (race), *ethnos* (tribe) and *phusis*, which is sometimes translated here as ‘creature,’ but really denotes a class of creatures (342-5, cf. Grene: “the brood”). The nature of the human race is in contrast to other kinds of animal races in that it is always on the move,

unlike the field-dwelling beast (344), the sea-dwelling fish (345). Even the beast who is mountain-roaming (349-50), though in motion, has his motion confined to a particular place. It is because of this versatility, this capability of surviving from place to place, that man rules over the various other animals.

In addition, man's fullness, even weight of intelligence (*periphrades*, 347) is contrasted with the light-minded bird (342-3). This rationality, however, is not cool, calm, and collected but rather quickly is taken up in the service of violence. The final two lines of the antistrophe (354-5) underscore how man has learned to protect himself from the dangers of the outside. The chorus does not say, although it may lie underneath their song, that language, especially in the context of the city, often involves contention and strife, as we shall see below. The ability to protect the city first of all implies that the city is in danger from what is outside (put here in terms of hail and rain), and there will be a perpetual contest between the city and the outside.

However grand an accomplishment of civilization the city may represent, it remained a tenuous accomplishment for Sophocles, long before the possibility of Athens' collapse became imminent near the end of his life.¹² Man is now terrible in the sense of his relentless violence, then wonderful in view of the accomplishments it brings, and finally terrible in the sense of the fragility of these accomplishments. It remains to be asked: What does man as the establisher and defender of cities have to

¹² It is worth noting that Sophocles probably composed the *Antigone* at the height of Athens' political power. It is difficult to understand him as an apologist for that power, when this play, written at that time, warns against the excesses of political will.

do with his perpetual movement, even homelessness? The answer seems to lie in the precarious relationship between the hero and the city that emerges in the second antistrophe (367-375) of the ode. For now, it will have to suffice to say that the accomplishment of the city is constantly under threat and that its protection depends upon the movement of the city in its own defense against the movement of the outside against it and that its sustenance still depends upon the roaming hunter and explorer that man is.

In the second strophe, the transient nature of man comes into focus with the first word, invoking man's resourcefulness in making provisions (*pantoporos*, 360). This does not mean, however, that he has in his possession a plentitude of resources in some kind of standing reserve, ready for whatever happens. Instead, resourcefulness is having many roads (*panto-poros*), indeed having traversed many roads, and being experienced with a multitude of options for what confronts him. Because he has been down many roads, he comes to nothing that lies ahead without a way (*aporos*, 360), a road out of the difficulty. Despite the predominance of assertive, masculine imagery throughout the ode, however, we find man in the second antistrophe slithering (*herpei*, 367) toward the good and the bad, evoking serpentine imagery, as against breaking through, plowing, traversing, et al., perhaps to evoke a sense of action through contrivance. Although intelligent cunning is conspicuous throughout the ode (*periphrades* (347, cunning), *phrônema* (355, thought), *edidaxato* (356, he has learned), *sôphon* (365, wise)), the verbs of

movement have so far focused on force. It could also mean to limit man's power concerning ethical matters, as the more restrained verb seems to indicate passivity.¹³

The chorus' notions of good and bad, respectively, are explained in the next couple of phrases. Despite man's contention with the Earth described earlier in the ode, his tendency toward the good depends upon his respect for the ground (*nomous chthonos*, 368-9), here not endowed with the name of Gaia. The swearing of oaths is, of course, an artifice of culture, and associated with Zeus' Olympian justice (*theôn t' enorkon dikan*, 369). Respect is necessary for both the high and the low, and the low is mentioned first. When this happens, that is to say, when not only the wonderful (ouranic) deities are honored, but also the terrible (chthonic) deities, man tends more toward the wonderful than the terrible. As Heidegger translates lines 368-9 of the ode on man, "Zwischen die Satzung der Erde und den beschworenen Fug der Götter hindurch fährt er."¹⁴ This poses a particular difficulty for the confrontation between Creon and Antigone. Creon stands on the side of the justice of the city and the ouranic deities, while Antigone stands on the side of the chthonic deities and the ties of family.

In order for humanity to emerge as the most wonderful, and thus for the achievement of civilization to be permanent, these must be reconciled. This is what makes the view of Hegel so attractive, but it may not be possible. Hence, the same

¹³ *Herpo* is cognate with the Latin *serpo*, and is used for the movement of infants in Aeschylus, that of the lame Philoctetes in Sophocles, and "an animal walks on its teeth" (*LSJ*, ad loc), that is, an animal that slithers in the *Carmina Popularia*.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1958), 113.

one who rises high in the city easily slides (*erdoi*, 375) over, into the one who is without city, standing at the precipice of civilization's collapse. Most translations of the ode turn these words into a pair of "if" clauses or a pair of temporal clauses, implying different classes of human activity. The two clauses are in fact conditional but the context suggests that they are not exclusive. It seems rather to point a universal human condition: that the same person may slide over from *hypsipolis* to *apolis*. The nouns "high in the city" and "citiless" (*hypsipolis/apolis*, 369) seem to be complementary, however paradoxical this may seem. Put more abruptly, it is not that man is now honoring the gods, then violating what is good, but that the what is wonderful about man is also what is terrible about him even though these states are in some sense distinguished. This is what prompts the Chorus finally to reject not one kind of person, but humanity in general, as a way of setting the stage for the rest of the tragic drama to unfold (374-375).¹⁵

¹⁵ Nussbaum, 73, also has observed that the chorus' use of the neuter pronoun at 334 distances it from 'man.' The whole tone of the first stasimon engenders the feeling that they are discussing a class of creatures in which they are not participants.

CHAPTER 2: THE ANALOGICAL RELATION OF ANTIGONE AND CREON

The “Ode on Man” comes immediately after the announcement that Creon’s edict has been violated and his demand that the perpetrator be found. It is followed by the bringing in of Antigone, itself introduced with “*es daimonion teras amphinoôtode*” (I am confused about this sign from a god, 376). The chorus’ horror lacks a clear direction. Is this monstrosity, this incomprehensible portent from a god, brought about by false accusation or by Antigone? Either option is unthinkable. Immediately after the kinetic nature of man, along with the intelligence he possesses have been praised, this very search for the cause of Polyneices’ burial yields Antigone, herself the terrible image of the laws of the Earth and familial blood ties that threaten Creon’s power. That is to say, the conflict that introduces to the city what is not good (*to me kalon*, 370) emerges.

The ensuing discussion between Creon and Antigone sets up the terms of the dilemma between their realms of activity. Creon, for his part invokes Antigone’s violation of established laws (*nomous...proskeimenous*, 481), that is, of his edict forbidding Polyneices’ burial. His rationale for the edict against burial is purely construed in terms of the city (194-206). Polyneices had been one of the seven against Thebes and since he had come against the city, his life, and in death his corpse lacked the value of that of his brother Eteocles. Antigone, on the other hand, makes the humanist affirmation of human dignity, independent of any political affiliation, invoking the gods below and even the spirit of Eteocles (450-7, 515).

Antigone clings to natural bonds of familial kinship (466-8, 502-4, 511) while Creon holds the bonds of politically constructed loyalty to be more fundamental (182-190). In terms of the great fifth century confrontation, Antigone is traditionally thought to stand on the side of *physis*, and Creon is held to be on the side of *nomos*.¹⁶ Creon understands the land as *gen patroan* (199), while Antigone understands the Earth in terms of a kind of divine presence ξύνοικος τῶν κάτω θεῶν Δίκη (450, Justice dwelling with the gods under the earth), where *dikê* seems to be personified as an element of the *physis*.

The terms of this opposition, however, can easily be reversed, as Antigone's justice ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὄρισεν νόμους (451, ordained the law for humanity) seems to suggest. Creon likewise objects to Antigone's presumption on account of supposedly natural distinctions between men and women: ἦ νῦν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀνὴρ, αὕτη δ' ἀνὴρ, εἰ ταῦτ' ἀνατὶ τῆδε κείσεται κράτη. (484-485, And now, I am not the man, but she is the man, if victory and control in these things will be allowed to her with impunity). So we have Creon, who is supposed to be on the side of law, making claims about nature, and Antigone, supposedly on the side of nature, making claims about divine law. Finally, when Antigone is pressed by Creon with the question of whether it is good to do good equally to the good and the bad, she responds with a lack of certainty: τίς οἶδεν εἰ κάτωθεν εὐαγὴ τάδε; (Who knows whether these things are well-regarded below?, 521) This answer is significant for

¹⁶ The most prominent recent example of this view is maintained by Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard, 1981), 152.

two reasons: it emphasizes a difficulty in distinguishing the bad from the good, the mystery of how the terrible passes over into the wonderful by some unknown justice, and it maintains the mystery of man under which life must be carried out.

Thus, the transgressions of the boundaries of the categories we so often ascribe to each of the characters and Antigone's questioning of the possibility of ethical certainty may indicate that there is more to the relationship of Antigone and Creon than simple opposition and beckon us to consider it more fully. Let us recall the chorus' claim in the first stasimon that the person who is *hypsipolis* (lit. high in the city) carefully balances the laws of the lower, chthonic divinities, those of the family, and heavenly justice. We have seen Antigone's defense of a *dike* of the gods below and Creon's advocacy of the *gen patroan*, both of which are attempts to subordinate the neglected aspect in their actions to their own agendas. Creon has, among his other gnomic utterances, condemned the impliable obstinacy of Antigone (480-483), but in so doing, also condemned his own intractability. Haimon will also emphasize the problem of Creon's self-condemnation; this, however, does not entirely exonerate Antigone, since the more sympathetic chorus also raises the same concern just before her death (853-857).

When we follow the unfolding of the dramatic action in this play, we find that Creon and Antigone are first brought together by their difference, then held apart by that difference, then brought together by their similarity-in-difference, and finally held apart in their fates, but held apart in a way that paradoxically—as each finally

transgresses the realm of the other—once again emphasizes their similarity.¹⁷

Conflict brings them together much in the way it brought Eteocles and Polyneices together, as disputed claims cannot long hope not to intersect. Coming together heightens that conflict and further illuminates the contours of their difference. Their dispute, indeed, seems to replay the confrontation between the two brothers: the interests of the former who overstayed his year on the throne is represented by the king who now denies death rites to the latter, who in turn finds an advocate in the heroine who will be deprived of citizenship, marriage, and even life on his behalf.

We may pass over the difference between Antigone and Creon, which I have adumbrated above and is known to nearly all students of western civilization. It is rather the similarity we have been seeing that is too seldom recognized and which we must attempt to understand. Both make an appeal to some sort of universal justice to which others, and not just themselves, ought to conform. It is this respect and in the details of their universalistic appeals that we may observe the analogy between them. Nussbaum has brought out many of these details, but she has not recognized the concomitant analogical relationship between Antigone and Creon with respect to these details. Creon, for his part, understands justice in terms of the city alone, the *enorkon dikan* (369) of the first stasimon, which was used to suggest justice within the city.¹⁸ It is along these lines that Creon redefines the boundaries along which

¹⁷ This is a paraphrase and expansion of what C. Vaught says about Euthyphro and Socrates in *The Quest for Wholeness*, (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1982), 153.

¹⁸ *cp. endikan*, 208 Nussbaum, 56.

friendship (*philia*) is to be conceived.¹⁹ This redefinition is apparent in his opening speech, where he claims that he would not call a friend anyone hostile to the land (*dusmene chthonos*, 187). As we have seen, however, Creon defines the country (or the land) not only in exclusively political terms but in solipsistic terms, so that Nussbaum remarks: “He recognizes no bond that he has not himself chosen.”²⁰ Indeed, Haimon suggests that the city understood as the body of citizens oppose Creon.²¹

Antigone, likewise, construes *philia* in terms of blood-relationships. Besides their basic similarity in limiting *philia*, Antigone is not entirely consistent in its application to blood relatives when she denies it to her sister for no other reason than Ismene’s refusal to participate in the burial of Polynices. Even if Ismene changes her mind, Antigone says, Antigone will not accept her partnership (*emou...meta*, 70) and will instead lie dead with her true friend (*philê...meta philou*, 73). When Ismene attempts to share in Antigone’s guilt, the heroine reiterates that she does not love as a friend one who is friend in words (λόγοις δ’ ἐγὼ φιλοῦσαν οὐ στέργω φίλην, 543). Much like Creon, Antigone herself defines the boundaries of *philia*, and denies it to those not only who do not fit in to her chosen rubric but also those who do not go along with her plans. She, as much as Creon, is the self-made arbiter of *philia*, with no friend whom she has not chosen.

¹⁹ Ibid., 54.

²⁰ Ibid., 57.

²¹ Ibid., 70.

We have already seen that Creon and Antigone, in their words and in their actions call into question the validity of traditional gender roles. Creon is concerned that if he allows Antigone to emerge as the actor whom he is passive toward, his masculine authority would be in jeopardy. It is, however, in the moment of Creon's recognition and reversal, which, as Aristotle preferred, precisely coincide, when he begins (too late) to try and remedy his mistake, that it is passivity and openness to counsel of others that mark this change. We shall have to return to this theme at the end, but for now it is enough to notice that Creon's insecurity, his trying too hard to be a "man," is the source of his mistake. Antigone, on the other hand, is at once the defender of feminine, nurturing principles and heroic (i.e. fully masculine) in her defense of those principles. She is, as G. Perotta has observed, "an indomitable character who can be admired and loved only by those who have a sense of the heroic."²² Winnington-Ingram adds, "Antigone may believe that it is her nature to share in love, but she is caught up in a code that equally demands hatred."²³ It is easy to sympathize with Antigone's devotion to her brother, but when we forget the heroic intractability, the hatred of her sister, and the (perhaps equally heroic²⁴) bringing about of civic turmoil, we forget Antigone.

They both also seem to commit acts of hubris in judgment, not only as arbiters of *philia*, but of justice (*dike*) itself. By her own lights, Antigone does not find Creon's edict to follow the justice of Zeus, but the *only* reason is her own fiat

²² G. Perrotta, *Sofocle*, (Milan 1915), 113.

²³ Winnington-Ingram, 135.

²⁴ The hero also must dwell outside the city in the *Coloneus*.

(οὐ γὰρ τί μοι Ζεὺς ἦν ὁ κηρύξας τάδε ...οὐδὲ σθένειν τοσοῦτον ῥόμην τὰ σὰ κηρύγμαθ', 450, 453-4). Creon does not have much more to say on behalf of his own self-made justice. He does argue against Antigone's assessment, but answers with threats. Even if Antigone is his niece, he suggests, she is a slave compared to his power and her excessively tough mind will be broken just as the toughest iron is hardened and snapped by the fire (ἴσθι τοι τὰ σκλήρ' ἄγαν φρονήματα...τὸν ἐγκρατέστατον σίδηρον ὀπτὸν ἐκ πυρὸς περισκελῆ θραυσθέντα καὶ ῥαγέντα, 473-6). Both Antigone and Creon are *deinos* in the sense of their overwhelming human power to redefine *philia* and *dike* for their own ends.

Because of this, Creon rules in a way that is inconsistent with the *dike* and laws of the nether gods and Antigone runs against the high altar of *dike* (see above, 451-2, 873-4). It is *dike*, used and abused by both Creon and Antigone, that will take its due vengeance on both of them, but it is the nature of *dike* that opposes Antigone and the laws that oppose Creon. Sophocles' symmetry is admirable: there is ouranic nature to check Antigone's chthonic nature and divine legislation to contramand Creon's human edict. I shall turn to the fates of Creon and Antigone in more detail below, but we may recall here that, in the words of the first stasimon, one must carefully balance heavenly and chthonic justice in order to remain high in the city. Even if Creon calls Antigone a slave, she is part of the royal family, daughter of one former king, sister of two (or three, if Oedipus is counted) others, and niece of the current one. Creon is, of course, the current king. Both are at one point undoubtedly *hypsipolis* citizens who become *apolis* by their neglect of one form of justice or the

other.

We have already seen how Antigone cuts off Ismene from the bonds of *philia*, and Creon likewise makes Haimon's filial relationship with him difficult by forcing him to choose between his father and his betrothed. Haimon at first indicates that he will side with his father (635-9) and it is only when Creon announces that he will kill Antigone that Haimon separates himself fully from his father's authority (762-765). Just as Antigone was unwilling to share the natural bonds of *philia* with Ismene because Ismene would not share in Antigone's deed, Haimon's disagreement with Creon's policy destroys the *philia* between them. We must read Haimon's speech (683-723) carefully, for it is not the emotional pleading of a smitten lover, but a purely political argument about the most rational course of action.²⁵ Haimon views Creon's actions as out of balance not because he wants to marry Antigone but because they are in violation of the obligations of justice (*dikaia*, 743), religion (*timas theon*, 745), moderation/mutability (710-9), and openness to others (705-9, 720-3).

Now that we have seen that the apparently contradictory positions of Creon and Antigone are not in fact absolute differences, but stand in analogical similarity to one another, I come finally to their fates, where we again encounter the interplay between similarity and difference. In the most basic way, Antigone dies and Creon

²⁵ Winnington-Ingram is typical of those who are, in my view, mistaken about Haimon: "He is in love, and it is the unconquerable power of love which has caused his unfilial behavior" (92). I fear that we have a tendency to read the *Romeo & Juliet* archetype back into the *Antigone*.

survives, but he survives with that most singularly awful of tragic fates, to have to go on living with the disaster of losing nearly everything. In this respect, Antigone's fate is similar. Although she tells Ismene at the beginning of the play that death resulting from burying Polyneices is both *kalon* (72) and religious (77) and reiterates to Creon in the passage we were just considering that death is a *kerdos* (profit, 462, 464) and *par' ouden algos* (painless, 466), news of Creon's sentence causes her to shudder. Was Creon correct to say that the bold flee when they see death is near (580-1)? I think rather, as Winnington-Ingram has suggested, that it is the manner of the death sentence Creon has ordained to be carried out that most horrified Antigone.²⁶ Indeed, her attention is fixed upon the isolation of the rocky cave, *aklautos* (unmourned, 848) in an unknown tomb (τυμβόχωστον ἔρχομαι τάφου ποταμίου, 849). The legislator of this sentence, however, is also isolated by his sentence, starting a chain of suicides that claims his son and then his wife.

Creon

Supports the burial of Eteocles

Defines *philia* in terms of political relationships, refuses it to those who oppose him.

Accused of obstinancy by Haimon.

Concerned about manliness, 525

Antigone

Supports the burial of Polyneices

Defines *philia* in terms of familial relationships, refuses it to those who oppose her.

Accused of obstinancy by Creon and the Chorus.

Takes on heroic qualities, refuses customary feminine role.

²⁶ Winnington-Ingram, 139.

Values political ties and perceived duties regarding those ties above the love of Haimon.	Values familial ties and perceived duties regarding those ties above the love of Haimon.
Defines political duties in terms of himself.	Called <i>autonomos</i> by the chorus.
Survives alone.	Dies alone.
Punished by the collapse of his own family, deprived of wife and son. ²⁷	Punished by the state.
Turns against his son.	Turns against her sister.
Appeals to the justice of the city and of ouranic deity. Will be punished by the Erinyes.	Appeals to the justice of the nether gods and the dead. Runs against the altar of Zeus.
Refuses <i>eros</i> by ordering the death of his son's betrothed.	Refuses <i>eros</i> by trading her betrothed for the 'bride-bed' of death.
Makes himself the arbiter of justice in place of Zeus.	Makes herself the arbiter of justice in place of Zeus.
Accused by Tiresias of having a diseased mind that infected the city (<i>ek phrenos nosei polis</i>) and is concerned to respond to the charge of <i>miasma</i> (1041)	Accused by Creon of introducing <i>miasma</i> to the city (776).

²⁷ Winnington-Ingram, 120.

CHAPTER 3: HEGEL'S INTERPRETATION

It is not so much in the conflict of individual conscience versus the prerogatives of the state, which Dodds rightly saw as one of the great heresies regarding the play,²⁸ nor even in the conflict between *physis* and *nomos*,²⁹ however attractive these alternatives may be, that the dispute between Creon and Antigone is to be understood, but in the justice of the city and the justice of the chthonic deities. In this respect, Hegel's interpretation of the play is on the mark: "Antigone reverences the ties of blood-relationship, the gods of the nether-world. Creon alone recognizes Zeus, the paramount power of public life and the commonwealth."³⁰ The conflict, then, is not over *physis* and *nomos simpliciter*, but over which order of divinity the protagonists recognize. It is, however, not this diagnosis of the conflict but the attempt to reconcile it, that is most provocative: "The true course of dramatic development consists in the annulment of contradictions viewed as such, in the reconciliation of the forces of human action, which alternately strive to negate each other in their conflict."³¹ Though gratitude may be permitted for Hegel's

²⁸ Antigone is called *autonomos* (821) by an unsympathetic male chorus as an insult which, as we have seen does not find support in her own self-understanding or the apparent meaning of her conflict with Creon.

²⁹ C. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1981), 155.

³⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, tr. F.P.B. Osmaston, (London: Continuum, 1920). Reprinted in Anne and Henry Paolucci (eds.), *Hegel on Tragedy*, (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 68.

³¹ *Hegel on Tragedy*, 71.

contribution to the *Nachleben* of tragedy, it poses particular problems for defending the integrity of the genre.

First, tragedy is part of Hegel's aesthetic stage in the development of humanity's self-realization, prior and inferior to the religious (read Christian) stage and ultimately the philosophical/ethical stage. In this connection, it is indicative of the aesthetic stage when he speaks of "our emotional attitude" that needs to be "tranquilized on a true ethical basis" and observes that the rationality of the play "does not yet appear as self-conscious providence."³² Second, although he mentions "dramatic development," his true interest lies in the "satisfaction of Spirit (*Geist*)" whereby "the necessity of all that individuals experience is able to appear in complete accord with reason."³³ The conflict of Creon and Antigone must appear in complete accord with reason, which is to say, with modern, Hegelian reason, purged of its supposedly Greek emotional *pathos*. For Hegel makes this, if nothing else, decisively clear, that "our modern consciousness of right and wrong" would be inaccessible to ancient Greek tragic consciousness, with its attention to the unity of character, destiny, and their objects: "The strength of great character consists precisely in this that they do not choose, but are entirely and absolutely just that which they will and achieve."³⁴

Besides the understanding of the nature of the conflict between Creon and Antigone, Hegel's interpretation has the added virtue of comprehending the analogy

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

between them and the admirable symmetry of their fates which I mention briefly above: “We find immanent in the life of both that which each respectively combats, and they are seized and broken by that very bond which is rooted in the compass of their own social existence.”³⁵ Yet he only takes this analogy so far, limiting it to Antigone’s legal obligations, Creon’s familial bonds, and the consequences of their neglect, a point to which I shall return below. The usual approach to Hegel’s reading, among those who do not simply ignore it, is direct opposition. Segal complains that it

...runs the risk of conceptualizing the protagonists into antithetical ‘principles’ which somehow are, and dialectically must be, ultimately reconciled...We must avoid seeing the protagonists as one-dimensional representatives of simple oppositions: right and wrong, reason and emotion, state and individual, or the like.³⁶

Indeed, if we have learned anything thus far, it is the nearly infinite complexity of Creon and Antigone.

If this was Hegel’s view, it would not be worthy of consideration but immediate rebuke. I do not think, however, that it is, and moreover it seems that Hegel would respect and even share those fears.³⁷ In fact, he rejects each of those binaries in the *Philosophy of Fine Art*. Because *Antigone* is, on Hegel’s view, a “pre-ethical” work, judgments of right/wrong and guilt/innocence are irrelevant to his analysis. He also rejects the independence of “psychological states of mind”

³⁵ *Hegel on Tragedy*, 73.

³⁶ Segal, “Sophocles,” 46.

³⁷ I think this is evident in the passage quoted above, where Hegel claims that what the protagonists’ combat is “immanent in the life of each.”

from the judgments of the protagonists. Finally, we have already seen that he does not understand the conflict in terms of the individual and the state but the ouranic against the chthonic and the state against the family, respectively.³⁸

Among the best responses to the Hegelian position comes from Nussbaum. For her, what is at issue is the attempt to stabilize the ethical world, to eliminate the fragility inherent to the human condition by neglecting some aspect of it. Antigone and Creon come to grief precisely in view of the attempt to do this. Hegel, according to Nussbaum, is too much like Creon and Antigone in trying to eliminate fragility from human life, this time through the strategy of mediation.³⁹ Put more directly, Hegel's mediation is a progressive move forward when what we need is a stepping back. I sympathize with Nussbaum's perspective, but it seems to me to still be insufficient to overcome Hegel's reading. Hegel's mediation will encompass the opposition of fragility and stability just as easily as the ouranic and the chthonic. For him, external negation is a boon, because the deepest level of negation is the negation of negation that makes mediation possible.⁴⁰ Carl Vaught has suggested that the only way to avoid Hegelian mediation is not through external attack, but by exploding the project from within.⁴¹ He proposes that the analogy, which includes within itself identity and difference, disallows the mediative process from getting

³⁸ *Hegel on Tragedy*, 70-1.

³⁹ Nussbaum, 67-68.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §95, tr. T.F. Garaets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 150-152.

⁴¹ Vaught, *Metaphor, Analogy, and the Place of Places*, (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2004), 95-96.

off the ground.⁴² Like Vaught's Euthyphro and Socrates, Antigone and Creon stand apart at the same time they are held together. It is in fact what they hold in common, their shared obstinacy, for instance that so sharply separates them. While Hegel recognizes the analogical structure of the protagonists' fate, he has failed to recognize how deeply embedded this identity-in-difference is woven into the whole structure of the play and the whole nature of the twin protagonists. In sum, Hegel accomplishes his rational mediation of the protagonists in view of their absolute contradiction of one another. The analogy I have attempted to develop between them, however, by showing the sense in which their identities overlap, denies the absoluteness of this contradiction, which is what mediation requires in order to get off the ground. Hegel's reading is found to be lacking, then, not in the attempt to mediate so much as the failure to understand how deeply the analogy between Antigone and Creon runs. The problem is at the beginning rather than the end.

⁴² A full explication of this view was included in a forthcoming book on the history of metaphysics. Unfortunately, Dr. Vaught's untimely death prevented its completion. Intimations of this view, especially as it applies to characters may be found in *The Quest for Wholeness*, 153ff. See also *Metaphor, Analogy, and the Place of Places* 95-106, (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2004) and "Metaphor, Analogy, and the Nature of Truth," in *New Essays in Metaphysics*, (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1986), 217-236.

CHAPTER 4: THE TRAGEDY OF DIONYSUS AND THE CRITIQUE OF
 APOLLONIAN RATIONALITY

I. A Dionysian Tragedy

If not with Hegel, then, how are we to read the play? Perhaps the interpretive key lies with Dionysus, the god so identified with the space in which rationality breaks down, with a more experiential form of knowledge. As Nietzsche argued in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, it is not that Dionysus should replace ordinary ratiocination, but that the principle he represents should be included along with it, as a compensating and balancing element. It should not surprise us to find Dionysus in Theban tragedy, but it may take us by surprise to see him in a play so especially focused on right reason and its limits. Indeed, in the later *Tyrannus*, which shows the downfall of a superlative intellectual hero, the play belongs to another god. It is Apollo who brings suffering through a plague, it is Apollo who punishes Oedipus' "crime," it is Apollo who makes manifest the limitations of mortal ratiocination. There are good reasons for this, not the least of which is his association with avenging blood-guilt against the father, as in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*. It should strike us Dionysus is absent from much of extant tragedy, a form of art dedicated to him in various ways, from its name, literally goat-song,⁴³ to the theatre in which it was performed in Athens. P.E. Easterling notes some of the reasons for Dionysus'

⁴³ Goats are sacred to the god. See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd rev. ed., "tragedy, Greek," 1539

connection with tragedy: the wine god's association with the ecstasy and excessive behavior that often leads to tragic events, the role of dancing in his cult, his relationship to "otherness" embodied in the masked characters, his patronage of mystery religion and cults of initiation, and the like.⁴⁴

Dionysus is not, however, frequently invoked by name in extant tragedy. What is interesting about our play is that the god is not the god of harmful, destructive taboo-breaking, but of the balance and moderation that the chorus seems to think would provide healing for the city. We cannot help but think of Euripides' *Bakkhai*—there is no indication that Sophocles ever wrote such a play⁴⁵—where he is not only named but is a principal. Nonetheless, he is not a character in our play and the Dionysus of the *Bakkhai* is not a healer but a vengeful destroyer. Since he is not a character in *Antigone* and the characters do not appear under his influence, the play does not show that actual effect of his presence, but the potential effect his presence might have had. Sophocles' Dionysus is venerable, just, and kind, the reverse of the lampooning treatment of Euripides. Creon, though, is very much like Pentheus, the young, ambitious Theban king who fears social disruption. What is most unique about this Dionysus is his intellectualization, his representation not so much of unrestrained emotion as of an alternative form of rationalization.

⁴⁴ P.E. Easterling, "A Show for Dionysus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, (Cambridge, 1997), 36-53.

⁴⁵ Sophocles does not appear to have written a play about Pentheus, the *maenads*, or Dionysus' destruction of Thebes.

The god makes three appearances in the play, first in the choral victory dance in the wake of the war with the seven (who had attacked Thebes) ending, and then in the fourth and fifth stasimons, after the announcement of Antigone's fate and the reversal of Creon, respectively. Although Sophocles does not write about Dionysus' destruction of Thebes, the chorus calls the god the shaker of Thebes (*Thebas elelichthon*, 153-4) in the first passage. This epithet is surprising, even if the Theban men have learned the lesson of Dionysus' attack; the mention of it commemorates something that one would think they would be anxious to forget. It can only serve to emphasize the reason for Dionysus' anger and, immediately preceding the entrance of Creon, the emergence of another leader impudently opposes the place of the chthonic in Theban society. The chorus wants Bacchus to lead them (*archoi*, 154) in leaving war and violence behind (*ek polemon...thesthai lesmosynan*, 150-1), but Creon's appearance will obstruct that goal (and obstruct Dionysus?).

The appearance of Dionysus in the fourth and fifth stasimons, comes at crucial moments in the play, after Antigone stares her fate in the face and Creon finally decides to yield to the wisdom of Tiresias. The fourth stasimon's invocation of Lycurgus is odd for two reasons: how it depicts Dionysus and the comparison of Antigone to Lycurgus. The god is here the destroyer, the aspect that is commemorated in his first appearance, but under the rubric of his leadership of the city away from violence, or at least the prospect of it. We may suspect that although Antigone reminds the chorus of Lycurgus' fate, his actions have more in common

with Creon's.⁴⁶ Lycurgus had set himself against Dionysus and the women inspired by him with wrathful insults (*kertomiois orgais*, 957), the kind of words with which Creon addressed Antigone. We should consider the next lines in full: “οὕτω τᾶς μανίας δεινὸν ἀποστάζει ἀνθηρόν τε μένος. κείνος ἐπέγνω μανίαις ψαύων τὸν θεὸν ἐν κερτομίῳις γλώσσαις” (958-62, “his terrible flowering rage burst, sobbing, dying away...at last that madman came to know his god—the power he mocked, the power he taunted in all his frenzy...,” tr. Fagles).⁴⁷ This passage shows the wisdom of yielding negatively, by revealing the costs of not yielding, with Dionysus as the avenger. Not only does it remind us of Creon, but once again of Pentheus and the god as the ‘shaker of Thebes.’ Although these words show Dionysus in destructive light, I think that they fit within a larger celebration of the god in the three passages taken together. Dionysus’ way is the way to peace, and those who oppose it are responsible for their own destruction.

Finally, we come to the fifth stasimon, where the celebration of Dionysus, and his many attributes, continues in the first strophe. This ode immediately follows Creon’s decision to change course (1105-15), and the chorus again hopes that Dionysus will lead the city to peace. The vividness of the language in the first antistrophe makes Dionysus present, even though he is not on stage:

σὲ δ’ ὑπὲρ διλόφου πέτρας

⁴⁶ See R.F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles’ Antigone*, (Princeton, 1951), 68. Jebb also contends that the Cleopatra story has more to do with Antigone than either the Danae or Lycurgus story.

⁴⁷ Sophocles, *Three Theban Plays*, tr. R. Fagles, (New York: Penguin, 1984), 108.

στέροψ ὄπωπε
 λιγνύς, ἔνθα Κωρύκλαι
 στείχουσι νύμφαι Βακχίδες,
 Κασταλίας τε νάμα.
 καί σε Νυσαίων ὀρέων
 κισσήρεις ὄχθαι χλωρά τ' ἀ-
 κτὰ πολυστάφυλος πέμπει,
 ἀμβρότων ἐπέων
 εὐαζόντων Θηβαίας
 ἐπισκοποῦντ' ἀγυιάς (1129-36)

Beyond the twin cliffs, the glare of fire emerging through smoke sees you.
 There the Bakkhic Korykian nymphs make their procession as well as the
 Kastalian stream. Both the ivy-laden slopes of the Nyssan mountains and the
 green, grape-filled promontories send you forth, with immortal words
 resounding as you look upon the streets of Thebes.

In the second strophe, we learn that the city that once opposed Dionysus is now to
 be, by choral fiat, his favorite city (τὰν ἐκ πασάν τιμᾶς ὑπερτάταν πόλεων, 1137).

The chorus asks the god to bring healing to their plague-ridden city (ὥς βιαίας
 ἔχεται πάνδαμος πόλις ἐπὶ νόσου, μολεῖν καθαροῖσι ποδί, 1140-3).

What is the nature of this 'plague'? Is it the conflict in the royal house?

Perhaps to some extent, but it is most directly the plague of Creon's empty
 rationality described as such by Haimon in his interchange with his father (709).

Creon, for his part, ascribes a *miasma* (polluting element) to Antigone, but Tiresias,
 agreeing with Haimon, accuses the king of having a disease of mind that has infected
 the city (τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις, 1015, cf. 1052, 1143). We can not
 underestimate the importance of Dionysus' healing foot, for it is the free rein of his
 dance that brings *katharsis*. The wine god here stands in, and it is not a position
 irregular to his nature, for all the chthonic and feminine forces Creon aims to subdue.

Also fulfilling this function (in the fourth stasimon) is Eros/Aphrodite, Ares, and Artemis (more in the capacity of earth goddess than as the virgin sister and supporter of Apollo).⁴⁸ The chorus calls Eros ἀνίκητον μάχων (781, unconquerable in war), says that he is φύξιμος οὐδεὶς (789, inescapable), that he drives those in love mad and gives them ἀδίκους φρένας (791, unjust thoughts), while Aphrodite herself, the ἄμαχος θεὸς (799, unconquerable goddess) mocks them (800, ἐμπαίζει). Immediately following the argument between Haimon and Creon, the object of the chorus' words must be Creon, since it is not Haimon who has attempted to escape Eros/Antigone, but Creon who attempted to deny its force. Creon is lampooned, Creon will be destroyed.

II. Apollonian Rationality

The play ends with the terrible and the wonderful: the inescapability of the tragic situation, because of the dependence of man upon the deliverances of fate and a renewed insistence on the benefits of wisdom even if the content of this wisdom remains a mystery (1347-53). Just prior to Creon's reversal, Tiresias repeats the insistence of Haimon, that the better part of wisdom consists in flexibility, the lack of obstinacy, and yielding (1027-9). As Segal has observed, the conflict of Creon and Antigone reenacts the dispute between Apollo and the Erinyes in Aeschylus'

⁴⁸ Winnington-Ingram, 109, suggests that the Thracian Artemis was closer in appearance to the Great Mother than the usual virgin goddess.

Eumenides, but places the source of blood relations in the mother's womb (*homosplanchnous*, 511), rather than the male seed (*Eum.* 657-66, 734-41). It also highlights a struggle between a masculine, Apollonian rationality that is assertive, acquisitive, and firm with a Dionysian, feminine rationality that is receptive, supple, and flexible. Segal contends that Antigone (and Eurydice) "embody the tragic failure of male-oriented rationalism in the face of the mysteries of death and the creation of life."⁴⁹ Although justice lies neither in the content of Antigone's or Creon's advocacy, the *ethos* of Antigone wins the day. "It is not my nature to share in hate, but in love" (523, οὔτοι συνέχθειν ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφην). Creon abdicates, Antigone retains her conviction and chooses the form of her death, and feminine deities destroy Creon. Who is the man, indeed.

Much of the intellectual failure attributable to Creon and Antigone, as we have observed above, is based on their obstinacy and, as Nussbaum has shown, their attempt to build an ethical world impregnable by the demands of the other. Would the outcome of the play be avoidable with a more Hegelian Creon, willing to negotiate the claims of city and family, and a less heroic Antigone? The tragedy would then seem to be not much different from a morality play, a fable, a fairy tale. Why then tragedy? Throughout, I have been concerned with defending the integrity of the genre, which would prove questionable if we could assimilate it into one of these rubrics. Much has been written about the definition of ancient tragedy, but it is difficult to improve upon the authority and persuasiveness of Aristotle. We need not

⁴⁹ Segal, *Tragedy*, 196.

go into every detail of his definition, for one is crucial for our considerations: *to anakeston*, that which is without remedy. As G. Steiner has pointed out:

The tragedy must be irreversible. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. This is crucial. Where the causes of disaster are temporary, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama but not tragedy."⁵⁰

The contrast between tragedy and disaster is appropriate. We may be justified in lamenting disaster because it is avoidable, and avoiding disaster can be the object of properly managed social control, and, in some cases, the failure to avoid disaster may be the source of blame. Tragedy is of a wholly different order. The *katharsis* provided by tragedy is always *ex post facto*, in and through violence and conflict. I have already suggested that *deinon* is sometimes connected with power, and this also means with violence. As Heidegger puts it, Sophocles' play shows that "...bedeutet δεινόν das Gewaltige im Sinne dessen, der die Gewalt braucht, nicht nur über Gewalt verfügt, sondern gewalt-tätig ist, insofern ihm das Gewaltbrauchen der Grundzug seines Tuns nicht nur, sondern seines Dasein ist."⁵¹ So Sophocles' characters do violence to one another but do not for that reason incur guilt, they are not evil (or good). Violence is rather the way man moves forward in the world, in some cases accomplishing heroic grandeur, but also the way he falls, the source, as Segal says, of his tragic status. Justice (*dike*), as Heraclitus said, is strife, and it did not rest with Antigone or Creon, but in their conflict.

⁵⁰ G. Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, (London: Faber, 1961), 8.

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 40: Einführung in die Metaphysik*, hrsg. von P. Yaegar (Frankfurt-Main: Klostermann, 1983), 115.

Conclusion

What is particularly Sophoclean, what is new about the position that human beings must respect the limits in which their existence is inscribed, that wisdom is learned through suffering, and that withdrawal from unbridled human assertion, even from rationality's, is necessary? Certainly the sometimes platitudinous exhortation to know one's limits (*meden agan/gnothi sauton*) had been engrained in depths of Greek consciousness from a very early date. Nonetheless, Sophocles lived at a unique and transitional time that demanded from him a unique response. The humanism of the Sophistic school, its belief in the powers of human assertion, and its radical questioning of divine prerogatives was gaining strength. The first stasimon itself may have been influenced by their claims. That Sophocles was not as prepared as Euripides to embrace their views may be a sign of conventionality and conservatism, but the extent to which he entertains them is not. His plays never dismiss the heroic struggle to break forth from boundaries of homeliness, comfort, and safety. They may call it into question, they may show it to be problematic and to entail the risk of disaster, but they never discredit it. The heroic stature of a woman in this play and the concomitant criticism of masculine, Apollonian, teleological rationality are a testament to the range of his exploratory rationality.

The last century saw a protracted scholarly discussion of whether Sophocles believed in the justice of the gods.⁵² We have no evidence apart from the plays to help answer this question; the biographical accounts are largely anecdotal and unverifiable. While they seem to describe a man of conventional piety, some scholars find the comedy of the events described, especially his temporary guardianship of Asclepius' snake, to be evidence that Sophocles could not have taken them seriously.⁵³ The evidence from the extant plays is twofold: never do we find a god lampooned and shown to be explicitly unjust, as we have for instance in Euripides' *Bacchae*, but we also never have an explicit display of human wickedness condemned and addressed by divine justice, as in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Why must Sophocles either be pious or a humanist? I have attempted to show that he is both and that this play holds divine justice and human achievement in tension, in the same way as the masculine and the feminine, the rational and the inscrutable.

⁵² See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, (Berkeley, 1971), 109 and C. Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1951), 229.

⁵³ Whitman, 11-12.

CHAPTER 5: THE TRAGEDY OF PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

We return now, in the final chapters of this inquiry, to where we began, to the question of the *Antigone* and philosophy. One may be forgiven for thinking that Sophocles, to use Hester's term, is the most 'unphilosophical' of all the tragedians. For it is of the greatest difficulty to learn what Sophocles' philosophy is, while Aeschylus is in a certain sense traditional (although he presents us with new and frightening possibilities of otherness, especially in Clytemnestra's usurpation of male characteristics), ending the cycle of Oresteian bloodshed with the death of Clytemnestra, the acquittal of Orestes, and the vindication of Apollo's male-oriented rationality, and Euripides is a revolutionary with clear connections to the new sophistic philosophy. These are traditional views, which I do not myself endorse, and there is not space here to amend them appropriately. I present them only for illustrative purposes, for they are exempla of the kind of views that undergird the understanding of Sophocles as the most 'unphilosophical.'

In this conventional schema, Sophocles is in the middle, not only temporally but also in terms of his thought, and the middle, the in between, is always the hardest to define, as we saw in the analysis of the word *deinos*. Perhaps he is as 'unphilosophical' as Hester would like us to believe. But what if precisely through his 'unphilosophy,' Sophocles turned out to be the most philosophical of all. There is of course more to philosophy than merely having a 'philosophy,' and in fact this

alone is what Aristotle calls rhetoric, the espousal of an opinion that is supposed to persuade, but without a middle term, a principle with explanatory force, which he says is reminiscent of nothing so much as gazing at a plant, that is, it is very beautiful but there is nothing one can learn from it.⁵⁴

Dennis Schmidt has argued that Kant's critique of reason was the tragedy of philosophy, the point at which it had to give up its efforts to move beyond the realm of appearances to the truth behind perception⁵⁵. Kant, however, was not the first philosopher with such a 'tragic' impulse, and we may recognize a similar chastening of philosophical ambition in the work of Aristotle. For it is not only in his openness to tragic drama as a means of moral education that the latter exhibits this impulse but in the structure of his philosophy itself. This needs, of course, to be developed further, and I will turn to this problem below.

Martha Nussbaum has done much to further our understanding of the theme of Aristotle's chastening of philosophical ambition and we will need to return to her work, as we did in earlier chapters, for a full account of its development. However helpful this may be, however, it is not enough, since Nussbaum, despite her superb insights on both *Antigone* and Aristotle does not explicitly develop the connection between them. This connection is not obvious, principally because Aristotle, in what we have of the *Poetica*, names *Tyrannus* as his favorite tragedy, and does not

⁵⁴ Aristotle seems to think this because plants cannot speak, and speech is the method by which humans learn, albeit a certain kind of speech more peculiar to the philosopher than the rhetorician, that of explanation and demonstration.

⁵⁵ D.J. Schmidt, *Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

mention *Antigone*. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that *Antigone* is not an Aristotelian tragedy. I think that this conclusion is, for reasons I shall broach below (in the next chapter), too strong.

Nonetheless, there are obvious conflicts between the poetic vision of *Antigone* and Aristotelian philosophy, however tragic it may be. At this point, it is worth saying how the present investigation differs from Nussbaum's. Arguing against Bernard Williams, she contests the view, which we saw also in Hester, that Sophocles stands on one side and Plato and Aristotle stand on the other with respect to the problem of 'moral luck' and argues that Aristotle and Sophocles have roughly the same view on the question.⁵⁶ My interpretation is somewhere between Nussbaum and Williams; there is, I think, significant affinity between Aristotle and Sophocles, but a chasm still separates the vision of *Antigone* from Aristotelian philosophy. This affinity, however, will be sufficient to show that Sophocles is not 'unphilosophical,' even though his philosophical tendencies differ (slightly) from those of Aristotle. It is also worth noting that our focus is not explicitly the ethical question of 'moral luck' as it is between Nussbaum and Williams, but the more general ontological and even epistemic question of human understanding. Of course, action is a significant, even the principal, part of this, but it is not the only part.

Since these issues are too large to be confined to a single chapter, I shall spend the remainder of this chapter with the question of what kind of philosopher and what kind of philosophy most illuminates the tragic situation. Then, in the

⁵⁶ Nussbaum, 18-20.

following chapter, my concern will shift to asking in what sense *Antigone* is an Aristotelian tragedy and in what sense it is not, turning not only the *Poetica*, but to the so far neglected role of Aphrodite in the play and its connection with Aristotle's general account of desire in the *De Anima*. For now, though, our aim is much more general, asking what it is about Aristotle's philosophy that disposes him to tragedy.

I. Aristotle and the Tragedy of Philosophy

I want to turn first, with Nussbaum's help, to the general question of Aristotle's philosophical approach, and how this leaves him open to tragedy. It has sometimes been argued that philosophy begins with mythology, and whether or not this is true, the importance of story-telling for Aristotelian philosophy cannot be denied. Not only does a substantial portion of the extant *Poetica* deal with tragedy as a form of moral education, but it also recurs in the *Politics*' discussion of moral education. Aristotle takes as his point of departure not some supposedly objective rule or even the models of the gods, but as Nussbaum puts it, "stories of good *human* activity" (emphasis hers).⁵⁷ This is due to the pride of place Aristotle gives to human experience, in direct opposition to Plato. In this connection, philosophy and mythology have a similar if not shared impetus based on 'wonder' about the world around us. If one knows nothing else about Aristotle, he will often nonetheless know the philosopher's famous and somewhat opaque declaration from book A of the

⁵⁷ Nussbaum, 378.

Metaphysics that it is through wonder (τὸ θαυμάζειν) that men begin to philosophize (982b).

It is not sufficient, however, merely to recognize Aristotle's respect for tragic drama and the role wonder plays in philosophy and mythology, for the former does not tell us anything about the relationship between philosophy and tragedy, although it certainly suggests that there is one, and the latter is too general. We must ask, what it is about the form of tragedy and the form of philosophy that makes them congenial to one another. The answer, it seems to me, lies in the question of appearances; drama is after all a visual performance and although Aristotle tends to minimize the importance of its performative aspects, the appearances of tragic drama do not disappear even when a play is read instead of seen. For even in reading, tragedy is a form of art concerned with the imitation of life, which is, the production of appearances that mimic the carrying out of life.⁵⁸

II. Appearance and Truth in Aristotle

Nussbaum⁵⁹ points us, in this connection, to Aristotle's prelude to the discussion of *akrasia* in book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

δεῖ δ' ὡσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων, τιθέντας τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ πρῶτον διαπορήσαντας οὕτω δεικνύναι μάλιστα μὲν πάντα τὰ ἔνδοξα περὶ ταῦτα τὰ πάθη, εἰ δὲ μή, τὰ πλείστα καὶ κυριώτατα: ἐὰν γὰρ λύηται τε τὰ δυσχερῆ καὶ καταλείπηται τὰ ἔνδοξα, δεδειγμένον ἂν εἶη ἰκανῶς. (*Eth. Nich.* 1145b)

⁵⁸ This is a rephrasing of the definition of tragedy at the beginning of *Poetics* 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 240. The translation, as always, is my own and differs slightly from Nussbaum's.

It is necessary here, as in other cases, after setting down the appearances and going through the problems, to thus demonstrate all of the greatest beliefs about these experiences, and if not, at least the greatest number and the most authoritative. For if the difficulties may be relinquished and the beliefs maintained, then the demonstration will be sufficient.

This is an example of a kind of ‘negative’ argumentation to which Aristotle frequently appeals, which would not be remarkable, if it were not so unique amongst philosophers. Another example of it occurs at *Metaphysics* I.IV (in regard to the demand for a demonstration of the principle of non-contradiction) and also in the *Physics* (in regard to the demand for a demonstration of the existence of *physis*). Aristotle says that such a skeptic displays *apaideusia*, because he has not learnt how to distinguish what is self-evident from what it not. In the former case, Aristotle says that he may be able to involve the skeptic in a self-referential inconsistency because in order to argue against the principle he will in fact be relying upon it.

The passage marks a refusal to regard *phainomena* as one side of a polarity to which truth is opposed, a view that is common to Plato and Parmenides. In some ways, it revives the Protagorean position that ‘man is the measure of all things,’ for it is only in and through the human world, how things appear to humans and how humans judge them that allows us access to truth. For Plato and Parmenides, no human, mortal, limited measure can prove sufficient for the discovery of the most important truths. Nussbaum is certainly right to say that Aristotle “is taking a

position about philosophical method and limits that is very unusual in his philosophical tradition.”⁶⁰

I think that she is wrong, however, to group Heraclitus with these thinkers⁶¹ and to correspondingly point to the etymological roots of *aletheia*, to which Heraclitus seems to be attending as an example of opposing truth and appearance. In fragment B123, Heraclitus claims that nature ‘loves to hide itself,’ and *alêtheia* does mean ‘unhiddenness.’ I am not sure how Nussbaum can enter into this discussion without reference to Martin Heidegger, whose discussion of the issue is somewhat normative.⁶² For him, truth is unconcealment, and the act of speech (*logos*) is *apophansis/apophainesthai*, the bringing out into the light (and out of the darkness in which it would otherwise be hidden). Although Heidegger does not point this out, Homer almost invariably uses *alêtheia* in connection with speech and in Pindar, who uses it only twice, it is in connection with oaths to which he was a witness.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 241.

⁶¹ The view of Athenian philosophical history I am defending here has the advantage of ancient support. For Cicero considered the ‘Old Academy’ to have consisted of Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Parmenides, Xenophanes, Socrates, Plato, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemo, Crates, and Crantor (*Acad. Quaest.* 4.5). Heraclitus is conspicuously absent from this list. Nussbaum later reverses herself and recognizes the affinity of Aristotle and Heraclitus on this point (260).

⁶² Heidegger’s word is *Unvorborgenheit* (unconcealment), the first reference to which occurs in *Sein und Zeit* (1927, 219-220, 222), and then recurs in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* and an essay on another fragment of Heraclitus, “Aletheia” (1951).

⁶³ On Homer, see R. Campbell, *Truth and Historicity*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 32-33: “Of the seventeen occurrences, this triadic pattern is explicit in all but six, and in those few cases the reference to a hearer is clearly implied. Truth has to do with the reliability of what is said by one person to another.” On Pindar, see L.H.

It is true that Aristotle also defends a correspondence theory of truth at *Metaphysics* 1011b, and his influence in the development of medieval *adaequatio rerum et intellectuum* cannot be discounted. To what extent Aristotle embraces a ‘philosophical’ correspondence theory of truth or a more traditionally Greek ‘aletheiology’ is the subject of great controversy, but it is too far afield of our present question to indulge it further. It is also not clear that *alêtheia* maintains its etymological connections in classical Greek.

However that may be, it is clear that Aristotle’s idea of philosophical investigation takes its start from appearances. That is not to say, however, that truth is equivalent to being appeared to in a certain way, because, in the end, truth will not turn out to be merely the appearance. The Epicurean claim that every appearance is true surely would have met with his most vigorous objections. To say that truth by nature hides or conceals itself from us is not to discount the role *phainomena* play, but to emphasize that the event of truth is a *phainomenon* itself, if not explicitly connected with the *phainomena* of initial perception. *A fortiori*, this is the kind of approach we find Aristotle approving of when, at the beginning of the *Posterior Analytics*, he claims that all learning is based on pre-existent knowledge, but this pre-existent knowledge does not take hold of its object in the relevant way—in this case, as a universal—so we may say the subject in one sense knew the particular *phainomenon* she initially perceived but in another sense that she did not. There is

Pratt, *Lying and Poetry from Homer to Pindar*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 118-119.

something ‘hidden’ from us in the perception, even though it may be right in front of us, not, as Parmenides says, ‘far from the beaten path of human beings.’

It is important to notice the consequences of Aristotle’s ‘negative’ philosophy for the treatment of *endoxa*, for, as the passage makes clear, *phainomena* are not merely appearances, but include ‘learned beliefs’ that hold force in Aristotle’s tradition. For this reason, some have shunned the translation of *phainomena* as appearances here, preferring instead something like W.D. Ross’ ‘observed facts.’ I think that Nussbaum is right to avoid this translation since δεικνύναι/δεδειγμένον is, after all, a showing.⁶⁴ So it seems that Aristotle’s view—and this interpretation is supported by the passage—is that the truth may well lie in the appearances, but our understanding is not sufficient *merely* from them, but we must discover it by going through the difficulties (διαπορήσαντας).

Endoxa, we may be confident, are a species of *phainomena*, the appearances, which is to say, what presents itself to us, from the learned men of the past. It is a peculiarity of Aristotle’s vision of the philosophical enterprise, that we do not begin in a vacuum or hidden in a secluded grove far from the transactions of the city.⁶⁵ We are instead always already implicated in a tradition, which is not say we are obligated to follow it mindlessly but that we must at least contend with it. For this reason, we find Aristotle, at the beginning of nearly every treatise, first recalling the *endoxa*.

Here again, we find a disagreement with Plato, who has Socrates notoriously oppose

⁶⁴ Nussbaum, 240-241.

⁶⁵ For the location of Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum see Pausanias’ *Description of Greece* (1.29 and 1.19, respectively).

epistême to *doxa* in book 5 of the *Republic*. Plato's Socrates consistently insists that we must care less for what men believe than for 'the truth,' and it is hard to escape the conclusion that these are mutually exclusive. While it is true that *doxa* and *endoxa* are different words, the latter already implying a degree of trustworthiness, it is significant that Plato never makes this distinction. It is important also not to be deceived by Aristotle's apparent credulity, as he often moves away from the *doxa* with which he begins. What is significant, however, is that he includes them at all.

It is especially remarkable how similar Aristotle's philosophical procedure is to the dramatic methodology I attributed to Sophocles in the introduction. For the kind of test Aristotle requires of *phainomena* in general and *endoxa* in particular is much the one Creon proposes at 175-177 of *Antigone*, where a man's nature, thoughts, and intelligence may not be known until they *show* themselves in the principles and laws that he articulates. As a lawful king and heir of Thebans, Creon is the type of person whose *endoxa* have every right to some sort of initial respect, but they can only be understood to be true or false when they are brought into the light, as it were, of action. So the Aristotelian philosopher and the Sophoclean spectator seem to have this in common, they cannot know the truth of appearances until they are tested and thus fully unveiled.

III. Aristotle on the Limits of Reason

So why is Aristotle so committed to beginning from appearances and the subspecies of learned judgments, and how does this commitment characterize his

philosophy more generally, as one that will prove more disposed and open to tragedy than others? It is, I want to argue, because of his strong delimitation of the limits of human reason. While Plato and Parmenides' opposition of the real and the appearances evinces an ambitious confidence in the powers of human reason, Aristotle's refusal to accept the polarity must signify the reverse. This is not skepticism pure and simple.⁶⁶ Amongst the major figures throughout the Hellenic philosophical tradition, we find an underlying belief, seemingly shared by all, that knowledge is possible. The question is not whether we can know it at all, but how much we can know and in what way.

As Nussbaum put it, "he insists that he will find his truth *inside* what we see, say, and believe rather than 'far from the beaten path of human beings' (in Plato's words) 'out there.'"⁶⁷ Aristotle's point is precisely that we do not have any cognitive access to what is 'out there,' at least not as a point of departure, an *archê*, as his well-known critique of the theory of forms makes clear. This is not a conviction arrived at through laziness (*rhathumia*), rashness, or neglect as Socrates and Glaucon suggest of those who form beliefs about the Good from the human standpoint (*Republic* 504b). For what Plato's approach requires is knowledge of something eternal (something like the forms), since anything else would be incomplete (*ateles*, id.). For Aristotle, there are no forms 'out there' but only in concrete existing things

⁶⁶ By skepticism, I mean doubt about whether knowledge is possible. By limiting what we can know, Aristotle is ensuring its possibility in those cases.

⁶⁷ Nussbaum, 243.

and only known through deduction (*sylogismos*), that is, inside and through the *phainomena*.

In order to see this more clearly, let us consider briefly how Plato and Aristotle approach the first principles of knowledge. In the *Republic* (511b), Plato makes clear that certain sciences are deficient because they do not explore the *logoi* of their fundamental presuppositions. Thus, he reserves the uppermost part of the divided line for philosophical λόγος, which ἄπτεται τῇ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δυνάμει, τὰς ὑποθέσεις ποιούμενος οὐκ ἀρχὰς ἀλλὰ τῷ ὄντι ὑποθέσεις, οἷον ἐπιβάσεις τε καὶ ὁρμάς, ἵνα μέχρι τοῦ ἀνυποθέτου ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχὴν ἴων” [...Lays hold of it (the first principle) by the power of dialoging, making hypotheses not foundations but treating them as hypotheses, such that they are means of approach and preliminary beginnings by which one goes up to the unhypothetical first principle of everything.] After that, he claims, the philosopher comes down (*katabainei*, 511c), making use of nothing visible (*aisthêton*)—no *phainomenon*, we might say—but only the unhypothetical form as his first principle.

Plato thus identifies, as the goal of philosophy, the discovery of unhypothetical first principles from which one could deduce every other kind of knowledge. In the *Republic*, however, he does not explain how philosophical *logos* takes hold of the first principle, only that it does. In the *Theaetetus*, he returns to the question of how knowledge is possible, with an aporetic result. Significantly, he does not mention the unhypothetical first principle in the dialogue or, for that matter, the forms. The concern there, expressed in *Theaetetus*' third definition of knowledge

(201cd), is again *logos* but this times it has to mean ‘account,’ ‘speech,’ and the like. Indeed, it is a mark of the knower, that he is able to give an account of what he knows, to ‘bring it out into the light’ for all to see, to demonstrate it.

One can surely interpret the absence of the forms as evidence that Plato did not think it was relevant⁶⁸ or that their absence indicates that the problem cannot be solved without them.⁶⁹ It seems to me, however, that the latter view is circular, for if one must apprehend the form as a principle of knowledge it cannot then be the explanation of how one apprehends it in the first place. Surely Plato recognized this, and for this reason left the theory of forms out of the *Theaetetus*. If he has an answer to this difficulty, it does not survive in the extant texts, and if his philosophical progeny are any indication, it seems to have remained a problem. In *Posterior Analytics* I.3, Aristotle summarizes the situation: one group apparently held that since demonstration was required for knowledge and primary things (*here prôta* rather than *archai*) cannot be demonstrated (lest they not be primary, since things are always demonstrated on the basis something more fundamental), knowledge was impossible; another group held that knowledge was possible through a circular demonstration. We can see here evidence of the predecessors of the view that would eventuate in the skeptical Academy under Arcesilaus and Carneades.

⁶⁸ G. Morrow, “Plato and the Mathematicians,” *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970): 330.

⁶⁹ This is F.M. Cornford’s view in *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1935), 7. The view is also defended in H. Cherniss, “Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas,” *American Journal of Philology* 57 (1936): 445-456, esp. 450ff.

Motivated at least in part by the desire to avoid skepticism, Aristotle concludes that the first principles must necessarily be undemonstrable. This response has not been greeted with universal approbation. G. Morrow's finding of a "disingenuousness" here is typical, because Aristotle is assuming that we have knowledge "which is the very point at issue."⁷⁰ This, however, is to look at Aristotle's solution with Platonic eyes. If we recall that what Aristotle has in mind as first principles are not separate forms but rather are inside the appearances or at least inside the discrete events of being appeared to in a certain way, the problem of knowledge will perhaps not be so insurmountable. In this connection, he says that our apprehension of first principle is not knowledge in the strict sense (*epistême*), but understanding (*nous*).

For him, all animals have perceptions, some retain them in memory, and still fewer deduce universals from perception and memory. This is not a philosophical conclusion as much as an observation from experience. If I move to strike a dog, and he perceives this, he will move to avoid it, and if I repeatedly makes this move, he will likely avoid me, and dogs repeatedly abused develop an aversion to any human contact. Internal to the movements of animals is some kind of discriminative faculty which is required for action, present in different degrees to different species and Aristotle wants to develop an account of this faculty. It seems to be *nous* rather than *epistême*, because it is not demonstrated, but revealed in the ordinary practices

⁷⁰ Glenn Morrow, "Plato and the Mathematicians," *The Philosophical Review* 79.3 (1970): 333.

of our lives, and, to differing degrees, the lives of all animals. In the words of Nussbaum, “To have *nous*, or insight, concerning first principle is to come to see the fundamental role that principles we have been using all along play in the structure of a science.”⁷¹ Examples of *nous* include the theory of non-contradiction and the belief in nature (both discussed above); we cannot demonstrate them, but we cannot act or speak without them.

From an Aristotelian point of view, the Platonic search for knowledge is misguided from the start because it asks for something that is impossible for limited human beings to attain. As long as we cling to Platonic presuppositions, we will never know anything because we have been cut off from our human world. If Plato would accuse the Aristotelian of laziness, he would perhaps retort that Platonists lost in a speculative dream, and have forgotten what it means to be human. In a passage that might well have been uttered by a tragic chorus, Aristotle notes,

ἡ γὰρ ὕστερον εὐπορία λύσις τῶν πρότερον ἀπορουμένων ἐστὶ, λύειν δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγνοοῦντας τὸν δεσμόν, ἀλλ' ἢ τῆς διανοίας ἀπορία δηλοῖ τοῦτο περὶ τοῦ πράγματος: ἢ γὰρ ἀπορεῖ, ταύτη παραπλήσιον πέπονθε τοῖς δεδεμένοις: ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἀμφοτέρως προελθεῖν εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν. (*Metaph.* 995a)

The later solution is a release from earlier confusions, but not with respect to those who do not recognize the bonds, but the confusion of thought shows the matter

⁷¹ Nussbaum, 251. See also A. Kosman, “Explanation and Understanding in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*,” in E.N. Lee, A.P.D. Mourelatos, and R.M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, *Phronesis* Suppl. I, (Assen, 1973), 374-392; J. Lesher, ‘The Role of *nous* in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*,” *Phronesis* 18 (1973): 44-68; M.F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Understanding Knowledge,” in E. Berti, *Aristotle on Science: The Posterior Analytics*, Proceedings of the 8th Symposium Aristotelicum, (Padua, 1981). 97-139.

clearly, this confusion that affects it is akin to those who are in shackles, for in both cases it is impossible to move forward.

The immediate context of this passage is certain confusions of mind, but it could just as well speak to the limits of knowledge more generally. In both cases, it is appropriate not to try to get around them through a super-sensible appeal, but to go through them. What are these bonds? Nothing other than the boundaries appropriate to human thought and language.

Conclusion: Ethics and Tragedy

It is not only in the first principles of science that Aristotle directs us not to expect a fully-fledged demonstration, but in each area of investigation, he warns us, we should only expect the degree of certainty that the subject-matter admits (*Eth. Nich.* 1098b, 1098a). It seems clear from this that he thinks the resolution of ethical problems will not involve scientific demonstration, but through negative argumentation (resolving the difficulties, see §1 above), this type of demonstration will somehow be sufficient. The *Antigone*, as we have seen is also circumspect about ethical matters, as near the end of their argument, Antigone demurs to Creon, ‘who knows’ which side is acting rightly. I also observed that the chorus in the first stasimon uses quite active words to describe man’s heroic accomplishment, but uncertain ones when the subject turns to his ethical activity. Having observed a certain continuity between the tragic vision of *Antigone* and Aristotle’s philosophical

vision, we now must turn to the analysis of action and determine to what extent the action of the *Antigone* is Aristotelian.

CHAPTER 6: THE PHILOSOPHY OF TRAGEDY

Introduction

One of the distinguishing marks of Aristotelian philosophy is the emphasis it places on desire in the constitution of the philosophical life, and all the more in its understanding of ethical action. In the last chapter, we examined how a ‘tragic’ understanding of the human situation and the limits of knowledge that go along with it shaped Aristotle’s approach to philosophical methodology. It now remains to examine Aristotle’s philosophy of action in light of the tragic action of the *Antigone*. Again unlike Plato, we shall find that Aristotle does not aim to eradicate the influence of emotions in ethical action, for he is convinced that without emotions, there would be no desire (broadly construed) and that without desire no motivation for any animal movement, let alone human action.

Aristotle’s view of the emotions and desire is central to his high regard for tragedy--which after all he thinks accomplishes the *katharsis* of the emotions of pity and fear—although commentators have not always recognized this connection. Moreover, the invocation of Aphrodite in the fourth stasimon of the *Antigone*, along with the variety of love relationships, or potential love relationships in the play—Haimon’s desire for Antigone, Creon’s desire for Haimon, Antigone’s desire for Polyneices, among others—indicate its importance for interpreting the play, although (again) few have attended to it. The representations of Creon and Antigone are of the kind that Aristotle recommends in the *Poetics*: fundamentally noble and well-

intentioned actors of good character, who are nonetheless not too good, and hence susceptible to the tragic *hamartiai* that cause their downfalls. Antigone's awful vision of her desolate and lonely bridal chamber of death and Creon's terrible loss of all his *philoï* are certainly objects of pity and fear.

In another way, however, the play seems to be in tension with Aristotle's idea of an ideal tragedy. There is no doubt, as I have observed (see above, Ch. 2), that Creon's *anagnorisis* corresponds to his *peripateia*. But as we have seen, it is not clear that Creon is the protagonist of the play. It is rather Antigone who seems to be, in the main, vindicated, with the only caveat that she appears too harsh, too inflexible in the way she approaches it. I have nonetheless not wanted merely to valorize Antigone and excoriate Creon, as they both share some measure of the truth, and their shortcomings seem to be quite similar. So we can at the least say that we have a major and minor protagonist, the latter of whom is Aristotelian, but is the former? Antigone, in her final speech, which I shall discuss below, does have a recognition, but not quite a *peripateia*.

It is for this reason that B.M.W. Knox, among others, argues that Creon cannot be the protagonist, because he is not sufficiently heroic. This is problematic because it seems that precisely insofar as Creon is Aristotelian, he is unheroic. This will not be true of all Aristotelian protagonists; Oedipus, for instance, is able to back down because he has already lost everything and he is perhaps even more heroic for the acceptance of his tragic fate. In this play, however, it looks as though the correspondence of recognition and reversal and the full expression of one's heroic

nature are opposed. Since Antigone's tragic loss is her own life, she cannot reverse herself prior to the realization of that loss, and, of course, she cannot do anything *ex post facto*. Our assessment of this difficulty will depend on how crucial we judge *peripateia* to be. I do not think it is decisive, but that despite Antigone's lack of reversal following upon recognition of her mistake, her fate is sufficient to demonstrate that mistake, and to allow for learning to take place.

A more serious problem arises in the context of such learning, for surely the play teaches yielding and withdrawal, but one still wonders if it is possible to escape the violence that characterizes human affairs. Nussbaum does not address these problems, turning instead, after the discussion of Aristotle, to a Euripidean play. In fact, no Aristotelian resolution to them is readily apparent. So the play appears to be in some respects Aristotelian, in others not, and its ultimate vision cannot be fully reconciled with Aristotle's conception of the ideal tragedy, much less with his overall view of the "action" and "life" tragedy is supposed to represent.

II. *Orexis*: Aristotle's General Conception of Desire

Aristotle first introduces *orexis*, his general conception of desire, in *De Anima* 3.9. There, he distinguishes two faculties of the soul, the discriminative part, which concerns understanding and perception, and the part that concerns movement in place, sometimes called 'local movement.' He then considers some other ways in which his predecessors had divided the soul, but concludes that one might divide it in an infinite number of ways. On the other hand, and this is crucial, he claims that is

absurd (*atopon*) to divide the desiderative part (*to orektikon*) into rational and irrational parts, since wish (*boulesis*) is found in the rational part, and appetite (*epithumia*) and spirit (*thumos*), and *orexis* would be common to both, and even to a third part of the soul if one were to so divide it.⁷² It seems clear that Aristotle thought that such divisions failed to account for what they shared in common, the unity of *orexis* as the source of animal movement.

Nussbaum has attempted to trace the development of this apparent neologism in Aristotle, and concluded that what runs through the tradition is a kind of object-orientation, a yearning or longing for something. She also notices that it is primarily active, although it also implies “a complex responsiveness that receives from the world and in turn focuses itself outwards towards the world.”⁷³ I think that this responsiveness is best understood by Aristotle’s word *phantasia*, which is often translated ‘imagination.’ This translation, however, will mislead us if we think of imagination as strictly internal, like a dream, that one then attempts to bring to bear on the world. We need to remember that *phantasia* is closely connected with *phainomenon*, and that both come from the verb *phainesthai*. A *phantasia* is literally an appearance that is, as Liddell & Scott suggest, either in sight or in memory. It is imagination in its more original sense, the presentation or re-presentation of an image to the mind. For the sake of capturing this sense, and of avoiding modern connotations of ‘imagination,’ I shall henceforth translate *phantasia* as ‘impression’

⁷² That is, if one were to divide it into a rational, appetitive, and spirited part as opposed to simply a rational and an irrational part.

⁷³ Nussbaum, 274.

or ‘presentation.’ So it is *phantasiai* that are “received from the world,” and Aristotle says, at the end of 3.10, *orexis* is impossible without them. Desire, it seems, is active, but it is not autonomous.

In order to understand this responsive reaching out of *orexis*, we need to consider the threefold sense of movement Aristotle develops in the latter chapter. One may understand movement as the cause of movement, the mover, and second as that by which it moves, the instrument of movement, and third the thing being moved. The mover may be either something that is itself unmoved or something that is the thing being moved in another causal chain. In the case of animal movement, Aristotle makes clear that animals are self-moved in as much as we have the capacity of *orexis* in virtue of *phantasiai*. Desire, then is the mover in so far as it receives impressions from the world, the instrument of its movement is *organon*, and belongs to the investigation of what is common to body and soul (which Aristotle takes up in the *Parva Naturalia*), and the thing moved is the animal.

So why does he call this local (*kata topon*) motion? Because, I think, it is a movement of the soul, an intentionality, in the specifically Aristotelian sense, not a movement of will, but directedness and focus of mind. It is not, however, exclusively intellectual:

εἰ γὰρ δύο, νοῦς καὶ ὄρεξις, ἐκίνουν, κατὰ κοινὸν ἄν τι ἐκίνουν εἶδος· νῦν δὲ ὁ μὲν νοῦς οὐ φαίνεται κινῶν ἄνευ ὀρέξεως (ἢ γὰρ βούλησις ὄρεξις, ὅταν δὲ κατὰ τὸν λογισμὸν κινῆται, καὶ κατὰ βούλησιν κινεῖται), ἢ δ’ ὄρεξις κινεῖ καὶ παρὰ τὸν λογισμὸν· ἢ γὰρ ἐπιθυμία ὄρεξις τίς ἐστιν. (433a21-23)

For if understanding and desire are two, they would move something in virtue of a common form, but understanding clearly does not move anything without desire (for

wish is a form of desire, and whenever desire moves according to calculation, it moves according to wish. Desire also moves things apart from calculation, and that form of desire is appetite.

Incidentally, it is fitting that Aristotle is constantly using the word *nous* instead of *epistême* to describe the kind of knowledge animals have relative to movement, indicating that it, like the first principles of knowledge, does not admit of a demonstration. Returning to the central theme of the passage, we cannot separate understanding from desire, because understanding can only initiate movement in virtue of *boulêsis*, and neither is the right kind of desire separate from calculation, but there are species of desire, with corresponding movements, that are separate from understanding.

III. Desire in the *Antigone*

When we look back at our play, it is clear that desire, especially in the form of love (*philia*) is consistently in play, but it is sometimes contrary to thought. At the beginning of the play, Antigone announces her desire to offer Polyneices a proper burial and she has a plan to accomplish this desire with the help of Ismene (εἰ τὸν νεκρὸν ξὺν τῆδε κουφιεῖς χερί, 43). When Ismene refuses to assist her, and thus obstructs Antigone's original plan, Antigone accuses her of trying to wish away her filial obligations to Polyneices (τὸν γοῦν ἐμὸν καὶ τὸν σὸν ἦν σὺ μὴ θέλης ἀδελφόν, 45). Ismene does not answer this criticism of Antigone directly, but instead cites the consequences of going against Creon's edict. It is not her wish to

not attend to her brother, but the circumstances at hand that obstruct her actual wish, that is most important, she seems to be suggesting.

While Antigone accuses Ismene of lacking the appropriate wish for their dead brother, Ismene suggests that Antigone has not formulated her desire (as a motivation) in accordance with appropriate calculation. She urges Antigone to reflect upon (*phronêson*) what has happened to their father, mother, and brothers and the consequent state of the family, to consider (*ennoein*, 61) the nature of their status as women unfit for political activity and lacking the capacity for political accomplishment. In her obedience to Creon, she hopes that those below will have understanding (*sugnoian*, 66), that there is no wisdom in overstepping boundaries (τὸ γὰρ περισσὰ πράσσειν οὐκ ἔχει νοῦν οὐδένα, 69).

Just as she will later do in the dispute with Creon (521, see also above, Ch. 1), Antigone gives up and essentially concedes the argument. Nonetheless, she says that her actions will earn her a noble death (*kalon...thanein*, 72), and that *philia* demands her actions, making the burial a holy crime (ὄσια πανουργήσασα, 74). The conclusion of the prologue, as M. Cropp puts it, “crystallizes the issue: Antigone thinks her action will for all its apparent misguidedness (*dusboulian*) lead to glory even in death (95-97), while Ismene sees her as mindless (*anous*) even though she is exhibiting proper *philia* to her *philoï* (98-99).” What Cropp translates as ‘misguidedness,’ of course, is the lack of a *boulê*, that is, of a kind of desire formed without appropriate calculation. After Creon’s declaration, the chorus avers that no one will be foolish enough (*môros*) to long for (*eran*) death (220). When they catch

sight of Antigone, they proclaim that she has been imprudent (*aphrosunê*) in violating the edict.⁷⁴

Antigone sums up her desire for Polyneices (and her other dead loved ones)

in her final speech:

ἐλθοῦσα μέντοι κάρτ' ἐν ἐλπίσιν τρέφω
 φίλη μὲν ἤξιεν πατρί, προσφιλῆς δὲ σοί,
 μήτερ, φίλη δὲ σοί, κασίγνητον κάρα.
 ἐπεὶ θανόντας αὐτόχειρ ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ
 ἔλουσα κάκωσμησα κάπιτυμβίους
 χοὰς ἔδωκα. νῦν δὲ Πολύνεικες, τὸ σὸν
 δέμας περιστέλλουσα τοιάδ' ἄρνημαι
 καίτοι σ' ἐγὼ τίμησα τοῖς φρονοῦσιν εὖ.
 οὐ γὰρ ποτ' οὔτ' ἄν, εἰ τέκνων μήτηρ ἔφυν,
 οὔτ' εἰ πόσις μοι κατθανὼν ἐτήκετο,
 βία πολιτῶν τόνδ' ἄν ἠρόμην πόνον.
 τίνος νόμου δὴ ταῦτα πρὸς χάριν λέγω;
 πόσις μὲν ἄν μοι κατθανόντος ἄλλος ἦν,
 καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον,
 μητρὸς δ' ἐν Ἄιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότιον
 οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἄν βλάστοι ποτέ. (897-912)

Having come to this, I greatly cherish the hope that I will come beloved to my father, beloved to you mother, and beloved to you brotherly head, since after you died, my hand alone washed you, set you in the tomb, and poured libations for you. But now Polyneices, (look) what things I earn for covering you. The wise know that I acted honorably in these things. I would never have taken up this grievous task, at odds with the people, however, if I were the mother of children, or my dead husband were rotting away. In virtue of what law do I declare these things? There would be another husband for me in place of the dying one, and a child from another man, if I lost the first one, but with mother and father covered in Hades, no other brother would spring forth for me.

Antigone's desire is thus concentrated on the singularity and irreplaceability of her brother. She is perhaps explaining herself to those who cannot understand why his

⁷⁴ M. Cropp, "Antigone's Final Speech (Sophocles, 'Antigone' 891-928)," *Greece and Rome* 44.2 (1997): 143-144.

burial was important enough to give up her life and her betrothed. However cold these comments may seem to us, they are certainly in character with the harsh woman we have been encountering throughout the play and, more importantly, are consistent with her actions.

For his part, Creon subordinates desire to statecraft, or at least to the propagation of his own political authority. For this reason, the initial indication that Haimon will side with Creon in the dispute with Antigone is an answer to Creon's prayers for an obedient son (641). For the most part, however, Creon's relation to desire is his failure to attend to it. He warns his son not to allow *hedone* into his thoughts (*phrenas*, 648). As I argued above (Ch. 2), it appears that Creon, rather than Haimon, must be the target of the chorus' invocation of Eros and Aphrodite, since it is he who has tried to evade their influence. At 486ff., Creon makes clear that he has no regard for the fact that Antigone is his niece, or any other relationship demanding filial piety. Ismene tells Haimon that his father has dishonored him (*atimazei*, 572) and reacts with amazement that he would deprive his son of his bride (574). Creon's pursuit of his desire to enhance his political *fiat* put him in the position of obstructing desire between Haimon and Antigone, robbing his son of his bride and turning his niece from focusing on her bridal bed to focusing on her death bed.

IV. Aristotle on Tragedy

I now want to turn to the direct consideration of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Because the *Poetics* (as we have it) is incomplete, many of the central concepts like *kinesis*, *hamartia*, *agnorisis*, and *peripateia* are not entirely clear. It is for this reason that I wanted to provide some relevant background in Aristotle's philosophical methodology and general approach before discussing this treatise. One of the immediate questions that arises is why Aristotle thinks it is important to focus upon poetry at all. I think that the answer lies in the need for *phantasiai*, which I noticed in the above section on desire, and the importance of *phainomena* for the practice of philosophy more generally (Ch. 3). Poetry offers philosophy the representation of a certain kind of activity, and these presentations help teach us what we ought to desire. Furthermore, it is a mark of the kind of philosopher he is that he finds particular nourishment for practical living in tragic story telling.

I am going to focus on the sections of the *Poetics* dealing with tragic drama, particularly the crucial 13th chapter. I want to begin, however, in the sixth chapter where Aristotle offers a general definition of tragedy as the "imitation of action and of life" (ἡ γὰρ τραγωδία μίμησις ἐστὶν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεων καὶ βίου, 1450b15ff.). He goes on to make clear that action is most significant because it, rather than character, determines whether one will live well or not, and in the case, it certainly seems to be the reverse. So tragedy, according to Aristotle, helps us to understand the causes of why life does not turn out well. He does not say that character is irrelevant, but that it must be subordinate to enhancing the description of action. Now the action that is most important to tragic drama, for Aristotle, is the

descent of a basically good (though not too good) person from good fortune to bad (13). This contributes to incitement of pity (for the hero) and fear (for ourselves) in the spectator and what Aristotle calls the *katharsis* of these emotions (6).

It is not entirely clear what Aristotle means by *katharsis* here, and his comment has aroused a variety of scholarly interpretations, which there is not space here to examine fully. What we should recognize, with Nussbaum, is the general theme surrounding uses of the word in extant texts. It appears largely in religious and medical contexts, and typically refers to removing an obstruction and thus clearing out an obstacle to right living or health.⁷⁵ It is important to recognize that the object of pity and fear is the imitation of pitiable and fearful things, not of the sufferer himself, and so the ideal tragedy must be constructed so as to contribute to this (δει... πεπλεγμένην καὶ ταύτην φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεινῶν εἶναι μιμητικὴν, 1452b32-33). For this reason, it is in a way more universal, or at least more broadly relevant to a variety of human situations.

In this connection, Aristotle claims that tragedy is more philosophical and more serious than history, because it expresses the general condition of humanity, not just what specifically happened to a particular person (1451b4-7). So we do not actually pity Oedipus but that someone of his stature has fallen. Nor do we become afraid of taking out our eyes or sleeping with our mothers but the destruction of the kind of person he is (one like ourselves), and this to a certain extent gives us pleasure because we learn from it (διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὁρῶντες, ὅτι

⁷⁵ Nussbaum, 389.

συμβαίνει θεωρούντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκείνος, for through this they (human beings) take pleasure seeing these images, because it happens that through considering them they learn and deduce what each one is, that this one is of a certain sort, 1448b15-17). It is the aspect of learning that seems to be behind Aristotle's requirement that *anagnorisis* and *peripateia* coincide.

In order to achieve the desired effect, Aristotle identifies three forms of plot that the tragic poet must avoid. The first is the (exceedingly) good man passing from good fortune to bad, because this is a defilement (*miarōn*, 1452b36). The second is a bad man passing from bad fortune to good, and this is, according to Aristotle, the most untragic of all, because it does not produce the appropriate feeling of benevolence toward human beings in general (*philanthropōn*, 1452b38), much less pity or fear. Finally, the tragedian must not show a bad man passing from good fortune to bad, for while it produces the appropriate disposition toward human beings, pity and fear are not in play. Tragedy is not a morality play. What remains is the “middle” sort of person who, like us, is of basically good character, but falls prey to some fatal mistake (*hamartia*, 1453a10). It is essential to recognize that *hamartia* is not a character flaw, or “fault,” for Aristotle stresses that the hero is not blameworthy (*anaxios*) or else we would not pity her, but censure her, and, of

course, we would not fear her fate for ourselves, but some failure in intellectual or ethical judgment.⁷⁶

It finally remains to reconsider what kind of person can benefit from tragedy, since I have been concerned throughout to say that Aristotle is the kind of philosopher who is especially disposed to tragedy. Aristotle takes up the question in *Rhetoric* 2.8, where he claims that the person who is already ruined (*apolôlotes*, 1385b19) can not feel pity (or fear, for that matter), because he has nothing more to lose. A person who thinks himself supremely wise will also not be susceptible, because he sees himself immune to the fate of the tragic hero, and the way Aristotle describes him is indicative: he is ἐν ὑβριστικῇ διαθέσει, ('in a disposition of hubris,' 1385b31). There can be no doubt that Plato is the direct target of this accusation, for in *Republic* VII he identifies as his goal the eradication of all emotions, especially pity. As Nussbaum puts it, "the person who believes he is invulnerable would not be an especially good person."⁷⁷

V. Concluding Remark: An Aristotelian Tragedy?

Despite the picture I have been presenting, the connection between Aristotelian philosophy and the guiding poetic vision of the *Antigone* has still not been decisively shown. To this I would respond, as Aristotle might urge, that we should only expect the degree of clarity that the subject matter admits. This is hardly

⁷⁶ I do not want to say, with J. Jones, that *hamartia* is exclusively intellectual, but it must be ethical in some non blameworthy sense.

⁷⁷ Nussbaum, 384.

an excuse to dismiss every objection, however, and I want conclude by noticing some potential objections with the thesis I have been defending. Most of them have to do with Antigone herself. First of all, there is nothing like the culminating moment of insight where *anagnorisis* and *peripateia* coincide for her. She does not really recognize that she has erred, but only that the circumstances have led to her fall. In the opinion of the wise (904, above), she has acted rightly, she avers. As Griffith has observed, the *Kreonti* at 914 responds ironically to τοῖς φρονοῦσιν (τοιῶνδε μέντοι σ' ἐκπροσιμήσασ' ἐγὼ νόμῳ Κρέοντι ταῦτ' ἔδοξ' ἀμαρτάνειν καὶ δεινὰ τολμᾶν, 'I have honored you above others according to this law, but to Creon I appear to have done these things in error, and to dare terrible things,' 913-915). So if the law of Creon is right, Antigone recognizes that she has committed *hamartia*, but this is just what the ironic contrast of Creon and the wise denies.

Antigone goes on to say that if the gods end up judging that her punishment was right, then, after enduring this judgement, she will then recognize her error (925-927). Her recognition thus lies in the future, not in the play, indicating her view that she has not lost everything with her death. If, after all, her enemy is punished, she will have obtained the goal of her actions (927-928). Indeed, as I observed in Ch. 2, the outcome of the play seems to vindicate her actions, as she achieves vengeance against Creon, who does lose everything on account of his opposition to her. Is Antigone's fate then untragic in Aristotelian terms because she has not in fact committed *hamartia*? Even if we deem Antigone's advocacy to be right, we can still

recognize that she was mistaken in the way that she pursued it. This poses another problem, however. For it seems that what makes her heroic is precisely her refusal to compromise. In the words of Knox,

Unlike Antigone, whom even death cannot move, Creon surrenders. The collapse of his apparently unshakable resolution throws into sharp relief the heroism of Antigone, who, in the face of opposition from friend and enemy alike, stands her ground and goes, still defiant, to her death.⁷⁸

The question this raises is whether the specifically Aristotelian resignation of the hero will make her heroic status problematic. Not in every case, I would want to argue. For, as Knox puts it, “Oedipus in his blindness, pollution, and misery asserts himself again as a powerful, imperious personality, but Creon at the end of the *Antigone* is a wailing wreck of man, stripped of dignity.”⁷⁹ The difference, I think, is the situation; Oedipus withdraws and can then assert himself as a hero because he has lost everything, whereas Creon (and Antigone when she has the chance) has not yet suffered.

It is Antigone who most often expresses sentiments congenial to Aristotle’s view of the limits of reason, and yet she poses the greatest resistance to his idea of a tragic hero. Our ultimate estimation of this difficulty will depend on how indispensable we think *anagnôrisis* and *peripateia* are to Aristotle’s assessment of tragedy. It seems to me that its purpose is to assist in the spectator’s own recognition

⁷⁸ B.M.W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964), 62.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

of the hero's mistake. If the *Antigone* is able to adequately bear witness to human frailty without it (at least in the case of Antigone herself), then it may still be compatible with Aristotle's view. Moreover, Aristotle does not say that all tragedies must have recognition but that this marks a complex plot (*Poetics*, ch, 6). Although the ideal tragedies (as defined in ch. 13) will have a complex plot, this certainly does not preclude a more "simple" character like Antigone from producing the tragic effect.

A larger problem emerges with respect to the play's general advocacy of withdrawal and flexibility, which I discussed in connection with Haimon's speech in Ch. 2, and the role of Dionysus in Ch. 3. Although Aristotle will recommend withdrawal in the case of the hero, because of his *hamartia*, nowhere in his work do we find the kind of Dionysian withdrawal that we noticed in Ch. 3. Although I argued that Dionysus' role in this play is to bring balance, moderation, and withdrawal, he is still Dionysus, an *eleichthon*, and one whose *apostasis* of terrible rage is ready to break forth against those who oppose him, as he does against Creon (and perhaps to some extent Antigone too) in this play. One must wonder if Aristotle is ready to dance with Dionysus. For the former's direction is always along the path of progressive illumination. Nonetheless, at the end of the play, the chorus again is as at pains to urge (alongside the wisdom of withdrawal) thinking as the greatest aid to *eudaimonia* (1348-1349). In this, Aristotle would certainly concur.

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