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HEGEL, ANTIGONE, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ECSTATIC DIALECTIC

In his Lectures on Aesthetics, Hegel argues that drama is the highest form of art. Only drama can resolve, or sublate (ausheben), an opposition between objective and subjective poles of aesthetic experience. This opposition takes its penultimate form in the difference between epic and lyric poetry. Subjective feelings expressed in lyric and the objective representation of events in epic are sublated in classical drama as ethical character and action. In this article I will examine both what Hegel does and does not say about the structure and function of classical drama in order to determine its role in the education of humanity, or what Hegel calls the "phenomenology of spirit." As it turns out, drama is not only a climactic moment in the development of spirit. The structure of drama also traces a paradigm and an historical origin for Hegel's dialectic. The ironic reversals and discoveries that employ tragic drama also constitute dialectic. An immediate consequence of this parallel is that, in accordance with Aristotle's definition of tragic drama, dialectic demands the catharsis, or purging, of emotion from educated spirit.

After establishing the analogy between dialectic and cathartic drama, I turn to the exemplary role that is played by Sophocles' Antigone in the Phenomenology of Spirit. A reinterpretation of the play suggests that Hegel fails to see that emotional engagement, or the unsublated subjective feeling relegated to the lower art of lyric, in fact orients the dramatic action of Antigone. The resemblance between drama and dialectic suggests that desire can no more be purged from dialectic than from classical tragedy. As a consequence, Hegelian dialectic should be reconceived in terms of a notion of tragedy that is not cathartic but ecstatic.
In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel places drama after epic and lyric as the third and final moment of the highest stage of art. Drama presents actions that are ethical and thus differs from the lyrical expression of feelings as well as the adventures narrated in epic (A, pp. 1158; 474). Hegel's definition of epic in terms of narration and description suggests that the language of epic functions as representation. Representational language externalizes, or objectifies, spirit's movement in a series of events which are related by the epic poet. This narration functions without the mediation of a subject, which is to say without an "agent's inner will and character" (A, pp. 1160; 476). Lyric poetry, on the other hand, concerns feelings or "the inner life alone" (A, pp. 984; 254). In accordance with its subject matter, the language of lyric is not representational but expressive.

Drama presents actions before an audience, such actions occurring primarily in the mode of speech (A, pp. 1159; 475). What we can characterize as the "speech-acts" performed in drama carry out intentions of, or ends sought by, the main character. Drama advances dialectic because, as Hegel writes, "drama does not fall apart into a lyric inner life and an external sphere as its opposite, but displays an inner life and its external realization" (A, pp. 1160; 476). First, events which occur episodically in epic attain the unity of a single action that comprises dramatic plot. Secondly, a "cleaned-up" version of the "chaotic" feelings expressed in lyric poetry develops into the intention of a character to adhere to a universal ethical principle. It is important to emphasize that, according to Hegel, drama should not draw any of its effect from subjective emotions. Drama sublates lyrical feeling into ethical law. Only thus does drama bring together the epic-making events and lyrical subjectivity, not by way of a mechanical synthesis, but in a metamorphosis enabling elements initially opposed to give rise to an original whole.

The proximity of drama to dialectical thought appears in the contrast Hegel draws between dramatic action and action which is prosaic, or philosophically insignificant (A, pp. 1159; 475). Dramatic action, Hegel explains, "is not confined to the simple and undisturbed accomplishment of a specific aim; on the contrary, it rests entirely on collisions of circumstances, passions, and characters... which in turn necessitate a resolution of the conflict and discord" (A, pp. 1159; 475). On the other hand, a prosaic, or ordinary, action requires only the mechanical calculation of means to end. Its success does not turn on discord, or dialectical reversal.
In the *Lesser Logic* Hegel remarks that the dialectical concept of unity taken subjectively always involves irony. The concept of action empowered by ironic reversal is not pragmatic but dramatic. Drama presents action torn by conflict and discord in the form of tragic ambiguity or comic reversal. If drama presents the highest level of aesthetic discourse, and if, as Joseph Flay suggests, we can interpret Hegel's notion of language generally in terms of the performatives of speech-act theory, that speech-act finds its paradigm in theatre. All of our significant actions are theatrical.

The representation of events in epic also involves ironic reversals. These reversals, however, find a resolution that falls short of a real dialectical reconciliation. Hegel explains that the reconciliation which occurs in epic occurs as Nemesis:

But Nemesis is simply the ancient justice which degrades what has risen too high only in order to restore by misfortune the mere equilibrium of good and ill fortune, and it touches and affects the realm of finitude without any further moral judgement... The more profound tragic reconciliation, on the other hand, depends on the advance of specific ethical powers out of their opposition to their true harmony. (A, pp. 1217; 548)

The *Odyssey*, for example, returns its hero to his home in Ithaca after he has lost the booty from Troy (A, pp. 1216; 548). Losses and compensations that occur in epic affect only property, or what is external to an individual. Thus, the sacrifices that introduce finitude into the epic do not torment the perpetrator except through the forces of revenge, and these forces are essentially external or accidental to the identity of the epic hero. Hence their restoration returns the hero to the exact same place from which he began. No real advance or learning occurs.

Hegel would insist that those who live in an age without tragedy are also missing actions that are ethical. Thus, Hegel's treatment of tragedy shares what some believe to be the Aristotelian notion that tragedy evolves around ethical issues. Aristotle, however, mistakenly locates tragedy in the hybris of a sole protagonist who acts against a single limiting principle. Aristotle's conception of tragic hybris is not far from Hegel's view of Nemesis in epic. That is, Aristotle's tragedy shares with Hegel's epic a form that is binary and not truly dialectical. Hegel insists that the actions of tragedy are dialectical. This means that the hero of
tragic drama must choose to act in accordance with one of two conflicting principles that simultaneously possess universal ethical significance (A, pp. 1217; 548). The one-sidedness which defines the heroic individual gives rise to a collision with another equally heroic individual. Thus, the Aesthetics locates tragedy in a decision to act in the name of one ethical universal rather than another equally compelling universal (pp. 1194–95; 521–22).

Tragedy ends in the incipient reconciliation of the ethical powers which come into conflict. Hegel writes: “an unresolved contradiction is set up; ... its proper claim is satisfied only when it is anulled (aufhebt) as a contradiction. However ... necessary the tragic collision, the third thing required is the tragic resolution (Lösung) of this conflict” (A, pp. 1197; 524). Tragic pathos, or suffering, brings each hero to recognize the opposing ethical law as his own. The tragic internalization of an agon, or conflict, constitutes the ethical vision which concludes a play. As the choruses of Sophocles’ plays proclaim, tragedy engenders learning through suffering.

It accords well with Hegel that Oedipus the King ends only after Jocasta, wife and mother of Oedipus, renames her son and lover “man of agony,” signifying that the tragic individual is a broken unity, or “agon” (Oedipus, l. 1177). It is this element of learning which is crucial. The tragic internalization of agon within a single character such as Oedipus makes possible the ethical vision, the moment of self-knowledge, which Hegel finds only in tragic drama. It would not be possible for an epic hero to internalize the agon that he suffers because the stakes of the struggle fall outside of the ethical identity which defines character. As a consequence, the adventures—the losses and sacrifices—of the epic do not advance its hero to a higher stage of ethical knowledge. On the contrary, the losses of epic are easily forgotten. As long as the epic can only portray retribution as external to the crime it cancels, the struggles of the hero cannot be internalized in the form of a divided consciousness. In epic, no dialectical advance is possible. The reconciliation of epic involves no more than a return to the origin in the mode of a simple repetition of the same. Because no learning occurs, the series of epic adventures may continue ad infinitum. On the other hand, tragic reconciliation requires the recognition that opposing laws are equally valid. The result of tragedy, Hegel insists, is positive knowledge. And this positive knowledge is required for the education of spirit.

In contrast to tragedy, comedy, according to Hegel, develops the
subjective and purely negative moment of spirit by freeing the individual and his desire from ethical law. Hegel understands desire as a negative force that does not constitute but destroys ethical community. Desire expresses itself in lyric or in negative satire but not in positive ethical comedy. The comic hero plays the lord of misrule, or perhaps the Cartesian skeptic, who reduces everything, except himself, to absurdity (A, pp. 1220; 552). The effect is to expose action to what is finite and contingent. Hegel limits his consideration of comic drama to ironic satire and, curiously, leaves aside altogether the marriages of romantic comedy. The Phenomenology, then, takes up the contingent and the comic but only as what destroy ethics.

Hegel argues that the rise of satiric comedy implies that the reconciliation of tragedy cannot finally be taken seriously. Satire must clear the path for the development of a religious and finally purely philosophical reformulation of the vision first glimpsed in tragedy. The content of the absolute first occurs in tragedy; the quest for its purest formulation, however, must continue.

II

It is surprising that while Hegel gives emphasis to the cathartic moment of tragedy, he does not explicitly refer to what Aristotle distills as two major components of tragedy: ironic reversal (peripeteia) and recognition (anagorisis). These two moments of tragic drama coincide well with the negative and speculative moments of the dialectic. Moreover, tragedy’s peripeteia presupposes an initial condition of stasis as does dialectical negation. Thus, the triadic structure of tragedy parallels that of dialectic.

Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit provides the clearest analogy between tragedy and dialectic. Here Hegel provides an education for “natural consciousness,” or the perspective of the prosaic and unphilosophical mind which divides end from means and fails to see the necessary connection between aspects of experience. The plight of natural consciousness resembles that of the hero of tragedy. Knowledge comes only after suffering through the dialectical reversal of what first appears to be true. Recognition of the interdependence of one-sided principles constitutes the positive resolution of tragic dialectic.

If the dialectical movement of the Phenomenology parallels tragic drama, the recognition of limits which propels natural consciousness
beyond one-sided positions reaches resolution only by way of catharsis. Hegel explicitly draws on the power of purification or purgation (Hegel tends to prefer the medical term "Reinigung") throughout the Phenomenology. It is the pathos of dialectical advance that every reconciliation of opposed principles demands the systematic expulsion of what cannot be taken up into pure thought.

Perhaps the most striking example of the cathartic sublation appears in the section of the Phenomenology that develops ethical spirit, i.e., the education of humanity to ethical decision, by way of Sophocles' Antigone. The ethical order culminates in a tentative Aufhebung of the clash between human and divine law.

In the play, Antigone refuses to obey the edict of her uncle Creon, king of Thebes, that outlaws the burial of the enemies of the city. These enemies include the brother of Antigone, Polynice, who has instigated a war on Thebes in order to regain control after forced exile. Antigone insists that the demands of human law pale against the divine right of the family to guarantee its members a burial.

The ensuing clash between Antigone and Creon disrupts original harmony. The rights of family and state passively coexist as long as death occurs by natural causes. Now death occurs as an act of the state, or universal community, against transgressions committed by the rebellious individual. The act of mourning protects the individual from the destructive forces of nature which would finally render every individual accidental and forgettable (P, pp 278; 330).

When death occurs, however, as an act of the state, the individual loses any principle of independence from the state. An individual that provides nothing more than resources for the state's needs is reduced to a "transitory particular," i.e., an entity that lacks separate identity and therefore can be replaced by any number of other entities. Only the family's right to burial could protect the memory of the individual from the oblivion and inconsequence of natural decay (P, pp. 278; 330). Creon expresses this negation when he has the body of Polyneices exposed to the irrational forces of nature—the appetites of the dogs and the abstract, or passive, destruction of the weather. If Antigone cannot perform memorial services in the name of her brother, Hegel argues, then his remains vanish in the philosophical void of nonhuman nature.

On the one hand, failing to recognize the state's dependency on the right of individuals, Creon attempts to preserve state power by re-
pressing the individual. On the other hand, Antigone erroneously insists that the demands of the state count for nothing against the divine right of the family to secure memorial services for each individual.

If the ritual of purification involved in funeral services is to protect the individual from the irrational forces of nature, then those forces must not contaminate the performance of ethical duty. Thus, it is crucial that the family’s duty to protect the individual not stem from natural desire or transitory feeling, which, Hegel insists, would befoul the ethical character of duty and conspire to reduce the value of the individual to the irrational and finally insignificant particular: “The Family . . . is within itself an ethical entity only so far as it is not the natural relationship of its members . . . because the ethical principle is intrinsically universal, the ethical connection between the members of the Family is not that of feeling, or the relationship of love” (P, pp. 268–69, 320).

The universal character of the law of the individual requires that neither the motive (or origin) nor the effects of the ethical act of the family be transitory. The latter requirement accounts for why family duty bears on the dead, and not the living. The ethical act must respond to the individual taken as a universal, or a completed totality, and not to the yet particular, and thus natural, creature defined by accidents that occur during a lifetime. It is the duty of the family, then, to save the individual, who has attained completion through death, from the natural forces which would once again tear him apart and subject him to contingency (P, pp. 271; 322).

Moreover, Hegel argues that if the motives for the ethical deed are to be pure—that is, uncontaminated by the irrationality that mars natural desire—the responsibility for the performance of ethical duty must reside in the relation of sister to brother. Hegel’s insistence on the unique character of the sibling relation finds its basis in a part of Sophocles’ play that persistently gives rise to difficulties of interpretation. At the first confrontation between Antigone and Creon, Antigone defends the burial of her brother by proclaiming that the duty to the dead extends universally: “Death longs for the same rites for all” (l. 584). In an apparent inconsistency, Antigone later singles out her brother as uniquely deserving of her services: “If my husband died, exposed and rotting—I’d never have taken this ordeal upon myself, never defied our people’s will. . . . A husband dead, there might have been another. A child by another too, if I had lost the first. But . . . no brother could ever spring to light again” (ll. 995–1004).

These lines, which are spoken with the clarity of vision that writers
often grant their characters at the point of death, threaten Hegel's reading of tragedy as the clash between universals. The problematic speech suggests that Antigone's character does not stem from an abstract duty to the family. On the contrary, it has been claimed that she possesses a "peculiar individuality" that manifests itself in a passionate devotion to a brother (Fagles, p. 46). Because these lines threaten interpretations that locate Antigone's motives in a purely ethical sense of duty, many critics, including Goethe, have insisted that Sophocles was not their author.

Hegel's interpretation of lines that otherwise appear external to the tragedy may well demonstrate the power of the dialectic to salvage much from what is first rendered accidental or irrational. Dialectic cancels all oppositions, including that between essence and accident or abstract universal and bare particular. The dialectical resolution, or mediation, of opposites presupposes a demonstration that opposites are reversible. Only then can we know that the truth of one-sided claims lies in their mediation.

For example, while Creon claims the universal interests of the state, his claim immediately converts into the demands of a tyrant, who, in his particularity, lacks ethical import. Similarly, Antigone's devotion to a particular person against the common interests of the state must be shown to convert into a duty to universal law. Given this dialectical reversal, Hegel can show that the relation between siblings incurs an uniquely ethical status.

The bonds between husband and wife or parent and child, Hegel points out, mix an ethical concern for the family with feelings of love or desire (P, pp. 273; 325). We can interpret these feelings in terms of erotic or maternal instincts. Hegel argues that these bonds have an external, or irreducibly accidental, quality to them. Either spouse could be replaced, their bond lasting only as long as their desire. So, too, maternal devotion to a child may be directed towards another child if the first dies.

The dialectic of ethical law requires the catharsis, or purging, of whatever originates in natural desire. The relationship between the brother and sister alone satisfies the requirement that ethical duty to the family is pure of the vagaries or accidental attractions of natural desire. The relationships of mother and wife can never take part in ethical spirit because their highest ethical moment appears as an abstract universal, an empty role, which can be played in relation to any number of substitutes. Presumably, natural desire or instinct is not very selective.
The ethical roles of mother and wife, then, admit a degree of sheer contingency, which in turn sullies their ethical character. Consequently, both roles fall out of the dialectic of ethical spirit. On the other hand, there does not appear to be any instinctual relation between siblings that is analogous to the other family bonds. If the family bond between siblings immediately negates any element of desire, then this bond is not reducible to an abstract universal, which can pertain to any number of substitutable particulars, and this bond alone carries ethical import. Hegel is able to conclude that “the loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest” (P, pp. 275; 327).

Similarly, the conflict between Antigone and Creon enacts the dialectic of divine and human law only as long as their intentions arise from universal principles. If their actions were to be shown to stem even partly from desire, the possibility of eventually resolving their differences would break down, and ethical spirit would be choked by impurities. Natural desire or transitory feeling would irredeemably disrupt dialectical closure in accordance with a “bad infinite,” an endless movement that could not be made true by sublation. If Hegel is correct in his assumption that sublation entails a kind of purgation, then the result of an ethics contaminated by desire could only be paralysis and skepticism.

The dialectic, then, can proceed towards an absolute, or infinite, totality (Hegel’s “good infinite”) only by way of a process that occurs in tragedy as pathetic catharsis, or what the preface to Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals recognizes, in a happier vein, as “active forgetting.” This systematic act of exclusion guarantees the relative unity possible for each Aufhebung, or tentative resolution, occurring in the Phenomenology. Every stage of ethical advance necessarily conceals in its shadow the work of forgetting. For Hegel, the success with which the dialectic brings us to the absolute standpoint legitimizes this exclusionary forgetfulness.

The legitimacy of dialectical catharsis falls apart, however, if the dialectic in some unacknowledged way draws its power from what it would exclude. We have seen that the dialectic of the ethical order can rely upon neither erotic nor maternal desire. Hegel can justify the consistency of Antigone’s final defense, which particularizes duty to a sibling, with her earlier demand that burial rites be universal, only if the sibling relationship is pure of desire. However, reinterpreting the problematic lines in the context of parts of the play ignored by Hegel undermines the purity of Antigone’s motives.
For example, Antigone's emotional speech about the irreplaceability of her brother comes immediately after she learns that she is to be buried alive. Hegel's attempt to reconcile the two defenses in favor of abstract law is unlikely if we suppose that the imminence of death has broken down the artificiality of Antigone's earlier appeal to abstract duty. Moreover, just after Antigone expresses her duty to her irreplaceable brother, the chorus accuses her of confusing impassioned public demonstrations of defiance with an acceptable private reverence for the gods (ll. 959–63). The accusations of the chorus suggest that Antigone's respect for the rites of burial is intertwined with passionate feelings for her brother. But then it is not Antigone's one-sided adherence to the law of the family over the law of the universal community which destroys her. Earlier, as Antigone is brought before the king to receive her final sentence, the chorus offers a hymn: "Love," the chorus wails, "wrench[es] the minds of the righteous into outrage, serve[s] them to their ruin . . . and Love alone the victor" (ll. 886–90). In this light, Antigone's insistence on duty appears to stem from love and if so, the very passion that motivates righteous ethical duty destroys what Hegel identifies as the ethical character of the act.

The nature of Antigone's love is complicated further by images of maternal instinct. For example, the sentry describes the scene in which Antigone encounters the unburied body of her brother as "like a bird come back to an empty nest, peering into its bed, and all the babies gone" (l. 471). Moreover, the image of Antigone's tomb as her bridal-bed (l. 978) and the fact that in other versions of the story she is to be buried with her brother suggest that the intensity of Antigone's feelings towards her brother owes something to the erotic instinct, which more typically binds husband and wife. The play locates the mountain-cave where Antigone will be entombed "down some wild, desolate path never trod by men" (l. 870). "Frenzied women . . . fired with . . . sacred rage" follow this path in celebration of the orgiastic rites of Dionysus (l. 1239ff). Antigone's "worship of death" (l. 877) carries erotic overtones. Dionysus lies behind devotion to law.

Various lines in the play also lead us to suspect that Creon's defense of the city against the "hysteria" of Antigone manifests more rage than pure devotion to law. When Creon decides to free Antigone, recognizing that he erred in punishing her, he confesses that "it's hard giving up the heart's desire" (l. 1229). As a result of similar lines critics suggest that there are incestuous elements in the relationship between Creon and Antigone. Moreover, the chorus compares Creon to King Ly-
curgus who, out of a rage that was itself mysterious, failed to suppress passions unleashed by the mysteries of Dionysus (ll. 1052–54).

Thus, the gods celebrated in a play that Hegel reads as the clash between abstract principles are Aphrodite and Dionysus (ll. 1240ff), gods of passion, not ethical purity or reason. The tragedy of Creon, like that of Lycurgus, suggests that any attempt to eradicate passion is itself passionate. The agony of Antigone intimates that the righteous defense of ethical duty originates not purely in a sense of duty but in a subjective passion that determines the performance of duty.

Hegel admits that the tentative resolution in ethical tragedy perpetually collapses. As Sophocles warns, "once the gods have rocked a house to its foundations the ruin will never cease" (ll. 658–59). Tragedy forewarns of the endless return of discord even as every play promises to bring the cycle of violence to a halt. That is, every work of tragedy knows itself as a failure. According to Hegel, this failure persists because the city-state of Creon continues to suffer from the contingencies introduced by nature. For example, it is a contingent fact that Antigone has two brothers, both of whom seek to control the state. The dialectic must proceed, Hegel urges, until it either eradicates or incorporates every interruption from nature into the service of spirit.

This interpretation of Antigone, however, suggests a more complicated understanding of the failure of tragedy and tragic dialectic. My claim is that while dialectic demands the purging of desire from ethical intention, ethical duty originates at least partly in such desire. Although dialectical sublation would seem to require the exclusion of desire from pure thought, the element of desire figures into the structure of dialectical progression. Inasmuch as Hegel models dialectic on cathartic drama, every attempt at resolution of discord demands the purging of whatever is inextricably irrational. But the very act of purgation reinserts what it attempts to purge. Creon's attempt to eradicate passion is then itself passionate and Creon's failure tells us something about the failure of any attempt to purge. The curse of cathartic tragedy necessarily haunts any philosophy of spirit that would borrow its structure. Consequently, every resolution of dialectic perpetuates the discord it promises to bring to harmony because no final catharsis of desire is possible.

III

Not all conceptions of tragedy depend upon Aristotelian catharsis. Longinus proposed that the most powerful literature is not cathartic
but ecstatic, i.e., it induces emotional transport.\textsuperscript{11} Tragedy, then, can be reconceived in terms that subordinate plot to the emotional engagement of characters in ethical decision and audience in the pathos of the characters. Moreover, if Sophocles' play epitomizes tragic drama, then tragic catharsis is no more possible than the suppression of Antigone's terrible love for her brother. The cathartic interpretation of tragedy, then, will suffer from the same abstraction and artificiality that characterizes Antigone's early defense of her brother. The emotional bond between them suggests that while a play may begin by inviting a rational response from both characters and audience, by the end it solicits not the logos of detached reason but an impassioned response to a compelling desire.

Hegel's favorite play turns against him in some of the ways insisted upon by Nietzsche's \textit{Birth of Tragedy}. Where Hegel sees reason as the force behind tragic actions, Nietzsche finds the less intelligible god of desire, Dionysus. The failure to confront such a desire or, alternatively, the attempt to rationalize tragic emotions leads Hegelians such as Stephen Houlgate to a somewhat strained defense of Hegel's claim that Creon's and Antigone's crimes are equal.\textsuperscript{12} Such a claim appears bizarre outside the peculiar demands of Hegelian system. Few readers would not be drawn to the side of Antigone. This is not to say that Antigone is not also somehow guilty or hybristic, but only that her crime is not the symmetrical opposite of Creon's. To interpret their crimes as equal is already to favor Creon, or at least his appeal to the rights of community, and hence to deny altogether what Houlgate rebukes in Nietzsche, that "the self is essentially natural, instinctual and individual rather than social" (p. 218). Nietzsche insists that tragedy unleashes natural desires which are primordial. This interpretation of \textit{Antigone} supports Nietzsche's insistence that tragedy expresses primordial desires that cannot be sublated into a logos that demands purity.

While a reinterpretation of \textit{Antigone} does suggest that instinct lies behind ethical duty, it resists further comparisons with Nietzsche. \textit{Antigone} does not celebrate but mourns the forces of destruction. These forces do not provide, as Houlgate summarizes Nietzsche, a "stimulant to man's own heroic affirmation, as a hurdle over which man may test his individualistic, gymnastic soul" (p. 216). On the contrary, the drama of \textit{Antigone} figures a kind of partial dialectic, that is, a dialectic that does not purge but engages characters and audience in an emotional bond. The dialectic of \textit{Antigone} marches towards a wisdom that is more than fictive or gymnastic and yet carries with it a crucial role for desire.
Acknowledged or not, dialectic advances only by way of mediations woven by ecstatic engagement in the world. Antigone's tragic force owes nothing to her "bare particularity," i.e., to an asocial isolation or inexplicable idiosyncracy. Nor does this force stem from participation in an utterly nonhuman cosmic force. Antigone's sense of duty stems from instincts that intertwine the eros of mother, wife, and sister.

In fact, the possibility of catharsis, or, analogously, audience disinterest in the plight of the pharmakos, or "scapegoat," might serve to distinguish comedy from tragedy. In the second paragraph of the Poetics, Aristotle observes that tragic characters are somehow greater or more noble than average people while comic characters fall below average. An audience more likely identifies with the suffering of a noble character than with the abuses suffered by an ignoble one. It is interesting that comedy often ends by laughing the scapegoat offstage and by bringing the audience to the perspective of those who remain on stage. Tragedy, on the other hand, invites the audience to share the perspective of the isolated pharmakos. That is, tragedy allows for sympathetic identification with the suffering of the scapegoat whereas comedy breaks off such emotional involvement. The sharing of pathos between audience and pharmakos rather than its eventual catharsis may define an ethical function of tragedy that is apt to be missing in comedy.

Finally, my suggestion that the tragedy of Antigone presents an ethics of desire rather than abstract principle intimates an alternative, or shadow, phenomenology of spirit. Such a phenomenology would retain a dialectical and hence mediating structure but would counter Hegel's own implicit tilt towards Creon and what Creon represents with a dialectic that tilts towards Antigone and what Hegel calls her "shadowy intuition." In effect, Hegel finally and one-sidedly subordinates a kind of knowledge that he associates with divine law and woman to the reason which he associates with human law and man.

Thus a reinterpretation of Antigone supports feminist critiques of Hegel. In particular, I agree with Patricia Jagontowicz Mills, who argues that Hegel's "partial treatment of woman not only limits woman but limits his philosophy so that he cannot claim for his system of knowledge the universality that he seeks."13 This is not because, as Mills mistakenly argues, Hegel never allows Antigone to become a self-conscious individual fully capable of rising above natural desire and choosing to act in accordance with a universal law (Mills, p. xiii). He insists on this. The problem is that while Hegel does grant Antigone the power to negate natural desire, in fact Antigone's ethical action does not purge but
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intensifies desire. Antigone resists Hegel's attempt to bring women and men into a community whose ethics rests on a logos purged of natural desire. Hegel's failure rests not so much on the exclusion of woman from a scene of recognition as the exclusion of woman's maternal and erotic desire from sublated ethics. This exclusion of desire stems from the fact that Hegel figures the pathos of dialectical negation from a cathartic rather than ecstatic conception of tragedy. Our reexamination of Antigone traces a process of sublation moved by ecstatic desire rather than its catharsis. The point is not to include woman in man's dialectic but to refigure a woman's dialectic. In either case, it does not seem possible to include both sexes in a position of equal power.

A woman's dialectic relocates woman and natural desire at the heart of ethical and political actions. If the ethical duty of Antigone to her brother intertwines maternal and erotic instincts, then key elements of dialectic require reformulation.

First of all, sublation should involve the intense expression of a binding desire rather than its non-dialectical exclusion and cathartic sublimation in abstract duty. Secondly, the Phenomenology's attempt to locate the origin of self-consciousness in a battle of recognition may be reinterpreted from a woman's point of view. According to Hegel, the will to risk one's life determines the winner in the battle of recognition. This game, however, sounds suspiciously close to rituals that belong to male and not female members of various animal species. While male animals may risk their lives in a symbolic show of force, which determines either rank or territorial possession, female members are more likely to risk death—or actually die—in order to protect their young. That is, male animals may struggle until one gives some sign of defeat, perhaps an exposed neck, which ends the conflict. The battle normally ends short of death. Thus, male animals do not so much risk death as play at risking death. The maternal instinct to protect the young, however, more often ends in the sacrifice of the mother. Similarly, Antigone's willingness to die in the name of the family owes its strength in part to a maternal instinct. The maternal readiness to die does not presuppose the same notion of self-conscious individual that develops in the Phenomenology.¹⁴

Hegel idealizes Antigone to the point where she is no longer an impassioned woman but an allegory of ethical duty. I fear that Mills may rescue Antigone from Hegel only in order to refashion her in much of the same idealizing, even masculine, terms. For example, Mills defines Antigone's nobility in terms of action that is justified by fully
conscious reason: “Antigone’s tragedy is the result of strength and moral courage—the so-called masculine virtues—not an emotional ‘intuition’” (p. 35).

Mills and Hegel fail to appreciate a more shadowy kind of knowledge that can only be partially brought to consciousness or submitted to a rational dialectic. My reading of Antigone resists the law, or logos, of a dialectic that proceeds by purges. In its place is not the dark and mute realm of unmediated and undialectical desire, i.e., Mills’s “unconscious particularity,” or sheer fragmentation and skepticism. Like Hegel’s dialectic, Antigone’s dialectic interweaves particularity and universality. Antigone’s dialectic also draws its emplotment from classical elements of reversal and recognition. Suffering brings wisdom. However, while Hegel’s dialectic subordinates and finally excludes desire in favor of reason, an alternative dialectic turns toward desire. Antigone’s dialectic mediates the engagement of wife and mother within an ethics that no longer expunges subjective feeling from duty. And if, as the Phenomenology assures us, the tragic dialectic of Antigone presents a first glimpse into the spirit of humanity, then that rather partial bond is held together by a reconciliation that may not be cathartic but ecstatic.

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14. This point can only be suggested here. I am elsewhere developing an alternative reading of the battle for recognition.