

Already Dead, Not Yet Living:
The Tragedy of Ethics in Hegel's *Phenomenology*

by

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A Note on Translations

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* are from Terry Pinkard's work-in-progress translation (2008), available online (see Works Cited). All translations from Sophocles' *Antigone* are from the Hugh Lloyd-Jones edition, published in the Loeb Library Series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Introduction

Philosophy's need is not yet philosophy. There is a *not yet* of philosophy. Philosophy—already—is announced in it. Now, reason's and thus Hegelian philosophy's essential proposition: philosophy has its beginning only in itself. Philosophy is the beginning, as the beginning of (it)self, the posit(ion)ing by (it)self of the beginning. How are these two axioms to be reconciled: philosophy only proceeds from/by itself, and yet it is the daughter of a need or an interest that are not yet philosophy?
(Derrida, *Glas* 95)

In his treatise on *Poetics*, Aristotle mentions Sophocles' *Antigone* only once, without a trace of the praise he gives *Oedipus Rex*. Rather than treating the work as a whole, he offhandedly references the deathly struggle between Creon and Haemon within Antigone's tomb (1454a1). Haemon, outraged at his father for condemning his bride, Antigone, to the live burial during which she kills herself, spits in Creon's face and draws his sword. Lunging at his father, he fails to strike. Without warning, he turns the sword on himself. Aristotle seems to take the Messenger at his word when he first reports to the polis: "He died at his own hand, in anger against his father for the murder he committed" (1177). For Aristotle, this is entirely unsatisfactory—leaving the deed undone is the opposite of tragedy (1453b38). But Aristotle has exhibited a *hamartia* of his own—he seems to have forgotten the later recollection of the messenger. After Eurydice, the wife of Creon, arrives before the polis, she asks for the messenger to tell the story again. Retracting his earlier statement, he gives Eurydice his full confidence. "I was there, dear mistress, and will tell you, and I shall suppress no word of the truth" (1192-3). First, the messenger tells her that together with Creon he purified Polyneices' exposed corpse, burning and burying the remains. Afterwards the two rushed to Antigone's tomb, which the messenger ironically refers to as "the maiden's hollow bridal chamber of death," echoing Antigone's earlier speech (1204-5). From afar they heard Haemon within the chamber, crying out as he held Antigone within his arms, her body

still dangling over the stony floor, hung by a linen noose. Coming upon the scene, Creon calls down to his son, imploring him to leave her corpse. But Haemon turns on him and strikes out:

As his father darted back to escape him, he missed him; then the unhappy man, furious with himself, just as he was, pressed himself against the sword and drove it, half its length, into his side. Still living, he clasped the maiden in the bend of his feeble arm, and pouring forth a sharp jet of blood, he stained her white cheek. He lay, a corpse holding a corpse, having achieved his marriage rites, poor fellow, in the house of Hades, having shown by how much the evil among mortals is bad counsel.
(1234-1243)

Can we side with Aristotle and say with confidence that Haemon really intended to kill his father in the fury of his bereavement? Turning away from his father, he chooses instead to *spill his blood*, tragically completing the customary marriage rites, staining Antigone's virginally white skin. Recognizing the tyranny of Creon's actions, Haemon chooses to join his bride beneath the ground, fulfilling at once their enjoined rites of marriage and burial. For Creon does not murder Antigone, as the messenger first exclaimed. Thinking he could wash his hands of the deed, he had condemned her to a live burial. He gives careful instructions regarding how to inter the daughter of Oedipus: "and when you have enclosed her in the encompassing tomb, as I have ordered, leave her alone, isolated, whether she wishes to die or be entombed living in such a dwelling" (885-888). To this fateful decree, Antigone responds with her famous lament, which begins, "O tomb, O bridal chamber, O deep-dug home, to be guarded forever, where I go to join those who are my own..." (891-3).

In *Antigone's Claim*, the monograph that perhaps formally inaugurated the interdisciplinary field of "Antigone Studies," Judith Butler says of these lines: "death is figured as a kind of marriage to those in her family who are already dead, affirming the deathlike quality of those loves for which there is no viable and livable place in culture" (24). When Antigone takes her own life, this unintelligible expression of her deed, her confused justification for burying her brother only to bury herself, lives on. Her words

continue to haunt the sphere from which she has been so violently excluded. For Butler, their very instability invests them with a subversive power: “Although Antigone dies, her deed remains in language, but what is her deed? This deed *is* and *is not* her own, a trespass on the norms of kinship and gender that exposes the precarious character of those norms” (24). Though drawn from a close reading of the primary text, Butler’s reinterpretation of Antigone as a character who subverts, rather than upholds customary norms of kinship and gender identity is directed against the legacy of the most influential interpretation of the tragedy, that of George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Hegel, in his posthumous *Aesthetics*, describes Sophocles’ *Antigone* as “the most magnificent and satisfying work of art among all the splendors of the ancient and modern worlds” (1218). Though a reader of Shakespeare and Molière, Hegel situated not their work but Sophocles’ play at the center of several of his major works. As George Steiner argues in *Antigones*, his rigorous study of various adaptations and interpretations of the play, “we find in Hegel’s successive, and, at decisive points, internally contrasting interpretations of the *Antigone* of Sophocles one of the high moments of the history of reading” (42). The play occupies a privileged role in the history of philosophy, especially from the German Idealists onwards. It has been used to reflect not only on the political particulars of its own time, but also to examine the relationship of the individual to the state in modern contexts. The tragic struggles between Antigone and Creon, between ‘natural’ laws of kinship and the laws of the state, between matriarchy and patriarchy, have been taken up again and again to illustrate various systems of ethics and their relation to rationality and subjectivity. The play brings to the fore contradictions that have haunted Western thought since the days of the pre-Socratics. This curious work of art written in the middle of the 5th century BCE both challenges the notion of a teleological development of reason and problematizes efforts to return to an innocent state before its emergence. As the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan muses in his Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, “Is there anyone who doesn’t invoke *Antigone* whenever

there is a question of a law that causes conflict in us even though it is acknowledged by the community as a just law?"(243).

Rather than try to encompass a panoply of philosophical 'Antigones,' as Steiner has attempted, I will focus my attention specifically on Hegel's use of Antigone in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the tragedy appears to help sketch a move beyond isolated individualized practical rationality (in the forms of *Individualität* and *Moralität*), to introduce the concepts of *Geist* and *Sittlichkeit*. I will explore the potentially destabilizing role of this transition section of the *Phenomenology* for larger debates within contemporary Hegel scholarship in American academic philosophy. Contemporary American scholars of Hegel have developed an interpretative schema that no longer caricatures Hegel as a hopelessly dogmatic theodician, a view that already seems doubtful in the light of his purposeful use of Sophocles' play, a play that renders an ethical impasse that haunts us to this day. But given the deeply troubling nature of the play, why does Hegel turn to the Antigone to try to resolve his discontent with Kantian practical reason? I will not isolate my treatment of the so-called 'Antigone section' from larger issues in Hegel's philosophy, but rather turn the peculiar nature of this first 'shape of Spirit' against contemporary readings of the *Phenomenology* that seem eager to purify it of such troubling aporias.

Hegel's 'reading,' or more accurately, *use* of Sophocles' *Antigone* in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been central in both motivating and shaping continued philosophical engagement with the drama into the 21st century. Especially when philosophers or theorists have wished to engage questions of the historicity of the subject, tragic finitude, the problem of gender, the sociality of reason, and the formation of a legalized ethical framework, they have variously been compelled to revisit Hegel's seminal restaging of the play as a deceptively simple dialectic of human and divine law. From his youthful days as a theology student in Tübingen onward, Hegel was fascinated by the tragedies of Sophocles, especially the *Antigone*. *Antigone* appears in his work

throughout his entire life, showing up notably in the *Phenomenology*, his lectures on *Aesthetics*, and the *Philosophy of Right*, as well as numerous other texts. However, his most sustained engagement with the tragedy occurs in the *Phenomenology*, and it is this reading that has proven the most influential. For this reason, we will focus our analysis primarily on the Hegelian Antigone of the *Phenomenology*, though without foreclosing engagement with his more mature texts. Further, this will allow us to focus on the way that Hegel himself *wrote* about Antigone, rather than try to understand his interpretation through transcribed lecture notes. In this way, we can examine how Hegel confronts the *Antigone* rhetorically and conceptually. Indeed, this apparent limitation merely opens up the study of the Hegelian Antigone to all the internal complications of the *Phenomenology* itself, of which Sophocles' play occupies a critical, central role.

Yet frequently, scholars have taken this section of Chapter VI in isolation from the rest of the *Phenomenology*, reading Hegel's "story" of *Geist* and *Sittlichkeit* incidentally. The Hegelian Antigone cannot be seen as a simple incident of a classic tragedy rewritten as an idealist dialectic. Even more, we cannot determine its role within Hegel's project by looking solely in the first section of Chapter VI on *Spirit*. It is quite tempting to see Hegel's Antigone as an isolated, romanticized allegory for the Greek way of life, exhibiting the simplicity of their ethical environment and its inevitable downfall. Yet in fact, Sophocles' *Antigone* is first quoted not in Chapter VI, but immediately beforehand in §437, preparing the transition for the realization of Reason as Spirit. At the end of Chapter V, Hegel criticizes the (Kantian) notion of Reason as law-giving and testing, that Reason as ahistorical, autonomous, and immediately self-determined, could serve as an adequate foundation for a system of ethics. Hegel sees this conception of rationality as itself historically situated, a 'moment' in the progressive development of shapes of consciousness that is thematized in the *Phenomenology*. Further, it is by this historicization of the modern, Enlightenment conception of Reason and its connection to ethical action that the Hegelian subject can move from Reason to Spirit. By

understanding Reason as Spirit, the Hegelian subject is supposed to comprehend the way an ethical action is *actually* achieved or determined in a historically contingent, lived social reality. The subject's own categorial self-understanding is supposed to depend on the real content and context in which he undertakes his (freely willed) self-conscious, rational activity. But how does Hegel indicate this move to objective ethical rationality, embodied firstly in the institutionalized social norms of a collective group of individuals? He does so by an appeal to *Antigone*, quoting lines 456-7: "the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the law. For they have life, not simply today and yesterday, but for ever, and no one knows how long ago they were revealed." As we shall see, these lines indicate that the ontological structure of rational *Individualität* is sublated into the collective, institutional structure of Spirit as the essential *reason* for the actual, objectively expressed norms and customs of *Sittlichkeit*, ethical life. The divine law that Antigone invokes in defense of burying her brother is thus aligned with the Enlightenment principle of essentially individual free will in action. But what does Antigone say immediately following these these two lines? She tells Creon,

I knew that I would die, of course I knew, even if you had made no proclamation. But if I die before my time, I account that gain. For does not whoever lives among many troubles, as I do, gain by death? So it is in no way painful for me to meet with this death... (459-64)

Antigone, the daughter of Oedipus, unsurprisingly longs for death. But in fact, even for Hegel's purposes the divine law becomes inseparable from death and the economy of reasoned activities surrounding death: purification, burial, and mourning. In the immediacy of Greek *Sittlichkeit*, the Hegelian self-conscious subject emerges for the first time into a concrete lived identity. The immediate experience of individual death brings the collective identity of the *polis* into confrontation with its own historicity, liberty, and destructive negativity—all through tragic decisions surrounding the *ethical reason of death*. But the experience of the tragic collapse ends up being a paradoxically productive

experience for the development of Spirit, which dissolves into a multiplicity of individuals and alienates consciousness from its own self, split into the realms of thought and being. The dialectic of Ethical Action, framed by the Antigone, allows the subject to experience death, non-actuality, and thus learn how to separate thought from being through negation, relieve this negation, and develop understanding (*Verstand*). The subject learns the necessity of mediating one's relationship to one's own death, and only by this facing of death is the subject *collectively* (socially/normatively) able to turn inward and experience the 'death in life' that is speculative thought—the ability to represent oneself to oneself and negate that representation. As we shall see, this relationship between freedom of thought and a relation to death are laid out through a theory of tragedy that implicitly supports Hegel's ethics of decisive rational agency. Through the influence of Hölderlin, Hegel developed a form of speculative idealism modeled after tragedy and its ability to provocatively endure these deathly contradictions, even linger with them and probe the aporetic abyss at the limit of ethical life itself. This turn is facilitated by an appeal to *Antigone* and the implicit speculative theory of tragedy undergirding Hegel's philosophical usage of the play.

Accordingly, our investigation will explore the connection between Sophocles play and the speculative move 'beyond' Kantian morality. We must understand the tragedy as both marking and enabling the transition from the inadequate ahistorical ethical system of abstract, autonomous individuals into an understanding of ethics as socially and historically constituted, built from concrete, *lived* social relations. Unfortunately, this opens our study up to transition problems and questions of unity that are endemic to critical scholarship on the *Phenomenology*. As Robert Pippin explores in his essay "You Can't Get There from Here: Transition problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," there has long been controversy surrounding the unity and coherence of different sections of the text. Some anti-unity theories that regard the *Phenomenology* as a palimpsest even see the point in which one text is grafted onto the

other as being this very point where *Antigone* seems to be a bridge: the division between “Reason” and “Spirit”. The best known of these deconstructions was Rudolf Haym’s 1857 *Hegel und seine Zeit*, which argues that the Phenomenology “is a psychology brought into confusion and disorder through a history, and a history brought to ruin through a psychology” (55). But rather than dissuade us from considering Antigone’s role in this transition, we should instead investigate why the tragedy is employed as a bridge between a critique of Kantian, individualist understandings of morality and the beginnings of a broad historical narrative detailing the practical development of legal/social institutions. For Pippin writes that the problems of important transitions, like that between Reason and Spirit that is bridged by Antigone, highlight certain key theses of Hegel’s post-Kantian project, including “his critique of *individualist* models of agency, especially self-conscious, rational agency” (57).

But what is often left uninterrogated in treatments of Hegel’s practical philosophy is the constitutive role of Hegel’s use of tragedy and Hegel’s philosophy of death in the formation of his speculative thought in general, *especially* with regard to issues of free agency and the institutional sociality of practical reason. What I hope to show in this thesis is that contemporary work on Hegel in mainstream American philosophy can and must be brought into a productive relation with the French reception of Hegel emerging after the lectures of Alexandre Kojève, specifically when focused upon the issues of death, negativity, and tragedy. Further, I believe this dialogue is extremely pressing, as a cadre of American philosophers surrounding the work of Robert Pippin try to revindicate Hegel’s practical relevance to modernity specifically through his practical philosophy. As I will show, Pippin and others have valuably renewed serious focus on a number of aspects of Hegel’s philosophy that have been ignored by previous commentators. However, in trying to make Hegel palatable for philosophers trained in the Anglo-American analytic tradition, they have neglected the contemporary contributions of another tradition of reading Hegel, the French tradition,

from which many recent, subversive interpretations such as Butler's have emerged. In fact, they have used methodological prejudices and accusations of metaphysical naïveté in order to foreclose any substantial engagement with this parallel tradition.

Nonetheless, Pippin's rigorous re-presentation of Hegel's philosophy prompts a reassessment of Hegel, one that cannot seek respite in the traditional objections to his supposed theodicy or regressive metaphysics. Thus, we should instead examine the aspects of Hegel's practical philosophy that Pippin has simultaneously marginalized and exploited, those key components of *Sittlichkeit*, whether in its 'immediate' or modern form, that Hegel cannot do without but which Pippin and other neo-Hegelians cannot bear to linger. They are quick to mourn and quick to bury, spurned by the catharsis felt in Antigone's wake. I claim that a close reading of the transition between 'Reason' and 'Spirit,' specifically from "V. Reason C. Individuality which takes itself to be real in and for itself" to "VI. Spirit A. The *true* Spirit. The ethical order", will allow us to see what is at stake in Hegel's peculiar use of Sophocles' tragedy. After reaching a practical impasse with Kant's formal subjectivity, why does Hegel turn to Antigone, and what does he achieve in so doing? As it becomes clear that the speculative move past Kant hinges on tragedy, the question broadens: Why does Hegel's philosophy *need* Antigone? What does *Antigone* offer Hegel that he cannot do without? .

Stathis Gourgoris suggests that "modern philosophy's need for *Antigone* emerges from the desire to occupy the realm of decision, of judgment (*krisis*), with a philosophical project" (123). Responding to Derrida's articulation of the inherent contradiction regarding origin in Hegel's turn to *Sittlichkeit* ("Philosophy's need is not yet philosophy..."), Gourgoris posits *hypokrisis* as the not-yet of philosophy. In an endnote, he clarifies his usage: "the Greek use of the term refers directly to the art (*technē*) of acting in the theatre, the performative rendition of an other. But it also means to make a response (to the oracle, for example), that is, to articulate a counter position, to engage in a drama of dialectics" (360). Hegel's philosophy needs *Antigone* in order to occupy, in

conscious experience, the dramatic realm of decision, where rational agents self-consciously *enact* their decisions, staking themselves against the concrete reality of social norms and risking death for an ideal. But at the same time, the mythic staging distances the subject from the proceedings before him, relieving him of his finitude, severing his thought from his being. A distant representation, yet at the same time absolutely real, the drama of *Sittlichkeit* does the work of death for the subject, paradoxically liberating him in and through his confrontation with finitude. In its final movement, the *mimetic* death of true ethical life grants *catharsis* to speculative thought, lending a perverse pleasure to holding out for the ideal, that always distant “achievement of freedom”.

Chapter 1 – Hölderlin & the Birth of the Speculative

Approaching Hegel

Through much of the twentieth century, Hegel's vilified reputation as a regressively dogmatic, obscurantist metaphysician foreclosed any serious consideration of his philosophical merit within American academic philosophy. This is partially due to several influential attacks on 'Hegelianism' in the early twentieth century by figures such as Bertrand Russell and C. S. Peirce. Because of the way that the analytic tradition had distinguished itself through an opposition to 'Hegelian' idealism, Hegel's philosophy was met with inherent skepticism that played upon assumptions about his commitment to a metaphysically monistic doctrine of necessary internal relations. This traditional view of Hegel in turn leads to dogmatic interpretations of his philosophy of history as theodicy and dismissive interpretations of his philosophy of right as simultaneously statist and traditionalist (Redding).

But these prejudices against Hegel forestalled his reevaluation for only so long. In the postwar period, a number of German scholars offered new commentaries on German Idealism that emphasized the thorough rigor and precision of their arguments in such a way that made the post-Kantians much more palatable to those trained in the analytic tradition. Perhaps the most influential interpreter was Dieter Henrich. Henrich came to Harvard in 1973, staying as a visiting professor until 1984. Highlighting the deep historical intricacies of the transition period between Kantian transcendental idealism to Hegelian speculative idealism, Henrich presented those classic debates on the nature of self-consciousness and subjectivity in such a way that sought to undo the skepticism regarding the philosophical merit of the actual arguments of Kant and his followers. In the preface to *Between Kant and Hegel*, Henrich writes:

From the outset, Rawls and Cavell had expressed the hope that I would make the classical tradition of philosophy in Germany accessible to American students and scholars. I responded to their request by offering a course that attempted to uncover the motivations and systematic structure of the philosophy of Kant and his successors. I also tried to interpret their theories and arguments—omitting, for example, their frequently exaggerated claims—in a way that analytically trained colleagues and students could take seriously. (vii)

Henrich set forth with the goal of showing the continued importance of the post-Kantian tradition to contemporary issues in philosophy. He was motivated by a “long-standing attempt to transform the post-Kantian movement into an acceptable contemporary philosophical perspective” (viii). In effect, Henrich achieves this valorization of the post-Kantian movement by emphasizing the way in which this period saw the genesis of the principal problems of philosophical modernity (i.e. self-consciousness, etc.)—problems that still occupy philosophers on either side of the ‘Continental’ divide.

In my analysis of Hegel, I will explore the ‘non-metaphysical’ interpretation of Hegel defended by Robert Pippin in works such as *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, but without Pippin’s insistent optimism about Hegel’s philosophy—that is, his commitment to seeing the Hegelian idealist project and its holding out for the possible achievement of “freedom” as a way to address the problems of what he calls the ‘persistence of subjectivity’ that characterize modernity. Pippin proposes to understand Hegel in light of the specific philosophical problematics that emerged in the aftermath of Kant’s ‘Copernican Revolution,’ concerns about the self-actualizing nature of self-consciousness (i.e. its ‘spontaneity’ in knowing or its analogous ‘freedom’ in acting) and the transcendental conditions for the possibility of any conscious experience.

One way that Pippin suggests we understand this relationship is by taking Hegel “at his word” when he writes in his early *The Difference between Fichte’s and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* that the argument of Kant’s Transcendental Deduction, namely the ‘transcendental unity of apperception’, “made possible the speculative identity theory

that he ultimately created” (*Hegel’s Idealism* 6). Pippin describes Hegel’s recurrent preoccupation with Kant’s claim about self-consciousness’ “spontaneity” in constituting its own experience as “the apperception theme.” Pippin is interested in the ways in which Hegel extends Kant’s idea of the role of the ‘spontaneous’ “I think” in both determining the conditions for the possibility of knowledge of experience as well as constituting that very experience by a certain kind of active, yet *a priori* self-conscious awareness: “apperception.”

However, Hegel was also, following Fichte, deeply critical of Kant’s distinction between intuitions and concepts and his use of the inaccessibility of the ‘thing-in-itself’ in order to describe all knowledge as only knowledge of appearances (8). Without the distinction between intuitions and concepts, the knowing subject is no longer restricted by the inherent finitude of sensibly received, given intuitions in conditioning the possibility of knowledge.

For Kant, the “I” is a simple transcendental designator, the necessary structural subject for the predicate, “think”. The subject’s *being* is indeterminate; the “I” is an empty designation of pure identity. Likewise, its *possibility* alone is enough to condition further analysis. Thus, on its own terms the Transcendental Deduction *does not* require any actual activity of self-reflection in order to proceed in its syllogistic inferences.

However, what the Transcendental Deduction *does* require is the anchoring presence of pure intuitions of time and space, a pre-critical framework that preconditions the unity achieved by (the possibility of) the act of apperception. Thus, Kant still relies on a certain doctrine of extra-conceptual *a priori* epistemological bases to then support further inferences concerning concepts themselves. Accordingly, Pippin can read Hegel’s rejection of this doctrine as metaphysically averse, critical of a pre-conceptual basis for the determination of ‘objectivity’. As it would be digressive and impractical, we will not examine the rigorous arguments that Pippin makes to support this claim. However, we can see that in this reading, Hegel does not reject Kant’s

doctrine of intuitions only to regressively replace it with a new, dogmatically metaphysical anchor instead. Of course, Pippin does not foolishly deny the metaphysical reading of Hegel. Rather, he claims that “one cannot understand the Hegelian payoff, his holism and the moral theory that depends on it, unless, again, one understands the Hegelian investment, the original engagement with Kant’s critical philosophy” (*Hegel’s Idealism* 12-13).

The idea here is not to completely subscribe to the non-metaphysical reading, but simply to employ its view as a way to temporarily suspend an understanding of Hegel’s metaphysics as ‘onto-theological’ or ‘monistic’ simply so as to take seriously the phenomenological inner workings of these sections of the *Phenomenology*. Given the oddity of the tragic collapse at the end of the Antigone section in particular, this will allow us to isolate the notion of *Sittlichkeit* put forth in this section from an optimistic anticipation of its full resolution with the ‘Absolute’.

Pippin has tried to further develop this non-metaphysical reading into a comprehensive account of Hegel’s ‘modern theory of agency’ that emphasizes the post-Kantian ‘achievement’ of individual freedom in a way *compatible* with the *rationalization* of social institutions. Pippin works from the thesis that the ‘apperceptive spontaneity of the mind’ is “by far the most important Kantian notion picked up and greatly expanded by the later German Idealists...Fichte, Schelling and Hegel” (*Idealism as Modernism* 32). In Chapter III, we will investigate the way in which this Kantian notion of spontaneity, when connected to Hegel’s theory of free agency, grounds the elementary importance of *Individualität*, the final development of individual rational self-consciousness, for Hegel’s (post-Kantian) practical philosophy in general. But for now, I simply want to point out who is *not* named by Pippin as one of those idealists who picked up this notion: Hölderlin. Even though Hölderlin may not have shared Hegel’s expressed approval of the constitutive role of the “I think,” it was Hölderlin who led the way out of Kant for Hegel. Hölderlin first guided Hegel, as a tutor in Frankfurt in 1797, to revise his

perspective and see that “freedom is no longer the overcoming of dependency but rather the unification of opposites” (Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance* 97). This new view of freedom is the same as the view expressed by his paradoxical commitment and rejection of Kant—his simultaneous allegiance to the ‘truth’ of Kant’s unity of apperception and disavowal of Kant’s formalist methodology. Not only is Hölderlin’s influence on Hegel’s theory of freedom unacknowledged, but Hölderlin’s name is not even *mentioned*, not once by Pippin, in the whole of *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* (2008). What I hope to show is that this omission is more damaging to an understanding of Hegel’s theory of freedom than it might first appear. By faithfully complying with Hegel’s own silence on his deeply influential friendship with Hölderlin during the formative years of their thought, a time when they were both grappling with how to move past Kantian morality in a way that still preserved their Romantic and Hellenistic convictions, we foreclose consideration of the way in which Hölderlin’s own work on theories of tragedy and theatre influenced Hegel’s innovative approach to ethics after Kant. Though Hegel may have never spoken of Hölderlin’s influence, Dieter Henrich shows that Hölderlin may have been *the* person who broke Hegel out of his Kantianism and revealed the productive possibility of the speculative dialectic. Henrich writes in his seminal essay *Hegel and Hölderlin* that when Hegel first arrived in Frankfurt, he still operated within the Kantian conceptual schema and methodology. As their good friend from Tübingen, F.W. J. Schelling, looked in the direction of Fichte and Spinoza,

Hölderlin opened [Hegel’s] eyes to the fact that the Kantian conceptual framework was incapable of grasping the shared experiences and convictions of their earlier years [in Tübingen]; that the Greek *polis* had been a *unity*, not merely a conjoining of free individuals; that freedom must be conceived not only as selfhood but also as abandon; that the experience of the beautiful consists in more than reverence for the law of reason. (129)

Hölderlin presented Hegel with new ways of thinking that combined their deep admiration for the work of Sophocles with a newly emerging method of philosophy that sought to rid the Kantian project of its inherent skepticism without regressing to

dogmatism. That is, the Hölderlin connection will allow us to see a closer relationship between tragedy, the performative nature of speculative thought, and the constitutive role of individual freedom in ethical action and ethical life. Whether in its modern or ancient form, *Sittlichkeit* is always already bound up with tragedy—specifically the modern philosophical reinterpretation of ancient tragedy. By attending to the possible influence of Hölderlin and his theory of tragedy in the formation of Hegel’s uniquely *speculative* identity theory, we can see the way in which tragedy comes to function as the constitutive *not yet* of any *modern* idealist theory of human agency constructed out of Hegel’s system.

Hegel and Hölderlin

How exactly did Hegel find a way to move past the Kantian paradigm and the inherent skepticism it generated, and why did this movement lead him to necessarily posit the origins of ethics as a theory of tragedy? Dieter Henrich argues that it was Hölderlin and his circle that first led Hegel ‘beyond’ Kant without regressing to pre-Kantian dogmatism. Among his Tübingen peers, Hölderlin alone had the privilege of living in Jena, working as a private tutor for 6 months from 1794-1795 (*The Course of Remembrance* 99). He writes to Hegel in January 1795, encouraging Hegel to read Fichte while at the same time presenting Hegel with his own, idiosyncratic interpretation. First, he states that Fichte’s absolute “I” contains *all* reality and therefore has no (external) object. However, for Hölderlin this contradicts the *consciousness* of the “I think” that, as a condition for the possibility of any cognition, formally takes itself as its object. That is, Hölderlin speculatively critiques Fichte’s “I” through an understanding of consciousness based on the Kantian “original-synthetic unity of apperception.” In 1795 Hölderlin is *already* looking beyond Fichte through a speculative reenactment of the Kantian notion of necessary self-consciousness within *historical time*:

[Fichte's] absolute "I" (= Spinoza's Substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside of it there is nothing; hence there is no object for this "I," for otherwise not all reality would be within it; however a consciousness without object cannot be thought, and if I myself am this object, then I am as such necessarily restricted, even if it were only within time, hence not absolute; therefore, within the absolute "I" I have no consciousness, and insofar as I have no consciousness I am (for myself) nothing, hence, is the absolute "I" for me nothing. (*Essays and letters on theory* 125)

In speculatively positing the absolute "I" within the limitations of human conscious experience, Hölderlin exposes the infinite negative movement of speculative self-consciousness itself: the way in which "I" must think against myself, deny myself in order to become my own object, and only thus experience the world as an objective reality in which "I" am but another finite object for 'self-consciousness in general,' that "infinite middle term," as Hegel will later say.

Also during the influential Jena period (1794-1795), Hölderlin began to see, before his peers, that Kant's problems lay in the way his dualisms, such as the 'scheme/content' distinction, inherently exposed him to skepticism. Though Pinkard will not claim Hölderlin as *the* originator of this 'post-Kantian' move, he does admit that it was "first haltingly articulated in Hölderlin's essay "Judgment and Being," ("Virtues" 218). The young idealists realized that there had to be a more primordial unity conditioning the possible abstraction of scheme from content. But whereas Hölderlin clung to the revelatory truth of a constitutive, primordial unity,

Hegel developed Hölderlin's insight in two novel directions at odds with Hölderlin's own understanding of what followed from it: The pre-reflective unity in terms of which we orient ourselves is a complex, *intersubjective*, mutual self-situating and mutual sanctioning within the natural world; and its structure is that of a complex *normative* social process of mutual *recognition* and mutual holding each other to norms. (220)

However, Hegel's development of Hölderlin's notion is not completely antithetical, as Pinkard seems to suggest. Rather, Hegel works within a (rather Hölderlinian) theory of tragedy that ends up conditioning the possibility for the very form in which Hegel's

philosophy is represented—the speculative dialectic. The “novel directions” that Hegel takes Hölderlin’s understanding of the primordial unity of being are, put simply, the way in which this ‘pre-reflective unity’ *dramatically performs* its own dissolution. Through our reading, we perform again this divisive emergence of a rationality. Reason severs thought from being by a theoretical reinterpretation of ancient tragedy as modern philosophy that is *at the same time* a theatrical restaging of modern philosophy as ancient tragedy. In the *Phenomenology*, in the conscious experience of *decisive* ethical action, theoretical interpretation *is* theatrical restaging; one becomes the other with all the ontological plurivocity visible in Hegel’s declaration “Subject is Substance.” Tragedy and the essence of practical philosophy must, in a certain sense, become indissoluble in order for reason to learn to think *beyond its own being*. Only the self-active performance of the historicized narrative of this ‘spirit,’ at once ancient and modern, at once *Sittlichkeit* and *Individualität*, will reveal that these complex intersubjective and normative processes are the necessary *stage* for the *performance* of thought that is Hegelian speculative idealism. I contend that Pinkard has mistakenly limited the extent of Hölderlin’s influence and that he has done so by distinguishing between two Hölderlins: one, the early, hopeful speculative idealist; the other, the late, death-bent poet and dramatist. But while Pinkard at least acknowledges Hölderlin’s productive contribution, together with Pippin he has inevitably complied with Hegel’s *own* later silence regarding Hölderlin, a silence that Henrich pleads we understand not as a philosophical judgment, but as an unfortunate disconnect occurring “in light of the poet’s fate and the illness to which he later succumbed” (100). By refusing to honor this distinction, built as it is in *anticipation* of Hölderlin’s later mental decline, we might see a more profound connection between Hegel’s own speculative ‘theory of freedom,’ so acclaimed by the American post-metaphysical view, and his own theory of tragedy. A speculative theory of tragedy emerged for Hegel as *the* way of dialectically working through the constitutive contradictions of freedom and necessity—the *origins* of any post-Kantian practical

philosophy. Hegel turns to a philosophically modern reinterpretation of ancient tragedy in a way that *essentially* reiterates Hölderlin's own reasons for returning to Sophocles on modern terms. In their own way, both returned to Sophocles to draw from the evocative power of the inseparability of tragedy's dramatically written form from its profoundly 'philosophical' content—for it appeared to them that Sophocles was able to represent, *without knowing it*, the inherent yet constitutive contradictions of moral law, i.e. *the* philosophical problematic of post-Kantian German Idealism. Both Hegel and Hölderlin endeavored to produce a new dramatic form of writing that could look beyond the Kantian antinomies by harnessing the illocutionary power of the Tragedians—their ability to *effect*, without saying it, the truth that in ethical life one 'has' reason without knowing it. They both sought after Sophocles the *technē* of catharsis.

Though both Hegel and Hölderlin innovated new, distinctly modern forms of writing through a compulsive attendance to the ancients, they diverged in their aims. The difference lies in the fact that while Hegel developed this eternal return through the speculative dialectic, Hölderlin worked through the literal acts of translation, poetic reproduction, and dramatic reenactment. But Hölderlin's turn to poetry and theatre proper did not diminish his continuing influence on Hegel's developing idealism, especially its formal innovations. The influential Hölderlin we must now attend to combines the early speculative idealist of 1794-1797 with the theoretician and dramatist that followed just after, from 1798-1800. We will combine Henrich's revindication of the Jena Hölderlin with Lacoue-Labarthes's subsequent "Hölderlin of a certain precise and sure trajectory in [the] theory and practice of the theater, in the theory of tragedy and the experience or the testing—and this entails the Greeks (Sophocles)—of a new kind of dramatic writing" (209). Hölderlin attends to the way in which the speculative performance of tragedy (again) is necessary to enact and originate of the law of freedom *for* consciousness in such a way that appears as its own, (already) free, speculative activity.

The representative experience of the tragic contradiction becomes necessary for the possibility of reflective experience by consciousness of its own internal self-legislation, its free will. In the 1794 fragment “On the Law of Freedom,” Hölderlin writes accordingly:

The law of freedom, however, rules without any regard for the help of nature. Nature may or may not be conducive to its enactment, it [the law of freedom] rules. Indeed, it presupposes a resistance in nature, for otherwise, it would not rule. The first time that the law of freedom discloses itself to us, it appears as punishing. The origin of all our virtue occurs in evil. Thus morality can never be entrusted to nature. For if morality did not cease to be morality, once its destiny’s foundations were located in nature and not in freedom, the legality that could be engendered by mere nature would be a very uncertain thing, changeable according to time and circumstances. (34)

In order for the law of freedom to be ‘freed’ from the contingency of nature and the inherent finitude of natural life, it must first disclose itself through punishment, the tragically necessary representation of an original yet unknown guilt. Hölderlin specifically investigates this original condition of freedom soon after, in the February 1795 essay “On the Concept of Punishment.” Hölderlin observes that, to avoid consequentialism in morality, we must proceed from principle. But because this principle cannot be derived directly from a notion of good or evil (there is no self-sufficient criterion for either), the moral principle appears *negatively* in the form of punishment rather than *positively* in the form of a ‘foundational’ first principle. Further, punishment first manifests itself tautologically and somewhat arbitrarily: “punishment is just punishment, and if a mechanism, chance, or arbitrariness do something unpleasant to me, I know that I have acted in an evil manner. I have to ask nothing else; what happens, happens rightly so because it happens” (35). At first, this claim seems fatalistic—but not if we compare it to Hegel’s conception of the ethical disposition, based on the essential *immanence* of ethical law insofar as it *is* law at all. To step beyond the ethical law, to inquire about its origins, is to deny its essential rightness as an ethical law. Accordingly, “an ethical disposition consists precisely in immovably sticking to what is right and in

abstaining from any movement, any undermining, and any reduction” (*Phenomenology* 390). But the ineffectiveness of inquiring about the origins of ethical law means that reflection upon these laws cannot occur reductively in conscious experience. Rather, our ethical origin (our effective ‘first principle’) must *show itself* negatively, as the result of our actively willing, yet still unknowing, *opposition*. We come to know our moral responsibility (the fact that we ought to reflect on our actions and involvement in the world) by having to undergo the seeming arbitrariness of experiencing the original concept of punishment. That is, we must first act *against* the moral law in order to gain knowledge of it. Hölderlin writes: “we have to will something that is opposed to the law of morality. What the law of morality is we knew neither before it opposed our will, nor do we know it now that it opposes us; we only experience its resistance as a result of the fact that we willed something which is opposed to the law of morality” (35-36). Hölderlin’s consideration of the emergence of the moral viewpoint through an experience of suffering through one’s own, self-willed yet unconscious opposition finds uncanny reflection in Hegel’s other notable quotation of *Antigone* itself, from §469 of the *Phenomenology*: “In terms of this actuality and in terms of its deed, ethical consciousness must recognize its opposite as its own. It must acknowledge its guilt: ‘*Because we suffer, we acknowledge that we have erred.*’” (423).

Hölderlin highlights the fact that a sort of original tragedy is necessary for moral law to announce itself to the subject, insofar as the law is built on a non-empiricist, non-consequentialist (that is to say, *idealist*) practical philosophy. There must be at least the *representation* of a fatal self-opposition for the subject to know the truth of his ethical disposition and reflect on it without repeating the tragic gesture. Only this originary experience will allow the subject to understand the way in which he is always already within a certain kind of objective knowledge of what counts as ethical behavior. Only through this experience can he understand the limits of an ethical disposition, the movement by which his subjective action is objectively always already enclosed within an

ethical 'substance', itself an object of *another* opposing subjective knowledge, likewise always in the process becoming individual, principled, rational reflection.

But what Hegel will emphasize is the notion that this seemingly unusual movement of coming to self-knowledge is actually the truth of self-consciousness. In so far as we freely try to *know* anything, we always proceed *negatively*. The subject 'comes to know' through a logic of opposition, through thinking *against* that which appears. In order to think through a way of understanding the world, one must *freely* oppose that understanding and subsequently experience, as truth, *both* the fatal guilt of acting on partial knowledge and the fatal incompleteness of the opposed understanding. In the interstice between these failures of subjective and objective knowledge, the absolute appears as a beacon, as the hope for satisfaction of the insatiable desire to know, the final end to this *via negativa*.

Yet there is a constitutive provisionality to the *being* of this absolute, at least for the subject of experience—I must, as an "I," only 'come into' knowledge of the absolute through an actively enacted sequence of moments in time, a *becoming*, always rationally comprehending the means by which I proceed negatively in the free willing of thought. But how does this play out in a real world of active individuals and institutions? Actually *trying* to act ethically always risks failing again. In *any* act, I am expressing myself into *Sittlichkeit* in a way that *objectively* posits that which I do not immediately know: the consequence of my action and the effective punishment that will be the *objective* judge of my deed. Yet it is this implicit, institutionally articulated ethical 'knowledge' and the *necessary failure* of the subject to presume it as a whole that *effects* a rational development of this knowledge itself. The way in which the particular individual necessarily stakes himself against 'actuality,' against the effective reality of the whole, is the very *means* by which 'Spirit' (collective, historicized, and customarily articulated rationality) develops 'consciousness' of itself. It is in this notion of Spirit's development that Hegel begins to

diverge from Hölderlin's preoccupation with morality in particular. The 'objective universal law' against which the individual judges the ethical content of his action is not some 'whole' within which the subject lives—it is not *actually* 'universal'. In fact, even the sum of all the social activity of all the particular subjects does not account for the whole of 'the way things are done'. Rather, the constant 'becoming' of the subject *into* objective knowledge is the only means by which the objective realm holds itself up, covers over its own incompleteness. And because the objective spirit cannot inherently 'know' *any* subject entirely, it is also fatally partial in a reciprocally productive manner. This reciprocal incompleteness is what allows Spirit itself to change over time. This is how the consciousness of experience can sustain itself and develop itself beyond the limitations of a particular living individual. In turn, this is what allows the individual to understand the social norms and institutions that form his subjectivity as something objective, not (yet?) absolute—he should still be compelled to strive for something beyond the objective status quo, because by its very nature it fails to fully account for his particularity, even as he exists therein.

Speculative Thought, Phenomenology

But what remains to be seen is how Hegel actually affects this movement within the *Phenomenology*. In order to contextualize these two sections *Individualität* and *Sittlichkeit*, we should briefly review the general nature of Hegel's unique form of speculative thought, specifically in relation to the *Phenomenology*. This will allow us to see what is at stake within a particular stage of the Hegelian subject's journey towards 'Absolute Knowing'. Though some commentators may warn against reading the *Phenomenology* as a Bildungsroman, it is undeniable that there is inherent narrativity in the *Phenomenology* and a certain type of progressive maturation in the Hegelian subject as it moves throughout the series of (partial) 'shapes' or modes of conscious experience

that make up the text. In fact, Hegel writes in §4 of the Preface that “the beginning both of cultural maturity [*Bildung*] and of working one’s way out of the immediacy of substantial life [for example, a rationalist, pre-Kantian metaphysical naiveté that immediately equates thought and being] must always be done by acquainting oneself with universal principles and points of view [i.e. different categories of understanding the normative ‘truth’ of a given experience]” (8). Hegel presents the way in which a subject might ‘work its way out of’ a determinate, thus incomplete shape of conscious experience through an infamous and idiosyncratic style of argumentation—the speculative dialectic. This style reaches all the way down to the peculiar rhetorical structures of his sentences, which Judith Butler aptly describes in *Subjects of Desire*:

Hegel’s sentence structure seems to defy the laws of grammar and test the ontological imagination beyond its usual bounds. His sentences begin with subjects that turn out to be interchangeable with their objects or to pivot on verbs that are swiftly negated or inverted in supporting clauses. When “is” is the verb at the core of any claim, it rarely carries a familiar burden of predication, but becomes transitive in an unfamiliar and foreboding sense, affirming the inherent movement in “being”, disrupting the ontological assumptions that ordinary language usage lulls us into making. (17-18)

Understanding the depth of Hegel’s commitment to even *rhetorically* enacting the self-movement of thought will allow us to understand how he tries to leverage the ‘truth’ of Being as a *becoming*, the becoming of *a* normative truth of a particular mode of experience. He attempts this through a dramatization, a rhetorical *performance* of the spontaneity of self-conscious thought—of thought thinking itself, through itself and against itself. Hegel radicalizes Kant’s synthetic unity of apperception by trying to enact the “I think” not merely as a formal, categorical element necessary for representational knowledge, but as a self-actualizing thinking that subsumes itself within the objective reality that appears opposed to it. The essence of the synthetic *a priori* of the “I think” is, for Hegel, the implicit free ‘spontaneity’ of self-conscious will that constitutes both subject and object; it is the self-differentiating identity of the thinking/acting subject and an opposing substantial reality. However, Hegel wants to actively enact that movement

of self-consciousness for the reader. This is why he employs not a deduction, but a ‘phenomenology.’ He writes in §27 of the Preface, “This coming-to-be of *science itself*, that is, of *knowledge*, is what is presented in this *phenomenology* of spirit as the first part of the system of science” (23-24).

With the Phenomenology, Hegel *presents* the self-enactment of the nature of *knowing* as such, the performative bringing-into-being of knowledge, through a rhetoric of speculative, dialectical positing that seeks to efface the inherent ontological biases of conventional grammar. Hegel must develop a radically new science of knowing in order to show the way in which the knowing subject might come to know his own involvement in the system of knowledge. The Phenomenology develops the way in which such a consciously experiencing subject comes to intelligibly comprehend that experience. The context of experience is revealed throughout in a form radically different from Kant’s critical project. The temporality of the experience of Being is no longer, in a certain sense, suspended in the reading of an ahistorical analysis, precisely because of the way in which the possibility of meaning is indicated: “Hegel’s sentences *enact* the meanings that they convey, indeed they show that what “is” only is to the extent that it is *enacted* [...] we also come to understand the role of our own consciousness in constituting this reality inasmuch as the text must be read to have its meaning enacted” (Butler *Subjects* 18-19). Robert Pippin echoes Butler’s rhetorical analysis, but in very different terms, clarifying Hegel’s procedure against the Kantian program, especially in the *Phenomenology*:

Hegel’s procedures in all his books and lectures are *developmental*, not *deductive*. The proof procedure shifts from attention to conceptually necessary conditions and logical presuppositions to demonstrations of the partiality of some prior attempt at self-imposed normative authority (and in his *Phenomenology*, accounts of the experience of such partiality and the “lived” implications of such partiality), and the subsequent developments and reformulations necessary to overcome such partiality. (“Hegel’s Practical Philosophy” 188)

The *Phenomenology* in particular indicates the way in which a distinctly human subject approaches this type of self-imposition of norms, their inevitable failure, and their successive, ever-expansive reformulation. However as readers we are not detached or isolated from this “thinking I” by formalized critical distance. Butler maintains that there is a certain irreducible multiplicity of meaning in the way in which the reading of Hegel performatively achieves its ontological *content*, evidenced by the internal complexity of even the simple declaration: Subject is Substance. Rather than simply observing the *Bildung* of a journeying subject, we are implicated in the subject’s struggles by the very way in which our reading enacts the ‘being’ of the ‘shape’ in which the subject finds himself. Our reading *enlivens* the scene, sets into motion the momentarily determinate, self-certain shapes of conscious experience, bringing them into doubt and forcing the subject to confront their inherent, but heretofore unseen contradictions. However, every attempt is revealed to be partial, unable to fully encompass or render intelligible the speculatively posited truth that is its object of desire. Butler understands the Hegelian subject as maintaining a certain metaphysical hope, a belief in the possibility of metaphysical satisfaction, even if that satisfaction may ultimately rely for its content on the contingent reality of socially and historically constructed norms (Spirit). Hegel seems to remain faithful to the project of modernity—that if only we could understand this historicized nature of rationality and the normativity of truth and then live according to its inherent constructivism, we could *fully* ‘actualize’ our inherent individual freedom—we need only to develop rationalized social institutions that can accommodate this fact of freedom.

Pippin, in his review of *Subjects of Desire*, decries Butler’s presentation of Hegel’s procedure as relying on an “unmotivated and opaque metaphysical context” (129). Though I share his dissatisfaction with her use of the antiquated “doctrine of internal relations,” her attention to Hegel’s use of rhetoric, narrativity, and a *fictional* subject of experience as the way of showing the “coming-to-be of science itself” is indispensable to

understand the textual presentation of the peculiar *activity* of speculative thought: the nature of first positing, then skeptically ‘tarrying with the negative,’ and nonetheless recovering oneself and moving onward. As I will elaborate in later sections of this work, I believe that the supposedly irreducible ‘freedom’ of self-consciousness that Hegel wants to preserve through the subject’s journey through the *Phenomenology* is intimately connected to a certain self-deceptive process of performance that incessantly seeks to efface its (actually irreducible) *non*-identity with the ‘being’ that confronts it. Pippin’s problem might then be the way in which he implicitly shares Hegel’s optimism about the possibilities for Enlightenment Reason, his hope for the *actual* ‘achievement’ (he uses the notion of achievement) of a society that seeks to accommodate the reasoning autonomy of individual agents. He simply believes that the complexities of Hegel’s compatibilism better explain the *actuality* of practical reason than most liberal, primarily individualist accounts. Hegel’s philosophy certainly has a lot more to give than the stereotypical portrayals of “Hegelianism” give it. In my view, the side of Hegel that Pippin believes is its truth, the “side which insists on the essentially historical *achievement* of satisfaction (or “identity”), not its mere revelation” is also the side that insists on the positivity of the rationality of certain dominant bourgeois institutions. Might we question the ethical consequences of this kind of rationalizing of the real, of lending the legitimizing force of Reason to the (sometimes violent) exercise of institutional power? After Nietzsche, how can we blinder ourselves to considerations of the way in which even the notions of ‘Morality’ or ‘Reason’ are always so compromised? Was Hegel’s historicization of (Kantian) rationality not the establishment of a conception of the historical contingency of Reason that enabled the Marxian and Nietzschean critiques? This seemingly willful denial might be what motivates Fredric Jameson to remark that Pippin might even agree with his characterization of Hegel as an “ideologist of the modern” (*The Hegel Variations* 2).

But this Hegelian subject that I have described, despite its ontological indeterminacy, seems to be simply an epistemological subject rather than the type of individual rational *agent* that I suggest Hegel is attempting to extend and critique in the transition area that is our primary focus. However, the way in which the knowing subject comes to understand his own involvement in giving content to the conceptual norms that define the particular truth of a mode of observational knowledge is in no way different or dissociable, for Hegel, from the way in which a practical agent comes to understand his self-actualization of an ethical rationality and its particular (socially/historical contingent) normative structure. Notably, the subject of the *Phenomenology* comes to know this very fact—that his mode of practical involvement in a social reality is inseparable from his mode of knowing and verifying seemingly empirical truths. Accordingly, we should briefly make note of what has already been accomplished or achieved by the subject up until the end of chapter V, where we will focus our textual analysis. Of course, this cannot amount to a recapitulation of the first five chapters. Rather, we can examine the way in which Hegel compels us to reflect back on the previous developments. Hegel begins “Individuality, which takes itself to be real in and for itself” with the type of brief meta-phenomenological reflection that has now become familiar to the reader of the *Phenomenology*. Before proceeding into a phenomenological account of a new ‘shape’ of consciousness, Hegel compels us to reflect on the previous shapes and the progress that has been made. By unpacking the terminology he employs in this reflection, we can further establish a basis for the subsequent speculative discourse. Accordingly, we can now turn to this particular section of the *Phenomenology* and examine it on its own terms.

Chapter II – A Tragically Rational Individual

Self-Consciousness as Reason

In this chapter, we will examine the progressive development of the conception *Individualität*, an ontological shape of self-consciousness that come to define the essence of *Spirit*, and thus *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel's careful exposition of *Individualität* allows him to formulate an abstract, formally universal ontological framework that conditions the possibility of acting freely and self-consciously in the world. By attending closely to the development of this notion, we can observe why and how Hegel intervenes at the limit of individualist morality through recourse to *Antigone*. Further, this study will undergird our analysis of Greek *Sittlichkeit* proper. Many of the terms of art used in that later section are formulated just beforehand in Chapter V. Accordingly, let's briefly recall the dialect of Reason that has led us to *Individualität*.

“Individuality, which in its own eyes is real in and for itself” is the third and final section of the fifth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, entitled “The certainty and truth of reason.” The two sections that precede “Individuality” are “Observing reason” and “The actualization of rational self-consciousness by way of itself”. At the juncture that begins chapter V, the subject has surpassed the deadlock of “the Unhappy Consciousness” by mediating its relationship to some essential truth through the figure of the minister, who is posited as possessing this truth despite his particularity as another consciousness. This process is supposed to reveal to the subject that it does not need to consider itself *against* the otherness that confronts the certainty it gains from interior self-reflection. In the Unhappy Consciousness, the subject felt himself a contradictorily dual-natured individual, one split between the contingency of his subjective point of view and

the comparatively essential immutability of the objective realm. The subject could only *believe* in the *possibility* of their reconciliation. However, through the displacement of this contradiction into the mediating role of the priest, the subject is no longer burdened by this existential doubt and simply allows the priest to express the certainty of his wholeness for him. However, Hegel tells us, this subject will inevitably become aware that this absolute trust in the mediator-priest has implicitly posited the idea that the certainty of this essential unity of subjective and objective being exists in a single, particular individual—for the priest is ultimately a particular self-consciousness just like the subject himself. Thus, the subject is compelled by this revelation to turn inward and search for what ‘in itself’ might lend this certainty. The subject now becomes reassured that there is no absolute, contradictory distinction between the existence of the world and its own reflective, interior existence. Rather, the basis for knowing oneself and knowing the world should come from the same place, some aspect of the uniquely singular point of view of the knowing subject himself. Hegel writes that “after it has lost the grave of its truth, after it has abolished the act of abolishing its actuality itself, and the individuality¹ of consciousness is in its eyes the absolute essence in itself, it discovers here for the first time the world as its newly actual world” (207). In order to understand exactly what this sort of rational self-actualization might mean specifically in the developmental context of the *Phenomenology*, we should first clarify what “actuality,” the preferred translation of *Wirklichkeit*, means for Hegel’s philosophy in general. Michael Inwood helpfully clarifies the etymological nature of this recurrent Hegelian term of art: “the word *wirlich* (‘actual’) is connected, both etymologically and in Hegel’s thought, with *wirken*, ‘to be active or effective’, *wirksam*, ‘effective’, and *Wirkung*, ‘effect’: ‘What is actual can take effect (*wirken*)’” (33). In relation to Reason, then, the subject no

¹ [*Einzelheit*, which A.V. Miller translates as ‘singleness.’ As we will see, this is a recurrent problem for both the Pinkard and Miller translations, who both use the term “individuality” somewhat recklessly for both *Individualität* and *Einzelheit*, only sometimes translating the latter ‘singleness’ or ‘singularity’. Hegel develops *Individualität* into a term of art, distinct from mere singularity, so we shall be especially attentive to when he uses this term or its related forms, such as *Individuum*, over *Einzelheit*, *Einzel*, etc.

longer understands the unity of inner, subjective essence and outer, objective existence as merely possible, but as something that through the activity of Reasoning, comes into effect as ‘actuality.’ This union cannot be retained as a constitutive possibility, but only as an actuality –enacted by rational activity (i.e. speculative positing). Yet the necessary *actualizing* of this union means that Reason must exhibit its *effective* movement in order to gain the self-certainty conveyed by “individuality real in and for itself.” Accordingly, we should briefly gloss over the preceding sections.

In the first division, “Observing Reason,” self-consciousness as Reason takes the form of naïve empiricism, trying to glean its truth through passive observation of the way in which entities appear for consciousness. This amounts to a higher-order repetition of the movement of consciousness (chapter I) that aims to take into account the inherent particularity and singularity of the observing self, hoping to find the universal element inherent in the unique nature of this subjective point of view (i.e. its Reason). The same process must then be repeated for the naïve initial movement of consciousness into *self-consciousness*: “Just as observing reason repeated within the elements of the category the movement of consciousness (namely, sense-certainty, perception, and understanding), reason will also once again pass through the doubled movement of self-consciousness, and then from self-sufficiency, it will make its transition into its freedom” (348). This is what occurs in “The actualization of rational self-consciousness by way of itself:” the reasoning subject now takes on an active rather than simply receptive role that implicates its own *social* or *practical* activity in coming to know the nature of ‘Reason,’ i.e. the universal (categorical) truth inherent in its particularly singular, subjective approach to *knowing* as such. This stage thus marks the beginning of Hegel’s radical claim regarding the essential *sociality* of practical reason through the form of *Sittlichkeit*, provoking him to remark that “if we single out this still inner spirit as the substance which has already vigorously grown into its existence, then within this concept, the realm of ethical life opens itself up” (315).

Despite the fact that the theme of “practical reason” is introduced in this section, we need not work out precisely how the subject dialectically comes to know its inherent freedom. Rather, we should simply note that as a consequence of this reasoning attentiveness to individual agency, the subject no longer conceives of the ‘Reason’ for acting in such a way as dependent on some external End, such as an impersonal ‘good’ external to the pure, spontaneous movement of self-consciousness itself. To elaborate precisely what this might mean for the way in which such a ‘rational’ agent might conceive of himself, i.e. how he would develop this ‘self-certainty’ into an applicable ethical theory, we should now turn our attention to the following section and its distinctly Hegelian title. We will read this section as phenomenologically elaborating the specific concept of ‘individuality’ as it is used in modern critical philosophy to define the nature of rational self-consciousness, the nature of the “I”. Here, Hegel explores the experience of self-consciously considering oneself to *know* the truth and reality of given experience only through this specific category: ‘individuality’. Importantly, Hegel does not want to reject this concept of ‘individuality’ as a wrong or incorrect way of understanding oneself as a subject. Rather, this ‘individuality’ is the fully developed *form* of individual subjectivity, but one that proves to be devoid of content. The idea is that the Hegelian subject now understands itself as the type of subject emerging in the aftermath of Kant’s Copernican revolution.

die Individualität, welche sich an und für sich selbst reel ist

Before unpacking the title itself, we should consider the fact that what is being elaborated in this section has deep implications for the foundations of Hegel’s ‘practical philosophy’ in general. Allen Wood notes in the editor’s introduction to Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* that “the *Philosophy of Right* is founded on an ethical theory which identifies the human good with the self-actualization of the human spirit.

Hegel's name for the essence of this spirit is *freedom* [...whereby] freedom is really a kind of *action*, namely one in which I am determined entirely through myself, and not at all by anything external" (xi). Accordingly, we can see that Hegel does not merely want to move past this 'shape' of conscious experience as merely another failed attempt, another misrecognition of truth-conditions that at least sets the stage for more productive reappraisals. Rather, the developing subject of the *Phenomenology* is now confronting his *true essence*, not merely as something implicit that motivates the self-movement of the dialectical narrative, but now rendered explicit, grasped by this subject itself, not merely by 'us', the conceited phenomenologists. For Robert Pippin, this certain kind self-conscious awareness of the constitutive role of "freedom" in understanding right action is what distinguishes the practical problems of distinctly 'modern' self-consciousness from pre-Kantian thought. In turn, this arguably vindicates the post-Kantianism of Hegel's speculative approach. Even though Hegel criticizes strictly individualist conceptions of this kind of freedom of will, there is intrinsic philosophical 'truth' for Hegel in the constitutive *form of Individualität* that is developed in this section—an element that will become foundational for Hegel's mature ethical theory expounded in the *Philosophy of Right*.

So what exactly might this enigmatic title mean? "*Die Individualität, welche sich an und für sich selbst reel ist*" is translated by A.V. Miller as "Individuality which takes itself to be real in and for itself" and translated by Terry Pinkard as "Individuality, which in its own eyes is real in and for itself." Interestingly, this title ends with the verb, the simple copula—the movement of the simple sentence is achieved by the multiple prepositions that reflect back on the subject, "individuality." What could be a simple declaration of the being of individuality ends up conveying the polyvalent ways in which "individuality" becomes its own direct and indirect object in its consideration of the certainty of its own being. Recalling Butler's comments about Hegel's rhetoric, we should remember that as Reason (*Vernunft*) rather than Understanding (*Verstand*), the

subject cannot conceive of its ontology as unitary and static—it only ‘is’ insofar as it is moving, even within itself, as particularly conveyed in this section’s title. Butler writes that the Hegelian grammatical subject is “never self-identical, but always and only itself in its reflexive movement; the sentence does not consist of grammatical elements that reflect or otherwise indicate corresponding ontological identities” (18). The *ist* that closes the sentence, that establishes the determinate place of this self-movement, is thus conveyed as a locus of the grammatically objectivizing (or rationally/metaphysically realizing) movement of *Individualität* within itself, for itself, etc. In *A Hegel Dictionary*, Michael Inwood details Hegel’s distinctive use of the third person reflexive pronoun *sich* in certain prepositional phrases that become Hegelian terms of art. He notes that *sich* “can be either accusative or dative, but not nominative or genitive” (133). This means that the “itself” *cannot* convey predication or possession by the subject, as in the case of the nominative and genitive. Rather, individuality is effectively *doing* something to “itself” even in the simplicity and immediacy of being. Individuality considers itself to be real not on account of a simple, predicated quality *of* itself. Instead, its self-contained certainty arises from these certain (spontaneously moving) relations to itself: in itself (*an sich*) and for itself (*für sich*). It is no accident that Hegel wrote the sentence as he did. The seemingly equivalent statement, that “Individuality is a being-in-and-for-self (*Anundfürsichsein*)” would turn the verb of the statement, *is*, into a static ‘=’ uncomplicated by the irreducible ontological self-movement that is supposed to be conveyed in those very qualities—being “for itself” and “in itself” and knowing oneself as being defined by those self-determining qualities. However, for the purpose of analysis we should separate these two prepositional phrases. First, as a being-for-self, the ‘individual’ subject considers himself as an “I” withdrawn from the possible condition of being for others. The subject maintains himself *for* this singularity, which he comes to understand as what he truly is *in himself* (*an sich*). That is, the subject now knows that the universal essence (the ‘in itself’) of “individuality” as such is the same as his

immediate certainty of being-for-self. The purpose of Reason, which he knew existed *in itself*, he now understands as what he is *for himself*, as a singularly individual actor. This *categorical* essence of the subject, his intrinsic *an sich* as a rational subjectivity, is now how takes himself to be, that is, *for himself* (135). At this point of immediate certainty (a certainty that will be, in classic Hegelian fashion, disturbed by speculative positing), the subject does not feel that he needs anything outside of himself, beyond the limits of the certainty of his own *subjective* being, in order to maintain certainty of this reality of conscious experience. Rather, as an *Anundfürsichsein*, we can understand the subject as fully recognizing the universality of this infinitely moving *prepositional* self-relation. His rationality and freedom do not come from some outside that must be purposively aimed for, but are retained in this special kind of spontaneous self-enactment inherent in his *particular (für sich) individuality (an sich)*.

The problem, as we shall see, is that this *immediately* self-certain individuality has not completely taken into account the ontologically constitutive role of *others* for self-consciousness—Hegel’s famous declarations in §178 and §179 that “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself because and by way of its existing in and for itself for an other; i.e., it exists only as a recognized being” and that “for self-consciousness, there is another self-consciousness; self-consciousness is outside of itself” (164). In the *immediacy* of its certainty regarding the *universality* of its singularly self-actualizing reality, the subject has effectively forgotten the foundational necessity of recognition in *existence*, because its universality seems to be contained within itself rather than in concordance with some Other. Even though the subject has realized the truth of its own autonomy as a universal, it has not yet confronted the way in which this very conception of individual, rational autonomy relies on a social domain of other self-consciousnesses. To experience this constitutive process of self-consciousness, we need to enter alongside the subject into “The spiritual realm of animals [Das geistige Tierreich]” (353). Before moving into

that subdivision of *Individualität*, which is the speculative enactment of this essential sociality, we should take into account Hegel's framing preparatory reflection.

Hegel reminds us in the meta-phenomenological reflection that begins *Individualität* that previously the truth of Reason (its essential "in itself") appeared to be a purpose or end [*Zweck*] separate from the "immediately existent actuality" of the subject (i.e. its self-constituting activity, its acting for itself). The end of Reason—the provisional, metaphysical hope the subject had invested in the concept of Reason as its essence—is now unified with the subject's own immediate certainty of self as thinking/acting and thus existing. This particular individual, our journeying subject, observes that it is only in his enacting of Reason (i.e. in his thinking/acting in a rational manner) that Reason *in itself* becomes more than an abstract, unreal [*unwirklichkeit*] universal. It is only in the (rational) activity of particular individuals that universal Reason becomes actual. Likewise, in the self-interested action of a *particular* individuality, it does not oppose the universality of principle. For in the individual's self-interest, that is, in being *for* himself, he acts with a purpose, an End. That End, in the most abstract, all encompassing (and hence universal) sense, is the process of individuality itself. So what appeared as an abstract universal principle (i.e. the End of Reason) opposed to the individual's self-interest is actually realized as being universal only insofar as it can apply to all individuals, and thus be contained within the self-interested act. Thus, the individual's activity *for himself* is an expression of individuality *in itself*. The abstract universal ideal that exists solely 'in itself' as an End or purpose for individual self-consciousness is thus reconciled with the self-certain, particular reality of the individual acting for itself, in self-interest. All oppositions or contradictions between an individual self and the reality of the world, or between a self-certain, self-interested subjectivity and its pursuit of a universal rationalized purpose are thus reconciled through the form of action, which must be understood as the purposive self-legislation of the *universalized* category of individual rationality.

Thus, the ensuing dialectic is undertaken to *enact* what takes place when this particular subject of the Phenomenology consciously experiences and thus realizes through this mode of active self-conception. Further, this dialectic process, by determinatively representing the lived experience of *Individualität*, allows Hegel to elaborate the significance of certain key concepts for the understanding of the *practical* components of individual rationality, specifically ‘action’ and ‘work.’ We have already alluded to the possibly freedom-granting ‘emptiness’ of activity for this form of individualist rationality, but the explanatory mode of the dialectic exhibits the consequences of *Individualität* for an actual, determinate individual in a populated social world. The very concept of *Individualität* seems to foreclose consideration of others, even though these other self-consciousnesses are maintained within the universal (categorical) applicability of the concept itself. But when faced with an already-constituted material reality of particular social actors, this self-certain singular individual will have to confront the way in which his self-regard still relies on the *recognition* of others. What happens to ‘individuality real in and for itself’ when it takes the form of a specific conscious individual acting in a temporal, material reality?

The real thing: “I is an other” becomes universal law

At first, the individual does not consider his ‘individuality’ as such to be solely the intended content of his action upon the materials of given reality. He is not (yet) an isolated individual who must necessarily ‘express’ himself upon a found reality. The very objective, material *being* of his world is supposed to be contained in his individuality itself. Even if he has not acted upon the world, its being is implicitly bound to the universality of individuality, individuality in itself. His actions merely render explicit for him what was already present in the concept: that this apparently given reality is not at all foreign to him but encompassed in his original nature – ‘individuality’ as objective

reality. That is, even in the finished work of his action, even when he has turned his back on this 'work', its existence is still within 'individuality' and for 'individuality'. In a footnote to his translation of the *Phenomenology*, Pinkard helpfully clarifies the specific meaning of "work" in this context. It is the translation of "Werke (such as a "literary work" ...to be distinguished from "Arbeit", i.e., labor)" (358). Work thus denotes the general form of self-expression, rather than mere labor or raw uninterested activity upon a given material reality. Thus, the existence of the work is supposed to be maintained within this self-certain domain of *Individualität*.

But here we notice a change in the nature of individuality. Now that the specific, particular action of an individual has been completed, the expressed "work" remains in its material reality. We have passed into a successive moment of the dialectic, whereby the subject has found itself paradoxically *other* to itself, yet still existing in time. The individual, in the form of his work, becomes explicit for *universal* consciousness (i.e. through the collective, mediated reality of being-for-another [*Sein-für-Anderes*] distinct from the singular immediacy of being-for-self [*Fürsichsein*]). He is no longer simply a particular individual but rather 'is,' or rather, is mediated through, individuality *in itself*, as an expression of the universal applicability of this concept through the form of an enduring, existent object. As we can see, in the abstract form of individual rationality, 'action' consists in the *expression* of a formerly interior (i.e. subjective) identity relation: being-in-and-for-self, the spontaneously moving, pre-positional certainty of being "I." But expression as an exteriorization of this self-relation comes to implicate being-for-another, specifically by confronting an opposing actuality, an already constituted material and social reality into which 'this particular individuality' (i.e. our subject's being) is expressed. "Work" is thus the objective result of this abstract activity of self-expression.

Put another way, in its very *being*, the work contains this essence of *Individualität*. The work's *being* itself is *action*, with all that is implied in the definition

both of 'action' and of the simple copula, in so far as it is *thought*. But we can already anticipate the coming sublation, the returning of this exteriorized, alienated essence into the subject's *own particular* individuality, and thus the integration of at least formal, abstract sociality (as 'universality') into the active constitution (actuality) of the concept of Reason. However, the subject still retains his strictly individualized conception of this so-called union of truth and reality. Accordingly, the subject experiences the integration of the opposing material/social being of the work into *Individualität* as such. This means that the 'true' result of individual action is not that mere work, the consequence of this momentary, contingent action, a perishing entity that loses its specificity within the abstract universality of being. Instead, the 'object' of action is the unity of action and being itself, retained as a subjective relation. What endures in "action," in so far as it is considered *rationally*, is not some petty, contingent self-expression of a particular actor, it is instead the subjective experience of unity with *being*, the explicit manifestation of the connection between individual activity and reality. This unity is what Hegel calls "*die Sache selbst*," translated by A.V. Miller as "the heart of the matter," but is also translated as "the thing that matters."

In reflecting back on itself and seeing that 'the thing that matters' about action is not its contingent result but rather the unity of individuality and objective reality affected in *acting*, self-consciousness, our Hegelian subject, finds that "the true concept of self-consciousness has in the eyes of self-consciousness come to be, that is, self-consciousness has arrived at a consciousness of its substance" (367). Through "the thing that matters," the subject first begins to understand, at least formally, the constitutive role of an always-already constituted *substantial* reality in the formation of its own self-conception, in so far as this conception is *rational*. But as "the thing that matters" rather than the "thing in itself," Hegel's substance has a decidedly social character. It is not the inaccessible source of intuitions, but the exterior social reality into which the subject expresses himself.

Though the nature of the “Sache selbst” at first seems elusive, we can remember that in the meta-phenomenological reflection that begins *Individualität...*, Hegel tells us that the subject regards himself as the unity of reality and individuality, and in doing so has

thus returned into itself both from out of the opposed determinations which the category had for self-consciousness and from out of the opposed determinations in the very way self-consciousness initially related itself to the category, first as observing consciousness and then later as active self-consciousness. Self-consciousness has the pure category itself for its object, that is, it is the category which has become conscious of itself (351).

Accordingly, I will argue that “the thing that matters” is, *in effect*, the aforementioned “pure category itself:” Kant’s original-synthetic unity of apperception. It is only through the spontaneous *act* of self-consciousness that there can be a unity of the given ‘reality’ of the manifold within one, individual consciousness. This synthetic unity is something that is guaranteed solely through the possibility of self-conscious action in its *purest form*, the “I think”. Yet the possibility of this “I think” is absolutely necessary in the exercise of Reason, even if it was only implicit earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, it is only now, in the Transcendental Deduction, that the *activity* of apperception is thematized. Just like the original-synthetic unity of apperception, the “thing that matters” is born out of the reflection of self-consciousness upon itself to maintain its self-certainty as reality vanishes beneath the contingency of action. Likewise, Kant writes that the “I think must **be able to...**” Though the performance of the “I think” is necessarily contingent, its *possibility* is what unifies the manifold into an intelligible reality for the subject. Likewise, *die Sache selbst* is not the contingent act itself, but rather the reflection upon the way that the possibility of conscious action allows the unity of individuality and reality to endure. For another comparison, Hegel writes as follows:

In this immediate consciousness of the thing that matters, the thing that matters itself has the form of simple essence, which, as universal, contains all its various moments within itself and which accords with them, but it is also once again indifferent to them as determinate moments; it is free-

standing on its own, and, as this free-standing, simple, abstract thing that matters, it counts as the essence. (367)

In this taking up of ‘the thing that matters’ then, the individual sees that the unity of the sequence of the moments of action with reality at large is essentially abstract. It is not that self-consciousness is performing the original act of apperception, the “I think” itself. Rather, the self-conscious Hegelian subject, as Reason, in acting both gives himself interior self-certainty and preserves externalized actual reality, but in a way that is always dependent on abstraction. The essence of *these particular individualities* is, in reality, an *abstract subjectivity*, the universal structure that applies to all individualities in so far as they *can be* particular individualities. That is, the unity of their particularity with the reality that appears opposed to them and provokes them to act upon it is not dependent on anything unique to them—the essential aspect of their particular individuality is itself an abstract concept, and necessarily so. Kant writes in §25 of the “Transcendental Deduction” that in the **I think**, “I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor **as** I am in myself, but only **that** I am” (259). The thinking “I” can actually be only known as that rational agent that allows for the manifold of representations to be thought, not as it is in itself. Though the particular individual acts as *this particular individual*, he realizes that his enduring *knowledge* of his connection to the world does not come from his specific acts, anything that he could uniquely do in himself. The truth and certainty of his own individuality – the reality of his acts of perception, cognition, etc.—is guaranteed in a lasting way only by his being an active individuality in the most abstract sense—an indeterminate rational, self-conscious agent.

In taking up the ‘thing that matters,’ i.e. his consciousness of the unity of individuality and reality as a *formal universality*, something that applies to all rational individuals, he still takes this abstraction *as his own*. He cannot escape the particularity of his willing, even if what he wills is an abstraction—his self-satisfaction is still dependent on the particular situation from which he acts, even if he is directed towards a

universal. Thus, the very nature of action itself means that he necessarily holds the ‘thing that matters’ as *his* own, as *his* essence, for his self-interest is an aspect of this unified structure of individuality and reality. He can only feign his disinterest in the particularity of his affairs; even when taking up the abstract ‘thing that matters’ as an object of thought, it is still *his* object, *his* thinking. The taking up of a ‘thing that matters’ into one’s hands is thus making an affair *mine*, uniquely bound to my particular individuality. But as these forms of matter are succeeded by one another in their temporal presentation, the momentary ‘matters’ are revealed as ‘in themselves’ only as existing for an Other. As always, Hegel implicates the fact that in existing, in continuing to exist, the subject is always being-for-an-other just as much as being-in-and-for-itself. The concept of *Individualität* is necessarily mediated into a constitutive social reality, even as it still naively returns to only subjective certainty. But Hegel clarifies:

it is not the case that one of those moments would alone merely be placed outside of consciousness and another which would be retained within the innerness of consciousness. Rather, consciousness alternates between them since it has to make one of them into what is essential on its own [*für sich*], and has to make the other moment into what is essential for others. The whole is the self-moving permeation of individuality and the universal. (371)

The whole, then, as the abstract right of individual action, is Hegel’s reworking of the original-synthetic unity of apperception as both transcendental and categorical—necessary for all individualities. But even more, when the subject acts, “in that action he comes to be for others, and in his eyes it seems that this all has to do with actuality” (372).

Beforehand, the ‘thing that matters’ appeared as an object for consciousness, an abstraction that represented the unity of the individual with his reality. For after being made cognizant of the fact that his continuing activity upon the world, not the mere result of any actual, contingent action, was what guaranteed the world’s enduring reality (actuality), he took the demonstration of this fact as the purpose of his action and equally the content of his thoughts. Here, we can observe the way in which Hegel does

not dissociate practical and pure, theoretical reason. As a categorical way of being and of knowing the world, a 'shape of spirit' in Hegelian terms, *Individualität* combines the subject's definitively theoretical self-conception as an abstract, rational self-conscious individual with his practical self-conception as a free, ethical agent active in the world. But this active relation in an abstractly defined social medium still implies the kind of constitutive struggle against others explored in the famous Lord and Bondsman section of Chapter IV. In this process, the subject ends up struggling through the social implications of his purely formal conception of this ontologically constitutive relation between an active self and a momentarily opposing actual reality [*Wirklichkeit*].

By acting, he seems to posit something as his own. The subject expresses himself into the actuality that is always confronting him, but in this externalization, this desire to see himself in mediated form, he has effectively created something else, something that exceeds his 'in itself' in its absolute singularity. His action renders this created object as *being* a real thing that matters, releasing this thing to other individualities. In turn, these individualities see the thing in its *actuality* as being an expression of the 'thing that matters,' which would be pointless to express in reality because they, too, already know the 'thing that matters' from their own self-conscious reflection on their action. The others, insofar as they, too, are categorically conditioned to consider themselves in this abstract, rational way, act as if they are disinterested in this real, determinate thing rendered by the single individual's action, but they actually only point out its superfluity so as to take the thing as *their own*, to *act upon it* themselves. Thus, their preoccupation with the purpose of action as an abstract universal is, in actuality, an expression of self-concern. The 'thing itself' as a momentary content becomes unimportant—rather, it reveals itself to these individuals as the *universal form* of their active engagement with the world. Beforehand, the 'thing that matters,' (the original-synthetic unity of apperception) appeared as an abstract universality. Yet in its enduring quality, it became the focus of the particular individual, the purpose of their activity (in that it gave the

performance of activity a lasting sense of certainty and reality). Thus, it was taken up by the particular individual as his own determinate action in the world, something that reflected reality back into *his* self-consciousness and *his* own, particular activity. He thought that he willed an abstract universal, but in effect he had taken this abstract unity of the 'I' with the world (through action) as his own, particular mode of being. Only when he acted upon the given world alongside other individualities did he recognize that acting for the unity of individuality and reality is neither a lifeless abstract universal (that then must be willed into being) nor solely the consequence of his own particular activity:

Rather, it is substance permeated with individuality. It is the subject in which individuality exists as itself or exists just as much as this individual as well as all individuals; and it is the universal, which is a being only as this activity which is the activity of each and all; and it is an actuality because this consciousness knows it as its own individual actuality and as the actuality of all. (375-6)

The particular, individual consciousnesses of the “spiritual animal kingdom” have come, through this dialectical process of trying to prove their uniqueness or particularity, to see that they are not unique, that they cannot hope to maintain their particularity and understand their actions upon the world as proving that particularity. This vain effort to maintain autonomy in their individual efforts has worked against itself, because it has paradoxically revealed the fact that it is this very understanding of themselves as autonomous individual agents that is their commonality. Their identity as particular, rational, reflective, and *willing* individuals is actually the essence that unifies them all together into a social community. Reduced to a single, essential universal, the commonality between all of these particular self-consciousnesses is “the category”. That is, these individual self-consciousness understand both their subjectivity and the objective reality of the world in terms of ‘the category.’ Of course, they already understood themselves in this way, but only in *thought*. They each thought of themselves as immediately creating their own particular existence as well as the existence of sensible reality, all by reflectively considering themselves as an “I” who, by their self-conscious act

of thought, unifies the impressed representations that make up this so-called 'reality' of the world. However, when they tried to express this, i.e. their particular certainty about both their selves and their reality, into reality in itself (i.e. the world as it exists for others), their work seemed to turn against them, and in its indifference to their willing, in its stasis of mere being, demanded them to act upon it again, speak again. But these particular individuals, having the capacity for self-consciousness, were able to reflect upon this structure of their particular individual relationship to reality, and see that acting, regardless of content or object, is essentially the reality of their world. That is, they recognize the abstract universality of action. Yet at the same time, they each *desire* to act individually, to make something their own affair. So they deceptively feign engagement with the abstract universality of action, just as they try to act for themselves, on their own. Or on the other hand, they feign the intent of acting on their own behalf, only to actually act in an engagement with the 'matter at hand,' i.e. the essentially formal connection between the truth and certainty of reality and the necessity of individual action in general. But in this dialectic of (self-)deceptive acting, the individual saw that the unity of individuality with the given world (in action) is neither a purely abstract universal nor something that is reserved as a consequence of his own particular, contingent acting.

What is the consequence of this revelation that the category—the I that is being, being that is the I—is both an abstract universal idea *and* a consequence of contingent, particular action? Self-consciousness begins to understand its *form*, the way that it wills, it thinks, it acts, on external reality and internal reflection—as something that is at once socially constituted and constituting of 'the social' itself. The category is thus the "Spirit" of this community. And as self-conscious, reflective individuals, they realize that their action, work done in a social reality for others, creates the category as an abstract idea of subjectivity. The category, even it is seems like an absolute that is the only way through which individuals can be certain of their connection to reality, is actually

something created by the general activity of each and every particular individual. Reality is only conceivable, comprehensible, in terms of the category as a ground for individual self-certainty, but the category itself is contingent upon the continuing social engagement of these particular individualities. The category is not an unchangeable, fixed, absolutely necessary aspect of the particular individual's 'mental faculties.' Rather, the category is a social norm through which the particular individual comes to understand his own action and its relation to the world he encounters. It is the Spirit of a community of self-conscious, individual agents, the social ethos through which he becomes certain of himself, his perceptions, his judgments.

But what is interesting about the category is that it defines each and every individual in terms of an abstract subjectivity, where there is no determinate content of action. Thus, in terms of the category, which unifies all individualities into a community, any particular individual action, when mediated through the category, is action for each and everyone. So any particular individuality choosing a course of action is immediately participating in a universal choice that would apply to each and every other individuality, inasmuch as the choice is routed through the category, which it must be, in order for the individual to have any certainty, either of self or of reality. In the individual's pursuit of the truth, the norms of his social environment require him to act through the category, and thus act for all. For when he acts through the category, his action is action in a pure, abstract form. Because this is what defines any and all individual action, insofar as the action is socially intelligible, the category also comes to define what would be *ethical* action. But in this self-consciousness, this Spirit, this social environment, all particular individuals are formally alike—their particularity is *immediately* universality. There are no articulated roles for specific individuals. We, these particular self-conscious individuals, are in social relation with each other only in and through the category. Thus, we only know how to relate to one other in terms of an abstract universal—that however one acts in a particular moment is immediately an action at a universal level

such that the choice of the act applies to all. Here, we can see how Hegel has elegantly reformed Kant's formula of universal law, the categorical imperative. Knowing what one *ought* to do is dependent entirely on its consequences as a *universal law* of action for each and every individual *in his being*.

Can (Kantian) Reason become Spirit?

At this point in the dialectic, Hegel has not given us too many hints of how he would directly judge Kant's formula of universal law. From the way that it leads elegantly from the theoretical basis of abstract, individual, subjective will, it seems strongly based in terms of philosophical argumentation. But Hegel has already decried this model of as merely "the empty thought of this category," where action is given the appearance of "the movement of a circle, which within itself set itself into motion and moves freely in the void" and reality is "the abstract universal which is without fruition and without content" (353-2). In this way, Hegel already is predisposed to consider Kant's categorical imperative as *practically* worthless, because of its philosophical basis in an understanding of subjectivity that is little more than empty 'formalism'. Indeed, Kant tells us in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the "I" of the "I think" is merely a transcendental designation, an indexical of sorts: "through the I, as a simple representation, nothing manifold is given; it can only be given in the intuition, which is distinct from it, and thought through **combination** in a consciousness" (248).

But the metaphysical question remains for our subject: is this supposed 'empty formalism' fatal to the ethical life of such a community of self-conscious individualities? Can no definitive laws of action be derived from this concept of universal law? In the section "Reason as lawgiver," Hegel tries to dialectically reveal this very deficiency. As we can see from the title, the implications of such a flaw go far beyond just the categorical imperative and Kantian morality. Reason is conceived of as Modern

Enlightenment rationality, exemplified in Kant's philosophy. But Hegel also is suggesting that it is the 'Spirit' of its time as well. Through Reason, we conceive of ourselves as abstract individuality with an autonomous free will. Our subjectivities are not understood in terms of customs, specific gender roles or family roles, etc. Instead, we *ideally* view ourselves in terms of our own wills, as pure (thought) action upon a manifold of representations, i.e. as an abstract indexical subject of a (psychic) act. When Reason is Spirit, when it is the basis through which we come to know ourselves *collectively*, would it actually be able to sustain itself ethically?

This brief section in between "Reason" and "Spirit" is not the only place in the *Phenomenology* that the Kantian system of morality is the object of criticism. He is criticized more extensively later in the section called "The Moral Worldview." But if this is the case, why bring up the 'formula of universal law' now? Terry Pinkard writes in *Hegel's Phenomenology* that "Hegel's discussion in these sections has to do, however, with the way in which Kantian philosophy both completed the Enlightenment project and went beyond it, or, to put the same thing differently, with the way in which Kant remained a figure of the Enlightenment while at the same time pointing the way beyond it – namely, towards its and modern life's culmination in Hegelian idealism" (125). Hegel needs to show Kant as preparing the way for a *new* modern notion of subjectivity and rationality; Kantian transcendental idealism, in both its epistemology and moral philosophy, must be 'sublated' towards what Pippin has called Hegel's "most revolutionary claim in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: his rejection of both an empirical or naturalistic as well as a transcendental notion of subjectivity in favor of a notion of a subject of experience and action as necessarily *self-transforming in time* and necessarily *social*...of the thinking and acting subject as *Geist, Spirit*" ("You Can't Get Here" 57).

Now, let's examine how he tries to effect this transition. That is, how do the inadequacies of modern Reason, in terms of generating and critiquing ethical laws, point towards a notion of subjectivity and Reason itself as socially and historically constituted?

First, the laws of this ethical/social reality are at once suspect because of the fact that they are “immediately acknowledged” (253). Immediacy can never be maintained for Hegel: the constant, fluxive movement of self-consciousness over and against itself shows this feeling of immediacy and certainty as merely a moment that is always already beginning to generate its own opposition. But at this point, the ethical laws of Modern Reason are understood immediately, which means that “we cannot ask for their origin and justification, nor can we look for any other warrant; for something other than essence that is in and for itself could only be self-consciousness itself. But self-consciousness is nothing but this essence” (253). Already, Hegel has tried to show that Reason, satisfied with its immediate self-justification of action, looks like empty, formal recursion. Yet this indeterminate, formal circle of justification is supposed to immediately *know* a particular law *and* its particular validity—self-consciousness as Reason is supposed to be able to *express* itself (i.e. into the *medium* of social engagement) such that actual, determinate laws of conduct are generated.

‘Sound Reason’ with its immediate access to knowledge of what is ‘right’ and ‘good,’ and thus valid as an ethical law, must equally be able to translate the universality of these terms into the content of a particular law: an actual, definite maxim. Yet now Hegel begins to turn against this assertion of immediacy. And quite notably, he returns our attention to the first chapter, on sense certainty. He states that we must examine how “this immediate ethical certainty” is constituted in a manner analogous to the original, even originary, examination of “the nature of what is immediately expressed as *being*” in sense-certainty (154). That is, the ‘ethical substance’ must be examined ontologically, an examination whose philosophical consequences will be developed in the following chapter.

The immediacy of ethical certainty can be challenged by critiquing examples of laws, which have the “form of declarations of the sound Reason which *knows* them” (254). That is, they have been constituted in language as the formal medium of

expression, yet they are still *known to be* purely rational, supposedly immediately. The contradiction Hegel has generated rhetorically will only take a simple dialectical movement to begin to unravel. Indeed, in §423 he goes so far as to italicize all the problematical terminologies that will spell the undermine “Sound Reason’s” security as “lawgiver”: “*being*,” “*knows*,” “*we*,” and “*immediate*.” For how can *we know* an ethical law except through a realized, social medium of expression, i.e. language? And indeed, when the example is stated, knowledge emerges as a fatal condition that undermines the supposedly immutable immediacy of the imperative. “Everyone ought to speak the truth,” but on the condition that they know the truth. And, Hegel maintains, the maxim thus violates itself, because it does not literally *say* what it *means*, it does not explicitly incorporate its *conditionality*, which thus makes it contingent upon the knowledge of the individual. This contingency distances the maxim, the law of duty, from the immediate, universal certainty of pure ‘Reason’. In as much as the maxim is realized socially, considered in relation to individuals, it is mediated through language in a way that lends it universality “merely in the *propositional form* in which it is expressed” (254). But what is it in the maxim that has generated this mediation, this self-contradiction, beyond its mere linguistic form? In fact, it is the *structure* of the imperative itself which generates the contradiction. An imperative expresses commands, requests, and negatively, prohibitions. That is, it tells what one *ought to do*, not *immediately* what one *does*. The *ought*, which is always an ‘*ought to know*,’ reveals a *formal distinction* within ethical life thus formulated, between sound Reason and knowledge of the truth. The particular individual must *knowledgably understand* the proposition in order to (rationally) say, and thus act, with ethical validity. At this point, Hegel has isolated his dialectic to the domain of a single self-consciousness, that of the particular individuality. Thus, his critique of the *ought* is effectively limited to the domain of individualized morality. The question here is: “How shall the particular individual act justly?” which Hegel has expanded to entail: “How shall the particular individual know to act justly?,” showing that Reason, when realized

in a particular form with actual content, necessarily entails an epistemological condition that renders the imperative contingent upon the individual's *own* knowledge of the statement. And when the imperative becomes so contingent, Hegel states that its immediate content *vanishes* when the epistemological condition (knowing) is universalized in the law. Put simply, the form of the maxim must be *understood* in order to be followed, and thus it is mediated by the knowledge of the subject.

In §425, Hegel uses an analysis of the commandment "Love thy neighbor as thyself" in order to direct his criticism of the form of the categorical imperative through the problematic of intersubjectivity. This imperative is "directed to the individual in his relationship with other individuals and asserts the commandment as a relationship" (255). The commandment itself has the form of a relationship between two individuals. Yet it cannot solely be an empty form, it must be filled with action. Hegel aphoristically proclaims that "love that does not act has no existence." But how can I distinguish between doing good or bad for an Other? The morality of an act of love can only be secured in the act if one acts intelligently. At this point in the dialectic, Hegel abruptly shifts his interest from the relationship between two individuals to the active relationship of the state:

However, intelligent, essential beneficence is in its richest and most important shape an intelligent and universal activity of the state – an activity compared with which what an individual does is in general something so trivial that it is hardly worth the trouble to talk about it. What the state does is of such great power that if the individual's activity were to oppose it and directly choose for himself the life of crime, or if out of love for another person he were to will that he cheat the universal out of its right and out of the share it has in him, then his activity would be entirely without utility and would be irresistibly destroyed. The only significance that remains to beneficence is that of sentiment, that is, that of a wholly singular act, namely, assistance in time of need, which is itself just as contingent as it is momentary. (380-1)

His hypothetical situation: the action of the state being opposed by the loving action of the individual, is, of course, the fundamental conflict within his reading of Antigone.

Hegel is again foreshadowing Chapter VI and complicating this transition from Reason

to Spirit. Hegel tells us of a hypothetical “individual [who] out of love for someone wanted to cheat the universal out of its right, and its share in the action” (255). Who could this be but Antigone herself? And Hegel does not hesitate to tell us that her action would (will?) be in vain. The only significance left to her act would be a contingent and transitory ‘sentiment.’ In terms of universality, it cannot even be compared to the act of the state. A simple commandment of personal relationships cannot be said to be definitely, absolutely necessary, in the way that an ethical law should. The contingency brought in by the ‘ought’ condemns any morality that is built on individual duty to maxims to only *formal* universality—there can be no absolute determinate ethical content. Here, Hegel seems to assert that if a practical philosophy claims to provide relevant ethical guidelines for the real exercise of power, its laws must be directed not towards personal, moral behavior between individuals, but rather towards broader, institutionalized forces of power, such as the state. Indeed, beneath the shadow cast by the power of the state, the substantial content of any ethics of purely *individual* conduct seems to vanish, leaving only the skeletal form of imperative itself.

But if Reason, through the particular phenomenological form of *Individualität* and in the universal form of *Moralität* cannot generate laws itself, perhaps it can critique existing laws. Hegel gives little credence to this suggestion. Because Reason, as understood, has only formal universality, indifferent to content, the testing of laws fails before it begins, for “one content is just as acceptable to it as its opposite” (257). After briefly ‘testing’ the law of private property, Hegel quickly concludes that “the criterion of law which Reason possesses within itself fits every case equally well, and is thus in fact no criterion at all” (259).

It’s almost shocking how quickly and abruptly Hegel dismisses Kant’s formulation of universal law. There is a substantial body of secondary literature analyzing Hegel’s critique of Kantian personal morality and the categorical imperative in particular. In *Hegel’s Ethical Thought*, Allen Wood meticulously shows how Hegel’s

critiques fail, that is, if they are directed at the FUL in its multiple rigorous formulations. Instead, Wood proposes understanding Hegel's emptiness charge as directed "against the moral standpoint as a whole" (154). Following Wood, we can remember how *formal universality*, i.e. emptiness, has been fundamental to the concept of individual, rational subjectivity that Hegel has developed throughout this section. "Hegel does not begin with Kant's FUL...he begins with the conception of the moral standpoint as that of the abstract subjective ego, founded on the pure concept of analytic unity," writes Wood (161). From this reading, Wood suggests that "Hegel might see the emptiness of Kant's principle as a unique strength in Kant's moral philosophy from the standpoint of philosophical understanding, even if it is a fatal weakness from the standpoint of practical ethics" (155).

The formal tragedy of Reason

In turn, Hegel dialectically opposes 'law-giving Reason' to 'law-testing Reason' in a manner that will again enact the tragic drama of the *Antigone*, as the abstract emptiness of the FUL comes into conflict with itself:

As a determinate law, the law has a contingent content – which here means that it is a law for an individual consciousness of an arbitrary content. Such an immediate law-giving is thus the kind of tyrannical iniquity that makes arbitrariness into law and ethical life into obedience to such arbitrary laws – into obedience to laws which are merely laws and are not at the same time commands. Likewise, the meaning of the second moment, insofar as the moment is isolated, is that of testing laws, that is, the moving of the immovable and the iniquity of a knowledge which freely and cleverly argues itself both into a freedom from all absolute laws and into taking them to be the issuances of an alien arbitrary will. (387)

A different dialectic, and with it, a new characterization of Creon and Antigone. By considering Creon and Antigone as these moments, they each become instances of 'self-conscious Reason', which as particular, take on that form of the abstract subjective ego defined through 'the category.' If their actions can be shown to be philosophically

intelligible according to Hegel's conception of modern, individualized rationality, the transition from Reason to Spirit through the Antigone can no longer be read simply as a return to the idyllic origins of the Attic 'way things are done'. Instead, Antigone and Creon can be seen as acting in the exercise of Reason within the ethical domain. Yet here, their acts are not acts of 'duty,' they are each a moment of self-critical negation: Reason as law-giver (Creon) and Reason as testing law (Antigone). And reciprocally, might we ask: does Reason itself take on the pathos of a tragic hero? But each mode is only valid when acting in isolation, considered alone, possessed immediately in consciousness. They are the subjective embodiments of the tragic moments of Reason, the implication of which will be explored in depth in the next chapter.

But these purely formal, inadequate moments have been surpassed, Hegel and the optimistic supporters of his idealism maintain. Of course practical philosophy cannot merely rely on "the *willing* and *knowing* by this particular individual," i.e. the good will (moral intentionality) of a single rational individual, because it will generate arbitrary content, for the willing and knowing itself has proven to be the actual 'matter at hand,' the arbitrary purpose of giving law, of issuing a commandment. Likewise, ethical action cannot be based on the 'ought to be' of a commandment, because another individual can then use her knowledge of the imperative's solely *formal* universality to deny the reality of any law as the law of an Other, of the will of an Other—"alien caprice" (260).

But how can the form of law, that is, the abstract form of free, active self-legislation redeem itself? As we shall see, this constitutive formal structure will be critical to the post-Kantian revindication of Hegel's identity theory as non-metaphysical. Here, non-metaphysical would mean that it maintains a theory of individual freedom that can reconcile the tragic contradiction of the Kantian formula without presupposing a pre-Kantian rationalist metaphysical substance. But for now, it still seems that the law as *morally individualist* can only be contingent, not yet constitutive. If it is grounded in a particular, individual will, it will be contingent upon knowledge of circumstances, the

circumstances themselves, and the individual act. Instead, Law must be will itself, “immediate being,” “the universal ‘I’ of the category, the ‘I’ which is immediately a reality, and the world *is* only this reality” (260-1). Self-consciousness no longer has a negative relationship to eternal laws: “They *are*, and nothing more; this is what constitutes the awareness of its relationship to them. Thus, Sophocles’ *Antigone* acknowledges them as the unwritten and infallible law of the gods” (261). Hegel then follows with the quote from the *Antigone*, lines 456-7, the first explicit reference in the text. We shall examine in depth how he follows:

They are. If I inquire about their emergence and confine them to their point of origin, then I have gone far beyond them, since it is I who am henceforth the universal, and they are the conditioned and restricted. If they are supposed to be legitimated through my insight, then I have already set their unwavering being-in-itself into motion, and I regard them as something which is perhaps true for me but perhaps not. An ethical disposition consists precisely in immovably sticking to what is right and in abstaining from any movement, any undermining, and any reduction. (261-2)

How can we consider Hegel’s turn here? Gone is the critical, dialectical movement of Reason, opposing the particular individuality of ‘this’ self-consciousness to the monolithic absolutism of the universal. Can Hegel’s practical philosophy, as put forth in the *Phenomenology*, actually be read as maintaining some continuity with the Kantian critique of metaphysics?

At first, such a post-Kantian reading of the transition from Reason to Spirit seems difficult to maintain. Accordingly, let’s look closely at Hegel’s rhetoric: Hegel is actually maintaining that the eternal laws of ethical life are actually that which transcend *us*, which condition and limit *our* particular ethical insights. Ethical rationality is conditioned by the universal, social domain, rather than by the individual will who seeks solely *his* will to be the universal right. We do not individually determine what constitutes an ethical action. Rather, we act ethically insofar as we understand our actions as *being* ethical, as being intelligible in the rational, ethical order, this normative social domain. Pinkard writes that “the Kantian conception of rationality as that which

is common to all subjects and that makes them self-determining *subjects* and not *substances* determined from outside of themselves can therefore only be fulfilled in terms of a conception of reason as *social practice*" (133).

Pinkard's use of 'conception' in this quotation is based on the Hegelian term *Begriff*. Pinkard's explication of Hegel's usage reveals the way in which we have to consider ethical rationality as historically contingent and normatively determined while still serving as an ontological category. Pinkard writes in *Hegel's Dialectic*:

For Hegel, a *Begriff*, a conception, is different than a representation [...but also] in distinction from a concept. A concept is nonexplanatory and is expressed by a term; this corresponds to Hegel's sense of "representation" (*Vorstellung*). A conception is explanatory and is expressed by a proposition [...] Conceptions express particular beliefs within a system of beliefs. A conception is supposed to explain the determinateness of things that fall under it, whereas a representation of something does not explain anything at all. (76)

This formulation of *Begriff* allows *Individualität*, as a conception rather than concept, to be considered more clearly in its *active*, presentative (or even performative) relation to the successive development of thought. Still, *Individualität's* active engagement with and enactment of a world seem to be doing more than explanation of a 'pre-suppositionless' real—it seems to be *prepositionally* enacting the very being of that world. The subject of experience is always acting in and through a conception—expressing particular beliefs within a system of beliefs. This is the *actual* way in which the subject acts in the world. Though a solely explanatory view of "conception" seems very appealing when considering the *Phenomenology* strictly in terms of epistemology, its claims must be strengthened in order for the categories that shape experience to have real ethical significance. Conception, as self-conception, comes to define how we can practically understand individual action.

But can 'Reason' actually be positively enacted in a social, inter-subjective domain? Has not Reason, as law-giver and law-tester, already effectively transgressed the limits of the Ethical order in its very exercise as a critically *reductive* faculty? Pinkard

claims that when “Reason is Spirit,” it has been re-conceptualized as a social practice built on the accidents and contingencies of historical reality, rather than as an ahistorical absolute through which all accidental and contingent action can be evaluated. This reading seems well supported in the text, but now we must ask: What is the consequence of this reading? Pinkard ends up claiming Hegel as a philosopher of the problems of modernity. He argues that Hegel is trying to further the Kant’s project of modern, Enlightened life by redefining Reason as a socio-historical realm of normative customs while still preserving the (liberal) ideal of the individual, self-determining free agent. What are we to make of this claim? What sort of rational freedom might the subject find in *Sittlichkeit* that he cannot achieve through individualist morality? To this end, I propose a comparison of Hegel’s theory of free agency, as formulated by Pippin in *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, with the specific problematic of this local transition area of the *Phenomenology*.

Chapter III –Morality’s Peripeteia

Between Morality and Ethics

How can Hegel’s ethical theory be positioned in relation to his radical turn (via *Antigone*) away from Kant’s formula of universal law and the deontologized, self-legislating, rational individual that constitutes itself as its subject? First, let’s clarify the basics of Hegel’s theory, introduced concisely by Pippin:

The theory ascribed to Hegel in what follows has two basic components: that for Hegel freedom consists in being in a certain reflective and deliberative relation to oneself (which he describes as being able to give my inclinations and incentives a "rational form"), which itself is possible, so it is argued, only if one is also already in certain (ultimately institutional, norm governed) relations to others, if one is a participant in certain practices. This account is resistant to any analysis of these forms of self- and other-relation that would isolate the possibility and very content of any self-understanding from social and political structures at a time, so it is much less straightforwardly psychological than many other modern theories. This is the feature of Hegel’s account that is probably the most well known, but mostly with respect to the question of the nature of social norms, social institutions, and social practices. That is, it is well known that Hegel is an opponent of "methodological individualism" in accounts of such things. (*Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* 4)

But for Pippin, Hegel does not merely augment the core ‘freedom of will’ given in methodological individualism with a further account of normative being-with-others. He claims that Hegel thinks that a “reversal of methodological individualist logic is necessary to explain the conditions of the possibility of agency itself” (5). That very *reversal* is what Hegel undertakes by the *sublation* of individualized Reason into the “immediate self-consciousness of ethical substance”—the transition from *Moralität* to *Sittlichkeit* that preserves a certain core of *Individualität* (*Phenomenology* 389). Though there seems to be an unaccountable historical regression from Kantian moral philosophy to the immediacy of attic tradition, Hegel tells us that even this problematically

immediate form of *Sittlichkeit*, of truly ethical life, is still an *actual* shape of Spirit, a substantive manifestation of an *implicit collective rationality*. He explains this in relation to the previous shapes of solely *subjective* spirit that formed Chapters I through V, spanning from consciousness to self-consciousness all through reason, now realized as an *objective* actuality. To establish a basis for our discussion, I have quoted at length from §439:

Here, where spirit as the reflection of these moments into themselves is posited, our reflection on them can remind us about what they were. They were consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason. Spirit is thus *consciousness* as such, which comprehends within itself sense-certainty, perception and understanding insofar as, in its analysis of itself, spirit clings to the following moment, namely, that in its own eyes, it is an *objective, existent* actuality, and if it abstracts from this, its actuality is its own being-for-itself. If on the contrary it clings to the other moment of the analysis, namely, that its object is its *being-for-itself*, then it is self-consciousness. However, as immediate consciousness of *being-in-and-for-itself*, as the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness [i.e. the pure, spontaneous act of apperception as unifying and constituting the subject-*Individualität*], it is consciousness which is *in possession of* reason, which, as the “in possession of” designates, is in possession of the object as rationally determined in-itself, or by the value of the category, but in such a way that for the consciousness of the object, the object does not yet have the value of the category. Spirit here is the consciousness that we were just examining. When this reason, which spirit has, is finally intuited by spirit as the reason that is, that is, the reason that is actual within spirit and which is spirit’s world, then spirit exists in its truth. It is spirit, it is the actual ethical essence. (394-395)

The ‘freedom’ of individually rationalized action must *emerge* from an immediate relation to an already-constituted world of social norms and institutions. The rational subject must bring himself into being in and through a prepositional ontological self-relation that relies on the persistent existence of an other. To achieve ‘freedom’ the subject must be at home with himself (*Beisichsein*) in the ‘Other,’ that is, the historicized, normative, social reality in which the subject actively lives and recognizes himself through other subjects. There is an element of sociality in Hegel’s theory that is not usually considered in methodological individualism, argues Pippin, describing agency accordingly: “put simply, for the action to count as mine, it must make a certain kind of sense to the agent, and that means that it must fit in intelligibly within a whole complex of practices

and institutions within which *doing this now* could have a coherent meaning” (Hegel’s *Practical Philosophy* 5). In a certain sense, in order for the subject to act *freely and for himself*, his act must be *given context*.

Greek *Sittlichkeit* has its rationality articulated *objectively* in the given context of its actual social institutions, but in such a way that isn’t known abstractly by the subjects themselves. For Hegel, their customs already embody the principles of individual freedom, but in such a way that the individual actors are unaware. How is this a *reversal* of methodological individualism? How has Hegel preserved the essence of free activity in an ethical domain that is not yet aware of this essence as such, as an abstract universal? How could a subject be free without knowing his *reason* for being free? Further, what does this mean for his ethics in comparison to Kantian morality? Alain Badiou helpfully explains Hegel’s move in as simple terms as possible in the introduction to his *Ethics*:

With the moderns – for whom, since Descartes, the question of the subject has been central—ethics is more or less synonymous with morality, or—as Kant would say—with practical reason (as distinguished from theoretical reason). It is a matter of how subjective action and its representable intentions relate to a universal Law. Ethics is the principle that judges the practice of a Subject, be it individual or collective... Hegel will introduce a subtle distinction between ‘ethics’ [*Sittlichkeit*] and ‘morality’ [*Moralität*]. He reserves the application of the ethical principle to *immediate* action, while morality is to concern *reflexive* action. (2)

The law of morality, as it was presented in “Individuality real in and for itself,” is a law of abstract individual freedom that must *presuppose* its essentially individual, autonomous, and ahistorical self-legislation of a ‘law of reason.’ That is, the individual is absolutely free simply *as an individuality* only if this ‘law of reason’ is active within the confines of the subjective point of view. Hegel undertakes a reversal by positing the law of reason as existing *in the world*, in the collective space of social norms and practices that we actively live in. Reason *in itself* is an objective phenomena that only subsequently undergirds individualist morality. Reason is not something reserved within the subject, used only for momentary reflection upon the morality of a possible action (the *ought*). Rather, reason

is something that must be materially *enacted* through the expression of particular agents who may or may not consider themselves moral individualities. And Pippin would be clear on this point: the normative ‘ethical rationality’ that gives one a reason to act is not the same as the moral law. A reflective, moral viewpoint is not the same as being ethically rational for Hegel. Ethical rationality is constituted by normative social customs and practices—the domain of decision, rather reflection. Accordingly, there is a clear distinction between moral and ethical reasoning. Pippin sees this basis of sociality in Hegel’s ethics as drawn from Rousseau, for Hegel argues “that it is only as such a social participant that I can be a free subject, truly self-determining, and thereby able to recognize myself in my deeds and practices” (*Idealism as Modernism* 93). Thus, the necessity of self-expression for *Individualität* can be seen as inherited from Rousseau, as Pinkard often emphasizes in *Hegel’s Phenomenology* (1994). This sociality means that when we consider a reason for action, we rationalize this action against actual, normative social practices. Further, this allows the ‘rationality’ of action to exist in a way that is supposedly not discontinuous with either social engagement or the passage of time—it is not abstracted from the actual *being* of the subject as an active agent in the world.

Yet even if there is ethical rationality, it must not be prescriptive or traditionalist. The rational individual subject is not *given* his *reasons* for acting in a certain way or performing a certain function, he is only given *context* for rational deliberation. In order for the achievement of ‘freedom,’ the subject must be able to *give himself reasons* for acting in such a way, even if the way in which he comes to these reasons is defined against a context of social norms and practices. As we can see, Hegel does not turn against Kant, but rather highlights the way in which moral reflection would always have to take place within an actual social reality that determines the way in which the subject *can* rationally reflect at all. This is why freedom is an achievement—a successful form of collective rationality must be able to facilitate ‘free’, subjective moral reflection on the subject’s own social participation and action.

Practical reason must be objectively and historically evident in the world through the free actions of living subjects. This is what incurs the reversal that Pippin spoke of. The ‘achievement’ of collective rationality entails the articulation of institutions that preserve the abstract ‘essence’ of Reason: irreducible individual freedom. *Ethical* free agency does not arise from moral reflection—rather, the historicized institutionalization of reason is the condition for ethical free agency. For Hegel, ethics should concern itself with the historical reality of action rather than with abstract, reflective judgment of what one ‘ought’ to do. Ethics is about the rationality of the ‘way things are done,’ as Pinkard likes to translate *Sittlichkeit*.

Recall from our earlier discussion that the ‘*ought*’ of individualist morality is always contingent on the condition of the individual agent’s knowledge of the context of the possible action. The imperative is contingent upon the subject’s *own* knowledge of the situation. But the *given context* of the individual’s action is not contingent on his subjective point of view—the context always exists *for others*, just as the individual’s own subjectivity *itself* relies on others for recognition. The ethical law cannot judge an action in a way *absolutely* abstracted from the historical, social, and normative context of that action. This is especially true because action is that which *effects* (actualizes) this context of social norms and institutions in the first place. Ethics, then, has to amount to the judgment of an action in and through the normative social sphere that gives the actor context. Yet in turn, the judgment of this action is likewise a judgment of the (always partial) rationality of the context, ethical substance [*sittliche Substanz*] itself: whether it *effectively* achieves institutional rationality that preserves individual freedom.

We have come upon a troubling development, or a troubling aspect of ‘development’ itself as a philosophical mode. Any and all action both needs an effected context and effects a further context for subsequent action. The partiality of any moment means that action is always speculative; the active subject is always positing itself in(to)

an uncertain context that will only be realized in the new actuality rendered by its expressed action. The individual actor is inseparable from its given context because it must give itself context through its action—its reality is in a continual state of development that in no way can be stilled or slowed down by the abstraction of reflection—for then there would be no actuality, no reality, on which to reflect upon. Even moral reflection, with its seemingly inconsequential and noncommittal nature, must take place *in time*, in the passing of moments. Because of the inherent historicity of Reason proposed by Hegel in this turn, there is no such thing as inaction for any and all living individuals. These agents only *are* insofar as they are expressing themselves into the world through the abstract form of action in general. Accordingly, we cannot properly judge action except in time, in the time and place in which the action is performed. The intelligibility of an action, for us and for the actor himself, is dependent on the (historically determined) rationality of that action. Further, this intelligibility, says Pippin, is required for the action to be free, for it to be considered *mine*. One must be able to reflectively *own* one's actions in order for them to be free, but the very ability to reflect on one's actions is conditioned by the collectively determined intelligibility of the actions themselves. My actions must make sense to me in order for me to have freely chosen to act as I did.

But a problem seems to be emerging. The first premise seems banal: my actions must make sense to be mine. Yet for them to make sense *in general*, they must be intelligible within an already-existent sphere of normative social practice. But *at the same time*, my actions *actualize* this very sphere in which they would gain their intelligibility *after the fact*. In the *irreducible immediacy of decision*, there is no *time* to reflect on all the possible ways in which the social whole will be changed by whatever action I take. I simply must act—to not act would just as much be an action. The very speculative logic that Hegel employs means that the speculative nature of action in general, the way in which it *enacts* itself and its context as well as *expressing* the 'self' of the agent to others,

yields a fundamental uncertainty concerning the consequence of every action in that very *moment* in which the action is decided. The action and the world it effects is always coming-to-be, even as the world is also always-already the ground upon which my action can take place and have meaning. Thus, if an action is to be *free*, it must effectively *presuppose* the intelligibility of its free action. There must be, in the *immediacy* of decision, a provisionally articulated social domain in which the decision can be *represented* for the subject—for otherwise the action could not be *mine*. Even in the *immediacy* of decision, the subject must always be able to represent the action to himself, reflect the action within himself in that very decisive instant. This *immediate* consciousness of collective rationality must be presupposed in *any* decision for it to *be* a decision. Thus, ‘freedom’ or at least the possibility of the ‘achievement’ of freedom must take place on the side of the *objective* social norms that *already* constitute and represent the ‘rationality’ by which the act *will* be intelligible—to the self and to others also within this normative domain. That is, the representation of the achievement of freedom *by the subject* must always *precede* and *presuppose* the *effective activity* of the subject, just as he constitutes himself and becomes intelligible for himself. Freedom isn’t exactly free—rather, it *is* the implicit collective rationality that defines what will be an acceptable action for this subject, demarcating and conditioning the possibility for what will count as ‘ethical’ even in the immediate uncertainty of ‘free’ decision.

We can see that there must be a presupposition of (socially normative) intelligibility in order for an action to be both rational and decisive. The subject must have already come to know certain limitations on what counts as rational. He must already have presented to himself the essential, abstract limits of a reasonable action. Yet in Greek *Sittlichkeit*, in the immediate consciousness of the way things are done, there is no space or time for rational deliberation. At this point, the subject does not and cannot know these limits to *rationality*, for rationality is only articulated in the immediate form of social custom. Spirit must have Reason without *knowing* that it has Reason. Only

after the fact, after the (at least partially unconscious) decision has been made, can Spirit come to know this Reason—only then can actions *make sense*, only then can they be *mine*. There must, already, be a representation of the conflict between freedom and necessity, between the free will of the living individual and necessary finitude imposed upon the activity of any *living* individual. Only by virtue of this representation can the ethical subject *know* the *rational* limitations of his freedom, which in turn allows him to consider this freedom *abstracted* from natural forces. However, this must be achieved in such a way that these limitations appear to be rationally self-legislated—the subject must come to know the rational limits of the exercise of freedom. He must come to know that he cannot rationally oppose the forces of nature. But, as we will see, only through the representative performance of tragedy can he consciously experience these limits for himself, through his own action.

In the resoluteness of any decisive action by an individual, as the *subject* of his act he is always already considering it to be rational—he is always *positing*, provisionally *speculating* on the effective rationality of his decision, in so far as he is *acting ethically*. But this speculative aspect of action in turn means that the individual is always subjectively *negating* the objectivity of the universal of ethical life. He is always implicitly endeavoring to claim his natural right to freely will his action independent of any alien law. Freedom does not arise from the structural possibility of morality, of conscience in action. Rather, freedom exists *by virtue* of the subject's incessantly and essentially *negative* relation to the imposition of *any* objective universal. But given this inherent negativity in action, the particular individual must be limited in what forces he struggles against—for otherwise he would find himself trying to tragically negate, for example, the particular contingencies of his own *life* and the unsurpassable force of death, which he sees as opposing the exercise of his free will.

In order to avoid tragically contradictory negativity, an individual must always already consider his actions independent of the activity of nature, even though nature, as the source of life, appears to be the wellspring of his freedom. That is, true ethical life *must collapse* in order for the individual to consider ethical activity abstractly, separate from the irrational contingencies of life. To this end, we must attend to the inherently *tragic* mode in which *Sittlichkeit* first enacts itself in the *Phenomenology*. What is the significance of the adaptation of Sophoclean tragedy by the speculative dialectic as the means of sublating (Kantian) *Moralität* into the conception of *Sittlichkeit*? How is it that a distinctly ‘modern’ theory of agency could emerge through the *re-enactment*, adaptation or even translation of a distinctly ‘ancient’ tragedy, Sophocles’ *Antigone*? Why would the movement of thought historically *regress* as a means to speculatively *surpass* the merely formal universality of Kantian morality? Put simply, why does Hegel’s practical philosophy *need* to posit *Antigone* as its source and as its ground?

The obvious Hegelian rejoinder would be that his mature practical philosophy does *not* need *Antigone* at all. Allen Wood claims Hegel “often quotes (with apparent approval) *Antigone*’s stubbornly pious attitude toward the sacred law for which she was willing to die” and that this sort of rhetorical flair is what causes many readers to think Hegel’s view of ethical life is “distressingly like the reverent atavism of Romantic reactionaries” to Kantian critical rationality. Counter to this traditional, surface level interpretation, Wood claims that “at least in its mature form, the conception of ethical life is intended to include rather than exclude individual moral reflection. *Sittlichkeit*, as Hegel means it, is a special kind of critical reflection on social life, not a prohibition against reflection” as the *Antigone* quotation would seem to indicate. The quotation from *Antigone* introduces *Sittlichkeit* in its immediate (non-reflective) form. It is simply a necessity of Hegel’s speculative logic itself that ‘Spirit’ must first experience itself in the inadequacies of its immediate form.

However, the inadequacies of immediate ethical action are experienced every time a decision must be made in a singular moment of crisis. This is true for any form of *Sittlichkeit*, even its modern form which incorporates individual moral reflection. In a moment of *crisis*, one must decide—to not act would just as much *be* an act. If Hegel's practical philosophy is anything more than a compatibilist understanding of individual *reflection* on social participation, then it must articulate an ethics of decision that incorporates the necessary immediacy of the moment of action. Otherwise, practical philosophy would privilege the essential *inactivity* of moral reflection. It would support states of passivity with regard to the present state of the social norms—philosophy would effectively deny the legitimacy to the political act that *necessarily* appears unintelligible as it acts immediately in a crisis.

In his aforementioned review of *Subjects of Desire*, Pippin writes that he sees in Butler's account the suggestion that "the most damaging aspect of the contemporary French Hegel reception is that its highly critical emphasis on the metaphysical issues of identity, rationality and historical closer, have so obscured Hegel's original idealism, especially his theory of reflection, that the rejection of Hegel brings with it, with a kind of dialectical necessity, the return of a *pre-Hegelian*, even the pre-Kantian, a kind of naïve hope for "immediacy" and, paradoxically, a commitment to a realism that the idealist tradition was to have finished off" (131). Pippin's mistake is that he conceives of the French tradition as "rejecting" Hegel in such a way that they fail to take seriously his original, Kantian preoccupations. However, it appears to us now that it is this disavowed French critique that we must, "with a kind of dialectical necessity," turn to, so as to attend to the way in which Pippin's own Hegelian theory of free agency must 'naively' posit the ideal *rational* 'freedom' already *really* existing within its own pre-Hegelian immediate beginnings. This 'reason' within Spirit must posit itself as its pre-existing, unconscious need so that rationality necessarily experiences, comes to a consciousness of, its own beginning, represents itself to itself as it was before it ever *was* at all: "the essence

existing-in-and-for-itself [*Das an-und-fürsichseiende Wesen*], which as consciousness is at the same time actual and which represents itself to itself, is Spirit” (393).

Sittlichkeit

The fundamental aspect of *Sittlichkeit* that must be already established, even in its immediate form, in order for *Sittlichkeit* to ‘have’ reason, is the *institutionally* articulated rationalization of the law of nature—Death. With the turn from subjective to objective spirit, from merely ahistorical, autonomous Reason to Spirit proper, Hegel has begun to introduce the subject of experience to the essentially *historical* nature of its conception of the world. However, the subject has simultaneously maintained, as its *essence*, the prepositional ontological structure of the sublated conception: *Individualität*. The subject (now understood as a collective *Spirit*) *has* the ontological structure of practically reasoning individualities [*Das an-und-fürsichseiende Wesen*] *as its actuality* [*Wirlichkeit*]. Recall that in §439, Hegel states that “When this reason, which spirit *has* is finally intuited by spirit as the reason that *is*, that is, the reason that is *actual* within spirit and which is spirit’s world, then spirit exists in truth. It *is* spirit, it is the *actual ethical essence*.” From this statement, we can observe that reason is already actual [*wirlich*] in spirit’s immediate form, Greek *Sittlichkeit*. This means that there is always already, in any collective institutional rationality, even that of the Greeks, a non-contingent ontological core of self-legislation in thought and action, in pure and practical reason: spontaneity of mind, free will. That is, this ‘essence of individuality’ must already exist in the normative work of the collective: its tradition of social customs and practices. Put simply, the law of freedom, the core of Hegel’s conception of agency, must already be expressed in the way in which ethical substance “exhibits itself as a world articulated into its social spheres” (397). The constitutive contradiction of human law and divine law, the *ethical action* that takes place within *Sittlichkeit*, must be a rational reenactment of the essential

self-movement of subjective thought so that it may ‘come to know’ its particular limitations. For itself, reason must represent the fatal *human* limits placed on a *singularly individual* decisive action in the world, and thus the intrinsic and paradoxically *infinite* negative potential within any and all activity in history, insofar as it is always actualized singularly, individually.

In turn, this incorporates another factor that must be accommodated alongside this essential, yet implicit, conception of agents as free rational individuals. These subjects do not yet have knowledge of themselves as they *are* per se. But Spirit—their essential collective rationality manifested in the world—is still their *life*: “Spirit is the *ethical life* [*sittliche Leben*] of a *people* insofar as it *is* the immediate truth” (395). Yet Hegel continues by saying that this truth cannot be maintained in a state of immediacy: *life itself must be sublated for Spirit to come to know itself*. How could a people collectively sublimate life itself? Only by rationalizing the laws of nature, rationalizing the *work* of death so that individual death itself becomes institutionalized. In this process, ethical life will inevitably collapse, but this institutional rationalization of death will have preserved Spirit’s separation from nature by replicating the laws of nature within its own system. Accordingly, this preserves its ability to move freely and reflectively within itself (as the “individual that is the world”) in its development of knowledge, in coming to know itself *as* the individual that is a world. That is, the collapse of Greek *Sittlichkeit* is necessary for the ‘turn inward’ that we saw from Stoicism all through to the conception of *Individualität*. Put simply, speculative thought itself—the subject of the *Phenomenology*—needs to represent its own origin specifically through an interpretive reenactment of tragedy, namely *Antigone*.

In this turn, I want to return to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s claim in “The Caesura of the Speculative” that “tragedy, or a certain interpretation of tragedy, explicitly philosophical, and above all wanting to be such, is the origin or the matrix of

what in the wake of Kant is conventionally called speculative thought” (208). How does a theory of tragedy inform this reversal whereby spirit emerges from itself to internalize, to subjectivize even, its *objectively necessary freedom*? Freedom is first a reality before it becomes an ideality—the normal encyclopedic development from subjective and objective spirit (here paraphrased by Derrida in *Margins of Philosophy*) is *reversed*: “Objective spirit, as a world to produce and produced in the form of reality, not only ideality. Freedom here becomes an existing, present necessity” now *precedes* “Subjective spirit: the spirit’s relation to itself, an only ideal totality of the Idea. This is Being-near-to-itself in the form of only internal freedom” (74).

Why does the historicized consciousness of the *Phenomenology* experience the development of spirit in reverse? Why does the necessity of freedom die, shattering and dispersing itself into the solely internal freedom of the abstract Idea, only returning to the philosopher as a mere hope, the fantastic possibility of the “achievement” of *Sittlichkeit* again, redressed for modernity?

But still within Greek *Sittlichkeit*, subject is substance immediately. The subject of conscious experience has not yet experienced itself as divided within itself or separated from its position within the objective realm. The subject must be made conscious of this division, for only then can the absolute emerge in the interstice between either side of self-consciousness as *the truth of the whole*, as the pure spontaneity of mind—the prepositional ontological core always actively moving in the space between the appearance of certainty on either side. Though this ‘truth’ of self-consciousness may already be operative in the very nature of action in general, the journeying subject must undergo the dissolution of all the determinate content of ethical life. Only once the relationship between the acting subject and his world has been rendered completely indeterminate, when there is no accepted ethical *content* on which to immediately justify his acts, can the subject self-consciously experience the subject/object division as a *formal* universality

existing within the self, seemingly independent from material reality. The collapse of *Sittlichkeit* forces the ‘turn inward’ that will enable the historically productive conflict between “the world of faith, the realm of essence [*die Welt des Glaubens, das Reich des Wesens*]” and the harsh actuality of “the realm of cultural maturation [*das Reich der Bildung*]” (387). The performance of tragedy frees the essence of Spirit from the harshness of actuality (that which spirit itself effects) so that it can move freely within itself as an idea, unburdened by the effective consequences of this thought.

Why not Oedipus?

What is most interesting, then, about the subject of immediate *Sittlichkeit*, is that it does not know that it *ought* to yearn for this absolute. In fact, it does not even need to know that self-conscious ethical participation is, in a certain sense, predicated on a provisional anticipation of the actual ‘achievement’ of absolutely rational involvement in the whole. It acts as if that whole has already been achieved, that in fact the social wholeness of this ethical life is the *original* truth of living ethically, one from which we have inevitably fallen, but must likewise *inevitably return to in any decisive action*. Accordingly, this subject is the only one who is able to give us the *actual* experience of the finite limits of individual will: that in its desires to know absolutely, it fatally exceeds and negates itself by its own act—individual will is tragic. Tragedy indicates the (fatal) limits we must necessarily impose on our enactment of speculative (i.e. negative) thought so that it can be both purely and practically rational.

Now we can see why Hegel, in the transition from Kantian individualist morality to *Sittlichkeit*, feels compelled to show the way in which *our* reason is *essentially* the same as the (unconscious) reason of the Greeks. Tragedy offers itself as a way to think through

the negative appearance of the law of freedom. Reiterating Peter Szondi's analysis of Schelling, Lacoue-Labarthe notes the peculiar hope yielded by tragedy for the (re)solution of "the philosophical contradiction par excellence":

Indeed, the possibility offered by the tragic fable or scenario is that of the preservation (though to the benefit and in the sense of freedom) of the contradiction of the subjective and the objective, since the tragic hero, "at once guilty and innocent" (as Hegel will also say) in struggling against the invincible, that is, in struggling against the destiny that bears responsibility for his fault, *provokes* an inevitable and necessary defeat and *voluntarily* chooses to expiate a crime of which he knows he is innocent and for which, in any case, he will have had to pay. Culpable innocence and the "gratuitous" provocation of punishment are therefore the solution to the conflict: the subject *manifests* its liberty "by the very loss of its liberty." The negative, here, is converted into the positive; the struggle (be it ever so vain or futile) is in itself productive. (216)

In fact, we do not need to look beyond §468 of the *Phenomenology* to find Hegel reiterating the productive possibility of speculative (re)solution expressed in a distinctly *Oedipal* logic of action. First, Hegel alludes directly to the Oedipal deed: "actuality...neither shows the son that the man insulting him and whom he strikes dead is his father, nor shows him that the queen whom he takes as his wife is his mother." However, continues Hegel, the completed deed reveals an even deeper truth than the mere actuality of his deed (what he had already *effected* in his act but did not yet know the meaning of). Hegel writes, "the deed comes to light – as that in which the conscious is combined with the unconscious and in which what is one's own is combined with what is alien. It comes to light as the estranged essence, whose other aspect consciousness also experiences as its own, namely, as a power violated by it and thereby roused to hostility" (413). What is this 'violated power' but the self-legislating power of individual self-conscious reflection on action? Oedipus' experience of guilt is an experience of the free self-legislation of a limit to what counts as ethical action, a demarcating law that is experienced through self-induced punishment (guilt) that serves literally as a *conscious reflection* of the deed itself.

However, *Oedipus Rex* is not the tragedy that Hegel uses in order to enact the emergence of ethical self-consciousness. That honor goes to *Antigone*. But why not Oedipus, given the elegant way in which his performance illuminates the dialectically *negative* movement of consciousness into self-consciousness? Put simply, the Oedipal drama can be understood purely individualistically, within the conception of *Moralität*—it does not truly need the innovation of *Sittlichkeit* in order to be explained. The unknowing act, the ‘innocent’ desire to know who acted, and the self-dissolving revelation of guilt are all seemingly motivated solely by his *singular* free will, rather than some *explicitly* collective understanding of what counts as right. The *causa sui* nature of Oedipus’ deed, the near-perfect complicity of will and fate, means that its performance in the world reveals little about the need for sociality in our conception of reason. Rather, it simply exhibits the inverted or negative way in which the *moral* law would announce itself to an ethically-minded actor such as Oedipus. Oedipus discovers that what he has willed for all (that the killer of Laius be punished) he has *also* essentially willed for himself. The *universality* of the moral law first reveals itself negatively. This is what Hölderlin means when he writes that “where the original concept of punishment occurs, in moral consciousness...the moral law announces itself negatively, and *as something infinite*, cannot announce itself differently” (35; my emphasis). However, Hegel wants to look beyond the subject to see what kind of *social* rather than purely personal development could occur through this form of negative movement. Oedipus’ deed reveals nothing about what might be wrong with Greek ethical life in general, its ‘objective spirit’. Even after his act, Oedipus still relates immediately to the law he discovers in the process. The immediacy of Greek life cannot be surpassed by Oedipus alone. Recall again that “Spirit is the *ethical life* [*sittliche Leben*] of a *people* insofar as it is the immediate truth” (395). This means that for the truth to no longer be simply immediate, the customs that define the ethical way of life for the polis in general must be dissolved. The way of life itself (the ethical ‘substance’) must *die* in order for the subject

to recognize the substance as predicated on his own particular, active participation. The substance of ethical life must dissolve so that the subject can understand that he has the capacity to reflect upon his relationship to social customs and practices. Only then will the subject be able to find that the lawfulness of *Sitten* do not rest in some unquestionable and inaccessible truth in nature, but rather are negotiated and even legislated by the continuing, reciprocally creative activity of individual subjects themselves. For Hegel, *Antigone* alone exhibits this fatal collapse of the polis at large.

The Power of Antigone

To introduce Hegel's *Antigone* proper, I have chosen to engage firstly with his lectures on Aesthetics. This will allow us to get a more general picture of Hegel's judgment of the play, one less obscured by its forceful contortion into Hegel's goals for *Sittlichkeit* within the *Phenomenology*. During his lectures on aesthetics from 1820-1829, Hegel comments on *Antigone* several times. Once, comparing the work to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Hegel notes that a similar conflict between the private right of the family and the public right of the community occurs in the *Antigone*, but now without the fantastical juridical involvement of the gods, the clash "entirely transferred into human feeling and action" (464). After establishing this similarity as a point of transition, Hegel makes his famously superlative estimate of the work, calling it "one of the most sublime and in every respect most excellent works of art of all time." He continues with a brief summary:

Everything in this tragedy is logical; the public law of the state is set in conflict over against inner family love and duty to a brother; the woman, Antigone has the family interest as her 'pathos,' Creon, the man, has the welfare of the community as his. Polyneices, at war with his native city, has fallen before the gates of Thebes and Creon, the ruler, in a publicly proclaimed law threatened with death anyone who gave the honour of burial. But this command, which concerned only the public weal, Antigone could not accept; as sister, in the piety of her love for her brother, she fulfills the holy duty of burial. In doing so, she appeals to the laws of the gods; but the gods for whom she worships are the underworld

gods of Hades, the inner gods of feeling, love, and kinship, not the daylight gods of free self-conscious national and political life. (464).

With a simplicity uncharacteristic of what we have seen in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel sets up a series of clear binary oppositions: public-private, law-love, state-family, man-woman, underworld-daylight, etc. Here, Hegel treats Sophocles' work not as philosophy, but simply as 'classical art'. Yet nonetheless, the much of the criticism of Hegel's (philosophical) interpretation of *Antigone* starts not from his rigorous philosophical treatment in the *Phenomenology*, but from these remarks transcribed from his lectures by an ardent pupil, Heinrich Gustav Hotho. It is clear that Hegel is introducing the tragedy in such a way that students unfamiliar with the work could still understand its plot in comparison to other contemporary works of tragedy: it repeats the Aeschylan conflict without appealing to divine intervention. He gives little clues about what this series of oppositions has to do with making the work "one of the most excellent works of all time." If one starts with these oppositions, Hegel's judgment of *Antigone* is easily dismissible—he fails to even mention the important roles of Ismene and Haemon, who intervene within the play to actively problematize the symmetry and exclusivity of these binary oppositions. Yet in fact, if we consider what "logical" means for Hegel, *Antigone* must already complicate these binaries within itself through its action, exhibiting their coincidences and extending the conflict beyond the normal limits of understanding. Indeed, if what is contained in *Antigone* is a speculative dialectic that exhibits and dissolves the contradictions of public and private right, then to describe the work in this way would be improperly reductive.

Hegel elevates *Antigone* surely not only because of its dualisms, but because of the way in which the characters of Creon and Antigone both necessarily experience and voluntarily perform the tragic dissolution of these divisions. Near the end of his lectures, he offers us another interpretation directed at the characters themselves. Because they are immediately certain of their respective rights, this one-sided confidence comes to

define the character (or pathos) of their action. But given the tragic premise of Polyneices' simultaneous (public) treason and (private) death, these pathologies collide with one another. Hegel states:

...if the one-sidedness of a 'pathos' is the real ground of the collisions, this can only mean that it is carried out into actually living action, and the one-sided 'pathos' has become the one and only 'pathos' of a specific individual. Now if the one-sidedness is to be cancelled, it is the individual, since he has acted solely as this *one* 'pathos' who must be got rid of and sacrificed. For the individual is only this *one* life and, if this is not to prevail on its own account as this *one*, the individual must be shattered.

This sort of development is most complete when the individuals who are at variance appear each of them in their concrete existence as a totality, so that they are in the power of what they are fighting, and therefore violate what, if they were true to their own nature, they should be honouring. [...] there is immanent in both Creon and Antigone something that in their own way they attack, so that they are gripped and shattered by something intrinsic to their own actual being (1217-1218).

What is this 'something' within Creon and Antigone that they are unaware of yet which comes to shatter each individual life as well as the totality these lives form? What do they *have* within themselves that they unknowingly and fatally act upon? In Hegel's reading, this 'something' is nothing other the ethical "substance" that "dwells in them as a living spirit," i.e., "their simple unadulterated individuality" (*Phenomenology* 431). But just as the one-sidedness of consciousness had to become reflective self-consciousness, so too does the initial, living singularity need to be sacrificed so that the 'pathos,' *Spirit itself*, can endure.

Antigone and Creon *have* Spirit in the way they live their life. Spirit literally *is* life itself. What *Antigone* offers Hegel is a way to transpose the effective immediacy of "Reason as law-giving" and "Reason as testing laws" into actually *living* actors. By 'effective immediacy' I refer to the fact that the rationality of *moral* law is given or tested only in autonomous, ahistorical thought, not in and through lived, historicized action in a world. Hegel wants to show the inadequacy of this form of rationality once it is no longer restricted to the immanent (effectively inactive) space of consciousness. Creon and Antigone act with the tyranny and caprice of individualized morality without even knowing it. The very fact that their action is *fatal* reveals the truth that we cannot

actually live our lives this way. We can never transform the self-legislated moral 'ought' into a universal 'is' unless we *already know* the natural limits of this form of moral conviction. What *Antigone* is able to give Hegel, then, is a way to represent the acquisition of this knowledge: that 'simple unadulterated individuality' must be understood as only a *formal* universality, *not* as something purely natural. He writes accordingly in §475: "The demise of ethical substance and its transition into another shape is thus determined because ethical consciousness is *immediately* directed toward the law and this determination of immediacy means that nature itself enters into ethical life's action. Its actuality merely reveals the contradiction" (430). Spirit is thus able to 'understand itself' distinct from the *natural* movement of life and death. As long as the *social-institutional* differences of public-private, man-woman, state-family, etc. are understood as *natural* differences, spirit cannot extend beyond the natural limitations of *a single life*, even a collectively determined one. That is, through the dialectical dissolution of *living* one-sidedness, subjective spirituality can be detached from objective actuality. Because spirit does not prevail on account of the life of any one individual, the conception of spirit as *natural* life must be sacrificed in order for it to live beyond the death of any of the particular individuals that make up its content.

What *Antigone* offers to Hegel is an enactment of the process by which Spirit, still a subject of conscious experience, can come to view its *truth* as neither the right of this or that particular law, but as the right of the differentiated yet universal whole of ethical life—the polis. But because one always acts from a necessarily restricted, particularly individual knowledge of this whole, the polis as whole can only be understood abstractly. This means that spirit, as the institutional rationality of the collective, can only understand itself as a totality once it has learned how to abstract its own activity from the natural contingencies that are *felt* by each particular individual in the world.

However, in so far as these ‘natural feelings’ are experienced by any consciousness, they must always already be rationally articulated within the institutionalized social customs of Greek life. In fact, the ‘natural’ element of each particular life (i.e. its inevitable death) is itself a *universal* aspect of life itself, and as a universal it must be incorporated into the structure of every institution in a way that binds them all together into an abstract universality of freely living/dying active individualities. This is the fatal contradiction that spells not just the death of the singular individual, but the dissolution of the entire ethical substance. The opposing ethical powers of human and divine law, embodied in Creon and Antigone, each make an absolute, unwavering claim to their right to hold the life/death of a single individual (Polyneices) as his/her own. Each conceives of him/herself as absolutely justified, failing to understand the way in which the life and death of this single individual is not something that can be claimed by one or the other, but which is paradoxically necessary for both. For Creon, it is necessary to exhibit the legislative power of human law; for Antigone, it is necessary to preserve the particular lineage of her family. In fact, this core of individuality is what makes the family and the state absolutely dependent on one another. Without the productive activity of the sphere of the family, the public sphere of the polis would not have citizens. Likewise, without the public political sphere, the family would not be able to represent its particular concerns to others. And as we know from the master-slave dialectic, without this public, social recognition, the family, as a particular individual entity, would not be able to recognize itself. Accordingly, we can see the way in which Antigone and Creon are each acting “in the power of what they are fighting, and therefore violate what, if they were true to their own nature, they should be honouring” (1217).

Whereas Oedipus’ deed is contained within the *subjective* sphere of a particular consciousness experiencing its self-legislated morality, Antigone and Creon together stage the emergence of (universal) ethical self-consciousness (i.e. morally reflective social

participation) through the experience of a contradictorily partial knowledge of the *objective* rationality of the polis itself—the way in which it “exhibits itself as a world articulated into its social spheres” and “breaks itself up into a differentiated ethical essence, into a human and a divine law” (397). The power of *Antigone* comes from its ability to show the way in which distinctly *human*, living agents perform, for themselves as a collective, the revelatory experience of coming to knowledge of their capacity for internal reflection on their own activity. Unlike *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* shows that the very way in which ethical power is socially exercised in *Sittlichkeit* contradicts the knowledge that the collective is institutionally capable of expressing to itself. That is, in Hegel’s use of *Antigone*, ethical power partially acts through a form of knowledge that is “an ignorance of what it is doing” such that *Sittlichkeit* as a totality is *deceived* in relation to the exercise of power (397). Specifically, the *reasons* for the divine law cannot be disclosed as such—they are not *immediately intelligible to consciousness*: “They are and nothing more than that. – This constitutes the consciousness of their relations,” Hegel writes (489). He then quotes from lines 454-456 of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, which read in the Lloyd-Jones translation, “the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods. For these have life, not simply today and yesterday, but for ever and ever, no one knows how long ago they were revealed.” Precisely because it *cannot be written*, the divine law is unintelligible and without history.

Yet this fact, that the *ontology* of ethical life is *irreducible to* written representation, invests it with *absolute power*. This is because the inexpressible essence of ethical being, what an ethical agent is *in itself* (i.e. the ontological structure of *Individualität*) is what conditions its ability to *reasonably* think against (speculatively *negate*) everything that can be concretely expressed (the totality itself) at least momentarily, that is to say, act in the certainty of *being-in-and-for-self*, as the pure *I*. The divine law, *in its very non-representability*, is supposed to ‘express’ this uniquely *negative* moment of ethical subjectivity. Yet somehow the activity that is performed by the

agents of the divine law (namely, *burial rites*) is itself a substantive aspect of *Sittlichkeit* necessary for the achievement of ‘freedom’: the ability to *individually* and singularly *possess* one’s *own, self-legislated* practical *reasons* for acting in and through the reality of ‘ethical substance’—historically contingent, normative social practices. Why is the activity of the family necessary to express ‘freedom,’ something we normally consider abstracted from concrete social structures?

For Hegel, the reasoning subject achieves individual agency (freedom) only in so far as he is always already acting as an *ethical* being—living in relation to already-constituted normative social practices. To be ‘free’ in Hegel’s terms, the subject must act out of this “element of *being*, or an *immediate* consciousness of itself both as an essence and as being this self in an other [*als Wesens so als dieses Selbsts in einem Andern*]” (400). The dutiful work of the family *is* an actual expression of this essential sociality that conditions the possibility of any and all ethical action. That is, there must be an objective expression of an intersubjective social relation such that the self(consciousness) might achieve the “being with self in another” which Pippin describes as Hegel’s proposed “‘achieved state of being’ theory of freedom” (*Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* 190). By combining the ontological self-moving pre-positionality of the inner ‘essence’ of spirit, namely *Individualität*, (the singular self as pure I, *eine anundfürsichsein*) with a dutiful, yet unconscious recognition of this essence of/for/by an *other*, the free agent is *given* effective freedom to choose his reasons for acting, even without his own conscious participation of the determination of the social significance of these reasons. Antigone acts on behalf of Polyneices—she *recovers* his individuality through the performance of burial—she gives his *being*, a positive expression in the polis: “the positive purpose distinctive of the family is the individual as such. For this relationship to be ethical, neither the individual who acts nor the individual to whom the act is related can come on the scene in terms of a contingency, that is, something that might occur where there is some form of assistance or service to be rendered. The content of the ethical action

must be substantial, that is, whole and universal” (401). The other (woman) recovers and redeems the contingent, accidental appearance of (male) individual activity from being something *natural* and renders it something *essentially universal*. Why is activity determined in this way? Hegel states:

This universality which the individual as such attains is pure being, death; it is what has naturally and immediately come about and is not something done by a consciousness. The duty of the family member is thus to augment this aspect so that his final being, that is, this universal being, would also not belong solely to nature and remain something non-rational. It is to make it so that it too may be something done, and that the right of consciousness would be asserted within that being. (402-3)

Why is it so important for death to be ‘something done by the right of (a) consciousness’? What is achieved by the (re)presentation of death as a practically rational (i.e. ‘spiritual’) activity? Pure being must be (re)claimed by *Sittlichkeit*, its *power* must be (re)inscribed within the limits of ethical life. For death necessarily exercises a power in life—as its *end, its purpose*. But death is not operative only at the level of mere natural life. But death, as “non-actuality,” also defines the freedom of spiritual (i.e. practically rational) consciousness to think and act against the totality. This *existential* element of speculative thought, though somewhat marginalized by the post-Kantian readings of Hegel, occupies a central position in the 20th century French reception of Hegel, following Alexandre Kojève’s seminal lectures on the *Phenomenology*, given in Paris from 1933-1939.

However, Kojève’s famously ‘idiosyncratic’ reading of Hegel is generally regarded as using the ‘master/slave dialectic’ of chapter VI as the key to systematic exegesis of the book as a whole, making his philosophy into an anthropology of historicized class struggle. In fact, this oversimplification of Kojève’s interpretation as being based almost solely on the extrapolation of this particular section overshadows his *general* interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy as “in the final analysis a *philosophy of death*” (539). In “Hegelianism in the 20th Century,” Terry Pinkard writes that Kojève “read the [master/slave] section as explaining the origin of self-consciousness itself” and that

“according to Kojève, the struggle for mastery thus emerges as the moving force of all history” (128-9). Butler affirms this reading, musing that “one might argue that the *Phenomenology* stops at Chapter 4 for Kojève, for it is there that the structure of desire, action, recognition, and reciprocity are revealed as the conditions of historical life universally” (64).

Working against the grain in his own study of Kojève’s thought: “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” Georges Bataille offers us another way to understand the Kojèvean Hegel by focusing explicitly on the “abyssal aspect” of Hegel’s philosophy: its status as a philosophy of death. Though Bataille makes sure to note that this philosophy is “also one of class struggle and work,” he writes “within the limits of this study I do not intend to envisage this other side” (17). By attending to Hegel’s theory of death alongside Bataille, we can see why the *representation* of man’s death is necessary for the consciousness of *Sittlichkeit* to be effectively rational. Why must the apparently accidental “*natural* negativity [of death] and the movement of the individual as an *existent*” be *supplemented* by a movement of consciousness that “takes upon itself the deed of destruction,” intervening and interrupting nature’s claim to the dead? What power is recognized by keeping the dead within the polity? The family, by rendering ‘death’ its own activity—by dutifully performing the rite of burial, effectively binds death as such, the non-actual, to the universality of *Individualität*—the essential freedom achieved in and through *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel writes that by the conscious deed of the family, “it thereby comes to pass that the *dead*, universal *being*, is elevated into a being returned into itself, *being-for-itself*, that is, the powerless pure *singular* singularity [*einzelne Einzelheit*] is elevated to *universal individuality* [*allgemeinen Individualität*]” (404).

The work of mourning

The normative, socially customary activity of the family gives substantial context to the performance of seemingly *accidental* subjective action—ultimately, the act of performing one’s own death, which Hegel tells us is “the consummation and the highest work that the individual as such [Individuum] undertakes for the polis” (403). That is, by consummating the *final* work of the individual as *his* work and not the work of nature, the family expresses this “tremendous power of the negative” as something operative within Ethical Life *as its truth, in-and-for-itself* (28). In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes a passage that Bataille’s recitation has made famous. As this quote will guide us through the constitutive role of Antigone, specifically, we quote it in full:

The accidental, separated from its surroundings, attains an isolated freedom and its own proper existence only in its being bound to other actualities and only as existing in their context; as such, it is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of the pure I. death, if that is what we wish to call that non-actuality, is the most fearful thing of all, and to keep and hold fast to what is dead requires only the greatest force...the life of spirit is not a life afraid of death and austerely saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth when it finds its feet within its absolute disruption. Spirit is not this power which, as the positive avoids looking at the negative, as is the case when we say of something that it is nothing or that it is false, and then, being done with it, go off on our own way on to something else. No, spirit is this power only when it looks the negative in the face and lingers with it. This lingering is the magical power that converts it into being. (29)

Just before, Hegel writes that “the act of separating is the force and labor of the *understanding* [Verstandes]...the absolute power” (29). The family rite of burial, the separation of the dead individual from natural contingency, is effectively the active self-*understanding* of ethical life. That is, through the family the individual agent is able to act in relation to death, to understand his finitude as the source of agency and thus face his ultimate ethical-existential condition as being for others: “He who is dead, by having his *being* set free from his *doing*, that is his negative oneness, is empty individuality, merely a

passive *being for others*" (404). The family provides a rationalized context for his final deed by arbitrarily repeating the deed, performing the work of mourning that implicitly endeavors to *understand* death, to think through its absolute disruption, its momentary non-actuality. The work of mourning is, for the polis, "the separating Action of the understanding [which] implies the monstrous energy of thought, of the "pure abstract I" (Bataille 15).

The work of mourning is perceived by its enacting agents to be a purely private, filial duty for the 'singular singularity' of the being of the individual—the preservation of his 'being-for-self' or the proof of his self-sufficiency *separate* from the community taken as a whole. However, by consciously yet *compulsively* performing these burial rites, the family gives real social significance to exposing oneself to death. The apparent *necessity* of burial implies, for the polis as a whole, that there must be a reason for death as such, there is an implicit power contained in acting with awareness of one's temporality and finitude as a singular being. But the family's apparently conscious separation of the particular being of the individual from the whole of natural contingency appears to fix his being within the element of the family distinct from the polis, for only in the family will his ultimate deed, his death, be fully recognized.

This means that in order to possess collective institutional rationality (i.e. Spirit) in its substantive practices, there must be another distinction within *Sittlichkeit* that claims the individual's act for itself, such that the community necessarily participates in the active historical process of constantly (re)constituting itself in time by negating the apparently fixed contingencies that oppose it. Because of this inherent self-movement of *Sittlichkeit* as such (that is, its very essence as a "shape of spirit"), another aspect of *Sittlichkeit* must oppose this apparent self-sufficiency of the family sphere in order to harness and manifest the power of negativity again, set the dialectic of ethical life into movement. Recall that for Hegel, the rational whole of ethical life is not something concrete or substantially fixed—it is rather the "self moving permeation of individuality

and the universal... As a whole, it is only exhausted and exhibited through the alternation which also separates the moments, that is, an alternation between exhibiting itself and keeping itself for itself' (371-2). This means that the duty enacted in the name of divine law, its "positive *ethical* action vis-à-vis the individual" simply allows this isolation of the singular being *for* the particular interests of the family to *itself* be negated by *another* law, the actual, visible human law that constitutes this being as an active individual in the sense of *Individuum*.

In fact, the *polity*, unable to comprehend the inherent rationality of the divine law, perceives the isolating moment expressed by burial as something *outside* of ethical life, an unreasonable claim to the individual that only has its "actual vitality in the *government*" for the government is "actual spirit *reflected into itself*, the simple *self* of the whole ethical substance" (406). Government is spirit 'brought to the light,' a lawful agency that is aware of its own power. Government is able to reflect on its validity as the unifying whole of disparate members, each part being given "both a durable existence and its own being-for-itself" (406). But by granting the self-sufficiency of individuated existence (being-for-itself), the government is able then to manifest its *force* through the necessary capacity to *negate* this given. In fact, this ability to *negate* the being-for-itself of its particular members is the very source of the government's power. The government, too, must manifest its 'validity' by claiming that the meaning of *life* for an ethically disposed human being, his effective rationale for acting, does not come from his particular activity for himself, which appears to be contingently determined and naturally disposed. Rather, the ethical subject is conscious of his *ethical life in its actuality* through his work for the collective. However, as being-for-self, the ethical subject still exhibits a tendency to fix his being in the real, which is essentially his *existence* for the family. The customary familial duty of burial allows the individual to achieve an objective institutional mediation of his relation to his own death, and thus act with freedom as a being-for-self. The ethical subject can be *positive* that even as merely (dead) existing

entity, he will still possess a rational *being* for the family: “it is there [in being-for itself] that spirit has its *reality*, that is, its *existence*, and the family is the *elemental unity* of this reality” (406).

The work of mourning, by the self-assurance it lends to the particular citizen, thus appears as an unintelligible threat to the activity of the polis as a whole. This is why the government “in order not to let them [its citizens] become rooted and rigidly fixed within this activity of isolating themselves...must from time to time shake them to their core by means of war” (406). Just as the work of mourning claims the individual’s ethical being as something distinct from nature, so too does the government find its power in collectively facing death through the struggle against another state. But the *reason* for going to war is immanent to the polis itself. But unlike the private duty of the family, the government achieves its power by virtue of visible coercion:

By the labor the government imposes on them, those individuals...are made to feel the power of their lord and master, death. By way of this dissolution of the form of durable existence, spirit wards off its descent out of ethical life and into merely natural existence, and it sustains and elevates the self of its consciousness into *freedom* and its *force*. – The negative essence shows itself to be the polity’s underlying *power* and the *force* of its self-preservation. The polity therefore has the truth and substantiation of its power in the essence of the divine law and the realm of the underworld. (407)

As the effective consciousness of a collective which “in its own eyes is real in and for itself,” which has the essential structure of *Individualität*, the government must reserve the capacity to upset its own ordering, to bring the violent force of negation to bear on a preexisting actual reality tending towards apparently natural existence and stasis.

Through this imposition, the government compels the particular individual to try to understand *his reasons* for living or dying—that is, achieve freedom. The government asserts, by its universally coercive legislation, the necessity of collective and rational mediation of individual death.

We can now see the contradiction inherent in *Sittlichkeit*—the divine law and the human law make competing yet co-constitutive claims on the right to finally determine

the ultimate act of the individual—the purpose or meaning of his death. However, the self-conscious subject of experience is only able to understand the human law, that is, to separate or abstract the concept of the state from the elemental reality of private family life. Yet the human law, the actual consciousness or realized will of the people, is necessarily founded on the already-constituted social mores of the family. That is, the individual's *actual* and *substantial* existence as a citizen—his self-realization (qua *Individualität*) within the universal discourse of the political sphere, is founded on his *other* existence as a singular individual (*einzelne Einzelheit*), a contingently living being.

However unknowingly, the duty of the family negates the natural immediacy of death in a way that rationalizes this final deed [*Tun*] of the individual, regardless of the contingent circumstances of his death. That is, while the family appears committed to making his being as such a positive ethical work, the result of ethical action, they effectively claim the absolute negativity of death as 'something that can be done' by consciousness. In an apparent paradox, the unknowingly performed act of burial (re)presents death as a possibility, as *the* inherent possibility of all living consciousness—as the universal 'work' which speculatively grounds the understanding. Consciousness has the power to negate, to turn itself into the non-actual and thus realize its truth as spirit: "the life of spirit...bears death calmly and in death, it sustains itself" (29). Through the objectively determined yet unconscious rationality of *Sittlichkeit*, the family performs the originary sublation, relieves the contingent accident of death by elevating the simple event into *something* done. The familial rites perform that first 'negation of negation' by giving the individual a second, *spiritual* death that replaces the determinate yet undecided natural death. But why is this so *necessary*, this act of performing burial rites? Might the specific activity of burial, as the work that forms the unknowing *reality* of ethical life, effectively condition the real historical possibility of speculative thought? Is speculative thought founded upon a veiled abyss? Kojève tells us that "the thought and the discourse which reveals the real are born of the negative Action which actualizes

Nothingness by annihilating Being: the given being of Man (in the Struggle) and the given being of Nature (through Work—which results, moreover, from the real contact with death in the Struggle.) That is to say, therefore, that the human being himself is none other than that Action: he is death which lives a human life” (550).

Hegel's Thanatology

In Ethical Life, the phenomenological subject experiences the development of conscious experience again, repeating the movement of consciousness from sense-certainty to perception to the understanding—but only as directed toward the *being* of ethical action itself—the substantial deed, finally the work of death. The subject experiences the pure work of ethically lived activity as such, its end in death. Death first gives itself as pure being, but as a simple moment, a singular event in time, this being appears arbitrary, solely an immediate *becoming*. But by virtue of the subject's ethical disposition, consciousness preserves this singular moment and *rationaly determines* its existence by acting in and through the normative social practices (i.e. burial) that are the substance of ethical life, the given social positions that define whether action is free, whether I can give understandable reasons for 'doing this now.'

In the ethical relation, the subject acts with the knowledge of the essence of ethical life: the truth that the ethical being is essentially free, whereby freedom is the actualization, the work of acting in such a way, that the act is free of any essential determinacy, spontaneously given to the self as his own voluntary decision. Allen Wood writes in his introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* that the essence of spirit, i.e. freedom, “is really a kind of *action*, namely one in which I am determined entirely through myself and not by anything external” (xi). But freedom is actual only in a social order, “a rational society whose institutions can be felt and known as rational by individuals who are ‘with themselves’ in those institutions. And yet in *Sittlichkeit*, this

truth is not immediately known as *reason* itself, as an *ideal* embodied in action. Recall that the ethical act is “*in possession of*” *reason*. What the phenomenological subject comes to know, through its conscious experience of the truth of being ethical life, is the *undying* absoluteness of right. However, the subject does not know the ethical substance *in itself*, as a concept abstracted from its reality yet still active within itself—an ideal in the active process of its realization. Hegel writes in the Preface that “the truth of substance, is being, that is, is the immediacy which does not have mediation external to itself but is itself this mediation”(29).

Now proceeding on the side of the objective, substantial realm, the *Bildung* of conscious experience is no longer simply the self-enacting development of epistemological categories of mindedness, it is an actual reality—the material world itself rather than only the one-sided, subjective experience of an indeterminate inaccessible noumenal realm that is only ‘reality’ when reflected back into an individual self-consciousness. As *Spirit*, the effective reality of Ethical life must materially contain the act of *sublation* as its *beginning*. Normally restricted to thought, the movement of speculative logic becomes the result of a practical action, now manifest as a determined, existing object in the world, a decided act that, as a expressed deed, cannot hope to negate itself.

Antigone *sublates* the death of Polyneices by cancelling the passing of his pure being (Death as such) into ‘nothingness,’ the abstract and natural negativity that is effectively the same as simple indistinct being. The act of burial, by adding *conscious purposeful action* to even the mere existence of the dead body, (re)places it in the ethical world, annulling the immediate *senselessness* of death, yet preserving the corpse as an (infinite) representation of the *finitude* of ethical life.

By burying Polyneices, Antigone determines spiritual existence, making it into *something* and in turn determining nature as its *other*. Antigone’s work is purely logical, on Hegel’s terms. Antigone enacts the being of spirit as “the true something, and hence

nature is what it is within only in contrast to spirit, taken for itself the quality of nature is just this, to be the other within, that *which-exists-outside-itself* (in the determinations of space, time, matter)” (*Science of Logic* 91-92). But by (unthinkingly) positing Polyneices as ‘something’ she has at the same time negated the *activity* of this other, of nature. For spirit, only the ‘something’ exists as an actuality, something done by consciousness. The ethical being of the individual is thus supposed to be something in-itself, which constitutes a negative movement against this ‘other’ that is implicitly within him, in so far as he is a determinate “something”. But Antigone does not dwell on the fact that he still has ‘nature’ even though he is spirit. Rather, the determinateness she introduces constitutes the *limit*. She actively *negates* the fact that Polyneices necessarily contains this possibility, that he is a passive ‘being-for-other’ just as much as he is a spiritual ‘something.’ Hegel writes accordingly in the *Science of Logic*:

Being-for-other is indeterminate, affirmative association of something with its other; in limit the *non-being-for-other* is emphasized, the qualitative negation of the other, which is thereby kept out of the something that is reflected into itself. We must see the development of this concept, a development that will rather look like confusion and contradiction. Contradiction immediately raises its head because limit, as an internally reflected negation of something, *ideally* holds in it the moments of something and other, and these, as distinct moments, are at the same time posited in the sphere of existence as *really, qualitatively distinct*. (98)

Antigone (re)places the limit of Polyneices within his own self, as an activity that he would do, for himself, if only he could. Her act makes his doubled existence as a natural and spiritual being into a contradiction by placing the (contradictory) negation of his being-for-other within the sphere of his own spiritual activity—as a limit *within* ethical life. In so doing, she unknowingly develops the quality of *ethical being* as something *finite*. Her act of opposition, now posited as a real deed in the world, is such that this “opposition of [ethical] existence and of the negation as the limit immanent to [ethical] existence is the very in-itselfness of the something, and this is thus only becoming in it, this negation constitutes the finitude of something” (101). By the act of burial, Antigone marks the essential finitude of ethical being in an absolutely logical

manner. But the *end* she represents, by marking it *as an end*, changes what ethical being is capable of within itself. For only by marking the living body as finite does she open up spirit to the infinite. Only by suffering *through* the contradictory finitude of ethical being, can spirit *emerge* as something *infinite* in itself. Hegel writes: “the finite is thus in itself the contradiction of itself; it sublates itself, it goes away and ceases to be. But this, its result, the negative as such, is (α) its very *determination*; for it is the negative of the negative. So, in going away and ceasing to be, the finite has not ceased; it has only become momentarily an *other* finite which equally is, however, a going-away as a going-over into another finite and so forth to *infinity*” (108).

By Antigone’s act of sublation, she preserves the absolute power of the negative within the finite. The divine law, as the *representation* of finitude, marks the *end* of finite ethical being as its truth, as the birth of its *infinite* capacity for internal, self-negating reflection (i.e. self-consciousness). Quoting again from the *Logic*:

Finite things *are*, but in their reference to themselves they refer to themselves *negatively*—in this very self-reference they propel themselves beyond themselves, beyond their being. They *are*, but the truth of this being is (as in Latin) their *finis*, their end. The finite does not just alter, as something in general does, but *perishes*, and its perishing is not just a mere possibility, as if it might be without perishing. Rather, the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of this transgression in their in-itselfness [their essence]: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death. (101)

By taking this *act of reference* upon herself as *her own end*, Antigone allows spirit to *live on*. In her suffering through death in life, she effectively abstracts the general activity of the will from the experience of corporeal existence, being-there (in the place of the body). But this means that the performance of an *ethical* duty—for the act of burial is already established and collectively determined as rational—ends up conditioning the possibility for the type of the thought that it comes to only *represent*, present again. The hour of the birth of the *actual being* of speculative thought is, by necessity, the hour of its (*lingering with, representation of*) death. For Hegel writes in the preface: “spirit is this power only when it looks the negative in the face and lingers with it. This lingering is the

magical power that converts it into being” (2). This ‘lingering’ alone gives reality to the work of the *understanding* [*Verstand*], the *conceptual* division of spirit into subject and object that abstractly separates (voluntary, mindful) doing from (accidental, natural) being.

But Antigone, as the *other* being on account of which Polyneices is the paradoxically finite-infinite something that is a thinking being, must have *her* otherness itself inscribed within *his* own being. The individual is regarded as purely *singular* within ethical life. Because of this, Antigone is the constitutive other to Polyneices, in so far as he is *this individual*, this one. But in order for the singular individual, as consciousness of ethical being, to transcend limitation and achieve *self*-consciousness, its constitutive other must exist *within* his own being, even as it is already determined. This means that Antigone *also* must be within his *sublated* existence, his preserved being-there. That is, her own self, as other, must likewise be *entombed*, placed and preserved within his already-preserved being (his own tomb).

Why must this be, what is the logic to Antigone being effectively buried within the tomb she consecrated herself? Hegel states that “something is *for itself* inasmuch as it sublates otherness, sublates its connection and community with other...the other is in it only *as* something sublated” (*Logic* 127). In this case, Polyneices’ *actual* transcendence of the limitation of death is possible only if there is a *sublated otherness within himself* as his preserved, negative moment. Only by virtue of this momentary otherness that is preserved as something within himself, can he then be “this negation, the infinite *turning back* into itself” (127). Acting on Polyneices’ behalf, Antigone must, in fact, effect the preservation, the inscription of this moment of absolute negativity (necessary for self-conscious thought) within his determinate existence. She herself must be the “simple self-reference” that is within his finite being, she must be that eternal other that *fixes* death, absolute negativity, as an inherent quality of finite being *immanent* to itself. Only by this referential fixing of death within the finitude of ethical life is the finite being able

to contain infinity within himself, and thus achieve free self-consciousness. Not only must Antigone bury Polyneices, she must be buried alongside him within this immanent, constructed space of conscious intention, the tomb. Her initial reference to his death, the covering of his body that rendered it 'something done,' must now be inscribed within the immanent space of the tomb itself, so that his being can be absolutely free, a "being-reflected-within-itself" (127). Polyneices can be free only insofar as he embodies self-consciousness: "*being-for-itself brought to completion and posited*; the side of reference to another, to an external object, is removed" (127).

The act of burial alone is not the actual completion, the fulfilled enclosure of the presence of ethical being. Rather, it is still only a simple, referential act, an external preservation that, in its negation of purely natural being, is still something other than the being it preserves. Yet by her *internment*, by being confined to the space that she herself has consecrated and preserved, Antigone can eternally perform, eternally *reenact* this role of immanent otherness that is so necessary for speculative thought, the productive capacity to think again oneself, to move dialectically. Antigone's action is *ontologically constitutive* for the *real possibility of self-consciousness*. It is not simply a dutiful performance of a social role. Or rather, it is a social role only in so far as it is actually the positing of the ontological condition of *sociality* inherent to reason. By preserving otherness within the *already*-preserved 'something' of ethical being, Antigone alone is able to *actively* achieve the truth of *Sittlichkeit*. Her lingering with 'death,' and her subsequent internment alongside 'death' allow her to be *truly* what Hegel calls the "subject, which, by virtue of giving existence to determinateness in its own element, sublates abstract immediacy, that is, merely existing immediacy, and, by doing so, is itself the true substance, is being, that is, is the immediacy which does not have mediation external to itself but is itself this mediation" (*Phenomenology* 29).

Antigone effectively *is* the doubled act of sublation, the preservation/cancellation of the simple being of the dead body that dissolves its contentful determinacy and

releases 'spiritual life' to become something that is *thought*. First, she posits ethical work against the work of nature by burying Polyneices' body. But secondly, she posits herself against her own negative action—she refuses to deny that she buried him, and thus buries herself—interns herself *within* his fate. In a rather complex move, her evasive speech act is a *negation of the negation of the negation*. When she acts again, before the polis, she acts in speech, denying (negating) the fact that she buried her brother (sublated his pure being, negated the abstract negativity of nature gives itself in the immediate experience of 'death'). Creon asks Antigone: "You there, you that are bowing down your head towards the ground, do you admit, or do you deny, that you have done this?" Her response, highlighted by Judith Butler in *Antigone's Claim*, is this cryptic statement: "I say that I did it and I do not deny it" (*Antigone* 441-3).

Antigone's Sacrifice

Within *Sittlichkeit*, the figure of Polyneices mirrors what Georges Bataille calls "the man of sacrifice, acting in ignorance (unconscious) of the full scope of what he is doing". For the polis, it appeared that in his life, Polyneices was not aware of his own finitude. He seems to conceive of his death as something other than "the consummation and the highest work that the individual as such undertakes for the polity" (*Phenomenology* 403). Fighting against his own native land, he seemed to act without knowing that he would die in the process. In fact, for the polis his death appeared an accident—for it is inconceivable that his 'highest work' could have been in direct opposition to the very sphere for which any action is performed. Consciousness of death never seems to reach Polyneices—he dies before he can know death. Because of this fact, that he dies without knowing what he is *doing* by dying, "during his life it will seem that death is not destined to reach him, and so the death awaiting him will not give him a *human* character" (Bataille 20). Because of this apparent ignorance, Antigone must intervene to retroactively give him this consciousness, or at least manifest its work, even

if she, too, is not conscious of the meaning of her deed. For in the state of immediate *Sittlichkeit*, there is no possibility of ‘knowing death’ because death is *immediately* nothing. Nothing is shown by death, and this is why it appears at first as an unacceptable accident. Bataille describes this phenomenon accordingly:

The privileged manifestation of Negativity is death, but death, in fact, reveals nothing. In theory, it is his natural, animal being whose death reveals man to himself, but this revelation never takes place. For when the animal being supporting him dies, the human being himself ceases to be. In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living—watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-) consciousness at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being. (19)

In her first act, the act of burial, Antigone makes death into something, rather than nothing. But man, this freely reasoning, self-conscious individual, is more than just a something. The determinate simplicity of ‘something’ means that it does not necessarily have the ability to actively reflect back on itself and consider its own activity. This can only be achieved from *within* this something. That is, the negativity manifest in death would have to refer to itself and identify with its action at the very limit in which it ends the possibility of action, transforms the active subject into the effected substance, work.

It therefore seems impossible that the subject of conscious experience, now Spirit, could ever actually know death. Yet Hegel says precisely the opposite when he states that “the life of spirit is not a life afraid of death and austere saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth when it finds its feet within its absolute disruption” (29). In fact, Hegel claims, the very *truth* of spirit is that it can experience death while still living. Only on account of this fact is spirit a reality, substance as well as subject.

So how then, can this moment of death within life occur, be present to consciousness? Bataille argues that “this is what takes place (what at least is on the point of taking place, or which takes place in a fugitive, ungraspable manner) by means of a subterfuge” (19). In order to understand precisely what Bataille is implying, we should

attend to the definition of 'subterfuge' as provided by the Oxford English Dictionary. First, 'subterfuge' is etymologically linked to the Latin *subterfugium*, which is a combination of the adverbial and prepositional prefix *subter-* (below, beneath, under) with the verb *fugere*, to flee. The OED first defines subterfuge as "an artifice or device to which a person resorts in order to escape the force of an argument, to avoid condemnation or censure, or to justify his conduct; an evasion or shift. Chiefly of discourse, argument, debate, but also of action in general." Both of Antigone's acts easily fit this definition. The burial can be seen as an artifice to justify Polyneices' conduct, just as Antigone's own defiant speech (ex. "I say that I did it and I do not deny it") can be understood as a series of discursive devices to evade and undercut the condemnatory force of Creon's decree.

But in *Sittlichkeit*, there can be no pure artifice. The first subterfuge that Antigone constructs in order to relieve Polyneices, the tomb, ends up becoming the very subterfuge to which she flees by means of her discourse. Another definition of subterfuge offered by the OED is "a place to which a person escapes; a retreat, refuge." With a logic that is nothing if not vicious, Antigone enacts a secret place within which Polyneices can continue being for-himself: the tomb. But with no one left to speak for her in the public sphere of the polis, Antigone can only evade Creon's speech by occulting into the work she has created, by joining Polyneices underneath the ground.

Yet by this doubled subterfuge, this secretive double sublation, she has constructed *her own* burial, she has manifested a real consciousness of her own death. By hiding within the tomb she has constructed with her own hands, she has willingly become a sort of 'living death'. Still alive, she inhabits the inner sanctum, and within this space rightfully takes her own life. Already buried, already assured by the supplementary ritual, she can live or die as she chooses: she is absolutely free.

Within the effective reality of the polis, Antigone is relegated to the tomb, placed face to face with a death that has become more than possibility. Yet within these

limitations, there is still time, time to reflectively choose whether to now live or now die. Hidden from the continuing activity, above ground, of Creon and the others, her crisis is no longer a crisis demanding an immediate action. From the audience, we can never know when she chose to hang herself and drag *Sittlichkeit* as a whole into the tomb along with her.

But what Antigone has forced upon *us* just as much as Creon, is the need for a space to reason publically, to enact decisions and experience their results without entailing fatal consequences. Yet this space cannot be a space immanent to the mind, an internal realm of moral reflection, for then it would be just as secret as Antigone's tomb. What Antigone demands is a *theatre*, and it is this that she offers to Hegel—the theatre of speculative thought.

Catharsis of the Speculative

Stathis Gourgouris, responding to Derrida's interpretation of *Antigone* as figuring the 'not-yet' of Hegel's philosophy, writes that "even if this staging of Hegelian ethics can be said to represent philosophy's need—a highly contestable point—the not-yet does not reside in the family and hence in religion (the guardian of kinship), as Derrida goes on to argue, but in theater itself: the historical institution, as form, as social-imaginary" (120-121). Philosophy needs *Antigone* as its origin because already in the performance of attic tragedy, the necessary moment of decision is (re)presented, elevated out of the confines of a lived social reality that demands 'reasons' for any and all action. Through the performance of theatre, I can experience the deathly struggle of ethical decision without having to live out the consequences. And yet I learn something about decision from the process I witness before me. Indeed, though Hegel wants to invest the dialectic of Ethical Action with undeniable historical, social, and epistemic consequences that occur because the action takes place in reality, he cannot help but allude to its

imaginary, theatrical nature, calling it “*dieser Vorstellung*,” which Pinkard notes in his translation as “playing on two senses here, one of this being a ‘representation’ and the other of this being a ‘performance’ (of the play, *Antigone*)” (427). This odd moment of abstraction contrasts the fact that Hegel has made all efforts to efface the names of the characters from the pathos they embody and represent: Antigone is named once, Creon not at all.

Why are we made to feel that the performance we witness is not simply the performance of a work of tragedy, but is instead the emergence of a systematic ethics founded on the implicit rationality of normative social practices? Or rather, why did we take this long sojourn, only to have spirit “turn inward” yet again and return to the mind, where it will stay at least until Absolute Knowing and the possible return of *Sittlichkeit*? Why is the death of the individual the birth of the subject? The answer lies in the thought that, through the speculative dialectic, we have somehow overcome Kant, crossed over the abyss and reached the thing itself, not merely its representation. Supposedly, with the turn from Reason to Spirit Hegel has shown us that rationality and our way of knowing the world is something in that world itself. Terry Pinkard writes in *Hegel's Phenomenology* that what Hegel shows in this famous transition from shapes of consciousness to shapes of spirit is that “the *representationalist* model of knowledge – that of a subject inspecting its representations of a world – must give way to a model of knowledge as participation in social practice, as a set of historically situated claims that can only underwrite their own authoritativeness from within the terms of a concrete, historical community” (133). But representationalism has not gone away, it has simply been reversed. Faced with the fact that the moral “ought” can become an ethical “is” only by virtue of the subject’s contingent, representational knowledge of circumstance and his own willingness to act, Hegel absolutizes this very contingency, transforming the subject’s self-assuredness of being all reality (*die Individualität, welche sich an und für sich selbst reel ist*) into the ontological essence of any social reality insofar as this reality can be

called “ethical” or “rational.” The task of the philosopher, then, is to uncover the ontological essence of rationality (or lack thereof) inherent in the interrelated social practices that, as a whole, constitute the ethical. What he investigates, then, is the way in which social customs and norms *represent themselves*, exhibit their own knowledge (or lack thereof) of the constitutive core of *Individualität*. Moving forward with our presupposition of Kantian reason as the ‘truth’ of ethical being, we now set forth searching for the rational within the real (of history). Having achieved its limit and consumed all reality within itself, Reason must forget itself. But it does this only to find itself once again, on the other side of life, in the tragic ruins of that reality it held dear. Reason becomes something one *has*, but not in the sense of an internal mental faculty. Now that reason is defined in terms of social practices, there is an economy of reason(s). Reason becomes a *possession*, something one can give, take, or withhold by means of subterfuge. Reason intersects with power, and history follows. Greek *Sittlichkeit*, then, might be understood as a totalized economy of reason(s), though one without any reflective doubt about the right of any particular reason against another. But given the seemingly disastrous consequences of this Greek economy, why make the turn past subjective, individualist rationality in this way? Pinkard considers the turn to Greek life to be almost an intellectual-historical necessity for Hegel. Hegel’s personal convictions about the harmony of Athens, formed during his time in Tübingen with Hölderlin, combined with the palatable Romantic obsession with everything Attic, gave Hegel an imperative to dialectically investigate how harmonious this life really was. Pinkard writes that Hegel’s concern was “whether the idealized Greek life described by many of his contemporaries could *on its own terms* be counted as a genuine alternative to modern life. Hegel’s concern was therefore not whether the Greeks violated some tenets of the kinds of understanding that *we*, the moderns, have but rather whether their own form of self-understanding violated some of its own essential tenets” (137). However, we must adequately take into account the fact that these tenets are presented not by a historical

political doctrine, but by a work of *tragedy*, a *contrived* work specifically *designed* to establish tenets as seemingly essential, only to bring them into irreconcilable contradiction. The conflict put forth by Sophocles is not somehow unique to Greek life, easily surpassed by ‘modern reflection’—if that were the case, what resonance would *Antigone* have in 19th century Germany, let alone 21st century America? Why would Hegel return again and again to the play, even transposing its conception of *Sittlichkeit* into a modern rendition in the *Philosophy of Right*? It can only be that the dissolution of ethical life is just as much a *solution* proper. Ethical life and ethical action teaches spirit how to tolerate contradiction and endure in the face of death—those “essential tenets” not only of “Greek Life,” but of *speculative thought itself*.

Tragedy offers Hegel a way to move past this irreconcilable, death-bent contradiction without shying from its reality. But he does this, seemingly against his better judgment, by an appeal to the *poetics* of tragedy. Though specifically in reference to Schelling’s early writings, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe muses upon the speculative appeal of/to tragedy, responding with a radical proposition: hidden beneath the dialectical logic of speculative thought is the productive mechanism of (Aristotelian)

mīmēsis:

How was Greek reason (that is, basically, How was philosophy...) able to "purify" itself of the menace which the contradiction illustrated by the tragic conflict represented? [...] it is indeed tragedy itself in both cases—the tragic spectacle—which is involved. Tragedy: that is, the mechanism of (re)presentation or of *Darstellung*, the structure of mimesis. Indeed, only mimesis—which in Aristotle’s view, as we know, is the most primitive determination of the human animal and the very possibility of knowledge and the Logos, of reason (*Poetics* IV, 1448b)—only mimesis has the power of "converting the negative into being" and of procuring the paradoxical pleasure, essentially "theoretical" and "mathematical" (moreover, especially reserved for the philosopher), which man is capable of feeling in the *representation*, provided it is exact, of the unbearable, the painful, and the horrible [...] Only mimesis gives the possibility of "tragic pleasure." Once they become part of the spectacle, in other words, both death and the unbearable (that is, in 1795, the contradictory) "can be faced." The spirit henceforth, far from taking fright, can take its leisure "sojourning" in their proximity—even derive on occasion a certain pleasure from them, and in any case can purge itself, heal and purify itself, preserve itself from its own fear (218)

What tragedy offers philosophy is a way to *relieve itself* of the unbearable experience of death and contradiction by appealing (in secret) to the power of representation, if artfully executed, to induce a *feeling* of resolution even in the greatest apparent dissolution. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as the “imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought inseparately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, where with to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions” (1449b). But how can philosophy need tragedy, if it does away with its “pleasurable accessories,” the rhythm and harmony of verse? Recall that Aristotle notes that the best poets construct plots such that “even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents” (1453b). But Hegel does not construct a new plot—he simply translates the imitation into a new form of tragic spectacle: the speculative dialectic. This dialectic, then, amounts to a logical verification of Aristotelian catharsis.

Lacoue-Labarthe helps us take this implication even further. If as Hegel claims, reason (and thus freedom) is now conceived as a possession, something that one can either have or not have, depending on the normative articulation of social practices, then tragedy facilitates the actual experience of this exchange: “if, in fact, the nature of the philosophical operation in general (and of the speculative one in particular) is fundamentally economic, the very principle of this economy is offered to philosophy by the specular relation and mimetic semblance, by the very structure of theatricality” (219). An ‘immediately mediate’ relation with the divine (the absolute) seems to be the expressed desire of speculative thought, and yet this yearning appears to be tragically impossible, for it would involve watching oneself die. What *Antigone* offers to Hegel, then, is the theatre in which to stage this process and still survive. At once immediately cathartic and mediately rational, Hegel’s *Antigone* offers a way past the tragedy of ethics that it stages by the very *feeling* it instills in the reader, a feeling the reader, by his self-

enactment of the text, believes is something arising by his own volition. The feeling of the possibility of freedom emerging in the wake of this encounter, then, is *nothing more than catharsis*: “the more the tragic is identified with the speculative desire for the infinite and the divine, the more tragedy presents it as a casting into separation, differentiation, finitude. Tragedy, then, is the catharsis of the speculative” (232).

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