



# HEGEL'S INFLUENCE ON KIERKEGAARD'S INTERPRETATION OF «ANTIGONE»

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In the section, »The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic of Modern Drama,« from Part One of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard analyzes among other things, Sophocles' famous tragedy, *Antigone*. This constitutes a natural point of comparison with Hegel, whose analysis of *Antigone* is well known. As we will see in more detail later, there is good evidence that Kierkegaard was familiar with Hegel's accounts of the famous drama. In this chapter from *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard cites Hegel from the *Lectures on Aesthetics*.<sup>1</sup> Some commentators have already argued that Kierkegaard's interpretation of *Antigone* is profoundly Hegelian in some of its aspects. For example, George Steiner writes, »It is the Hegelian Antigone which lies behind the tormented silhouette in *Either/Or*....Contrasting, in certain respects antithetical, as they are, the Antigone readings and transformations proposed by Hegel and by Kierkegaard remain

1. EO I p. 147; EE I pp. 124-125. (EO I = *Either/Or, I*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987; EE I = *Enten-Eller. Første del. SV*, vol. 1; SV = *Samlede Værker*, 14 volumes, edited by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and H. O. Lange. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1901-1906.)

inseparable.«<sup>2</sup> In this essay I will explore the similarities and differences between the two accounts. I would like to support Steiner's thesis that much of Kierkegaard's *Antigone* interpretation is derivative from Hegel's. I would, however, like to develop Steiner's thesis somewhat and argue specifically that Kierkegaard took to heart Hegel's analysis of the distinction between ancient and modern tragedy and applied Hegel's characterization of the modern notion of tragedy to the story of Antigone. In this way he modifies the story by Sophocles to make it into a modern tragedy. Thus, his entire analysis, although original in its development, is informed and motivated by Hegel's characterization of the nature of modern tragedy.

#### A. HEGEL'S INTERPRETATION

Before we examine Kierkegaard's reading, it will be useful to say a few words about Hegel's famous interpretation. Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* is clearly Hegel's favorite drama. Indeed, he says directly, »Among all the fine creations of the ancient and the modern world...the *Antigone* of Sophocles is from this point of view in my judgment the most excellent and satisfying work of art.«<sup>3</sup> Hegel discusses the drama in the initial sections of the »Spirit« chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, entitled »The

2. STEINER, George, *Antigones*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, pp. 65-66. Cf. also REHM, Walter, »Kierkegaards Antigone« in his *Begegnungen und Probleme*. Bern: A. Franke AG, 1957, pp. 274-316, esp. pp. 284-285. JOHANSEN, Karsten Friis, »Kierkegaard on 'The Tragic',« *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy*, (13), 1976, pp. 105-146, esp. pp. 122-124.

3. HEGEL, Aesthetics IV, p. 324; Aesthetik III, p. 556. (Aesthetics I-IV = *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, 4 volumes, translated by F. P. B. Osmaston. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1975; Aesthetik I-III = *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, 3 volumes, SW vols. 12-14; SW = *Sämtliche Werke*. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden, edited by Hermann Glockner. Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1927-1940.)



Ethical World« and »Ethical Action,« and again in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*.<sup>4</sup> In the *Phenomenology* the analysis is intended to illustrate decisive aspects of the fundamental tension at the heart of the Greek world which led to its downfall. Thus, in this context Hegel does not analyze the drama *Antigone* as a piece of literature or art *per se*; rather, this discussion of the *Antigone* is a part of a larger historical analysis of the Greeks as a world-historical people. By contrast, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel discusses the play specifically as a work of art. Although he examines the piece in these two quite different contexts, the general points he makes are much the same. Here I will give a very general account of his interpretation of *Antigone*, drawing above all on his most famous analysis, i.e. that from the *Phenomenology*. This will then provide us with a basis for contrast with Kierkegaard's interpretation.

In the *Phenomenology* the discussion in which the *Antigone* appears is the first analysis of world-historical peoples in the »Spirit« chapter and as such it begins with immediacy at the level of Spirit. Hegel uses the example of Greek tragedy to characterize what he regards as the unreflective nature of the Greek world. According to Hegel, the Greeks are immediately absorbed in the customs, duties and traditions of their world. This sphere is what Hegel refers to as *Sittlichkeit* or ethical life. Although at later stages of world Spirit there will be reflection and criticism of the customs and traditions of one's culture as in the Enlightenment, nevertheless what characterizes the Greeks is precisely their lack of reflectivity. Hegel writes, »Spirit is the *ethical life* of a nation in so far as it is the *immediate truth*—the individual that is a

4. It is also alluded to in the *Philosophy of Right*. PR §166; RP pp. 246-247. (PR = *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; RP = *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse*. SW vol. 7.)

world.«<sup>5</sup> The Greek *polis* represents an immediate harmony of individuals living in a social whole. They are bound by a common language, custom, law, religion and tradition. The harmony does not arise as the result of reason or reflection but rather from the collective identification of each individual citizen with his or her own culture, an immediate feeling of love or sympathy. The individual has his or her identity in the life of the social whole. It defines the roles, duties and obligations that make each individual who he or she is. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel characterizes the Greek Spirit as follows:

Of the Greeks in the first and genuine form of their freedom, we may assert, that they had no conscience; the habit of living for their country without further reflection, was the principle dominant among them. The consideration of the state in the abstract—which to our understanding is the essential point—was alien to them. Their grand object was their country in its living and real aspect; —*this actual* Athens, this Sparta, these temples, these altars, this form of social life, this union of fellow-citizens, these manners and customs.<sup>6</sup>

While this immediacy is what characterizes the Greek world for Hegel, it is also what leads to its downfall since this same immediacy does not allow for any mediation; thus, the internal contradictions within the Greek world must come to a tragic conflict and cannot be resolved in any other fashion than mutual destruction.

According to Hegel, the Greek world has two guiding laws or principles: on the one hand, the human law, which is the seat of

5. HEGEL, PhS §441; PhG p. 240. (PhS = *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. Cited by paragraph number (§); PhG = *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, GWe. vol. 9. Cited by page number; GWe = *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by the Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968ff.)

6. HEGEL, *Phil. of Hist.* p. 253; VPG p. 330. (*Phil. of Hist.* = *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree. New York: Willey Book Co., 1944; VPG = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*. SW vol. 11.)



jurisprudence and government, and on the other hand, the divine law which is the seat of the family.<sup>7</sup> Human law is grounded in the mundane power of specific states, whereas the divine law is eternal and exists as a fact of nature which is ruled over by the forces of the nether world. In the *Antigone*, Creon, the King of Thebes is the representative of the former, while Antigone herself, the daughter of Oedipus, is the champion of the latter. The natural difference of the sexes is transformed in the realm of Spirit into the distinction of these two spheres, the human law being the domain of the male and the divine law that of the female.

The human law, as represented by Creon, is »the law of universality.« Its commands are universal and public. They are the public decrees of time-honored law and of the king: »Its truth is the authority which is openly accepted and manifest to all.«<sup>8</sup> The citizens of the *polis* are all aware of this public power and follow its laws obediently. Since they have their very identity in their roles in the state, its laws must be upheld in order that it be preserved. The worst conceivable punishment is exile since not merely does one lose one's state, but rather one loses one's self-identity. By contrast, the divine law is unknown and not consciously articulated. Unlike the law of the state, it is not available to public view. The individual has access to it only by means of immediate intuition. While the realm of the state is that of reason and transparency, the realm of the family is that of feeling and mystery: »the law of the family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world.«<sup>9</sup>

One of the main duties that befalls the family is the proper care for its dead. The distinguished actions of the individual family

7. PhS §445; PhG p. 241.

8. PhS §448; PhG p. 242.

9. PhS §457; PhG p. 247.

members reflect a positive light back onto the family as a whole. In this way they cease to become the actions of the individual alone and become adopted by the family as that which makes the family famous. Thus, it is the duty of the family to keep alive the memory of the exploits of its past members. By giving the deceased family member a proper burial, one overcomes the realm of mere nature which destroys the individual. The unburied corpse is subject to the forces of nature and in time is ultimately destroyed. In contradiction to nature, one makes the individual immortal by recounting his exploits and paying respects to his soul. Thus, in death the family member overcomes his individuality and becomes universal. It is incumbent upon the surviving family members to provide the dead relatives with a final rest which allows them to transcend the sensuous contingency of nature and become universal, immortal individuals: »This last duty thus constitutes the perfect *divine* law, or the positive *ethical* action towards the individual.«<sup>10</sup>

The family and the state represent two opposing sides of the state, but yet they are interdependent, and each requires the other for its very existence. Each needs the other in order to affirm its validity. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, the mutual relation of the two elements is made clear: »the divine receives its honor through the respect paid to the human, and the human in virtue of the honor paid to the divine.«<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, the family gains its identity in the public sphere of the community which provides a forum for its individual members to act and to perform great deeds. Without the community and its human law, there would be no family in the sense that there would be no way for the family to distinguish itself. Conversely, the community requires the family in order to supply it with citizens who will protect its laws and fight in its defense. Without these individuals

10. PhS §453; PhG p. 245.

11. Phil. of Hist. p. 239; VPG p. 315.



striving to attain glory for the family, the state could not exist. Hegel indicates the reciprocal relationship as follows:

human law proceeds in its living process from the divine, the law valid on earth from that of the nether world, the conscious from the unconscious, mediation from immediacy—and equally returns whence it came. The power of the nether world, on the other hand, has its actual existence on earth; through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity.<sup>12</sup>

Each term is mediated and conditioned by the other. Hegel says, »Neither of the two [sc. the state or the family] is by itself absolutely valid.«<sup>13</sup> The two institutions with their concomitant laws are mutually dependent. It is their unity which constitutes ethical substance. Ideally there exists a harmony of the two elements in the *polis*.

The two elements are brought into conflict, and as a result the harmony is ruptured and an irresolvable opposition is created between them. This conflict has its origin in a specific action of a particular individual. The action is, of course, that of Antigone, who in defiance of Creon's decree gives her brother, the fallen Polyneices, a proper burial in accordance with the laws of the family. As justification of her action, Antigone appeals to the universality of the divine law: »Death yearns for equal law for all the dead.«<sup>14</sup> For her, Creon's edict forbidding the burial of a traitor to the state has no legitimacy due to the fact that the divine laws have more validity than the merely human ones. Making reference to Creon's decree, Antigone says to him:

12. PhS §460; PhG p. 249.

13. PhS §460; PhG p. 248.

14. *Antigone*, 519. All quotations from Sophocles' *Antigone* are taken from *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richard Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954. (Hereafter simply *Antigone*.) The references are to line numbers.

For me it was not Zeus who made that order.  
Nor did that justice who lives with the gods below  
mark out such laws to hold among mankind.  
Nor did I think your orders were so strong  
that you, a mortal man, could over-run  
the gods' unwritten and unfailing laws.  
Not now, nor yesterday's, they always live,  
and no one knows their origin in time.<sup>15</sup>

For Antigone, the divine law enjoins an absolute command. It is higher than finite human law, whose commands are only relative. The divine law is a natural fact of the matter, whereas it is the human law which is arbitrary and contingent since it has its origin in a human ruler rather than in a necessary, absolute law of nature. The Greek world marks the initial stage of ethical life and as such is characterized by immediacy. Antigone is intractable. She knows in her own heart that she is right and many others agree with her: »Polyneices knows the price I pay / for doing final service to his corpse. / And yet the wise will know my choice was right.«<sup>16</sup>

From the perspective of Creon, all individual action undertaken against the state's decree appears to be a transgression of the legitimate and universal laws of the state. It is only a capricious, arbitrary act intended as a challenge to the state. In order to uphold the validity of civil law, Creon in his office as king, must forbid the burial of Polyneices for his rebellion against the state. He says,

There is no greater wrong than disobedience.  
This ruins cities, this tears down our homes,  
this breaks the battle-front in panic rout.  
If men live decently it is because  
discipline saves their very lives for them.<sup>17</sup>

15. *Antigone*, 450-457.

16. *Antigone*, 902-904.

17. *Antigone*, 672-676.





According to this view, justice is the force which keeps the equilibrium and maintains it when the actions of individuals try to destroy it. Creon must deny the rebel against the state the proper burial rites that would be due to the usual citizen. By doing so, Creon reduces the rebel to a merely natural being, an entity without a state or ethical life. It is precisely with the city and the community that the individual becomes who he is and that humans transcend the sphere of nature. Hegel writes of Polyneices, »He who wantonly attacked the Spirit's highest form of consciousness, the Spirit of the community, must be stripped of the honor of his entire and finished being, the honor due to the Spirit of the departed.«<sup>18</sup> The community believes that it is establishing its former equilibrium by repressing individualistic spirits, but in fact it is destroying itself since it must deny the validity of the divine law. Thus, even though the state has *de facto* power, by denying the divine law its right, the state destroys itself.

The stage is now set for the tragic conflict. Each side of the conflict knows immediately what its duty is without further ado: »In it there is no caprice and equally no struggle, no indecision...on the contrary, the essence of ethical life is for consciousness immediate, unwavering, without contradiction.«<sup>19</sup> Given this immediacy, no mediated solution is possible. Each side takes its own law to be absolute and utterly dismisses the other law as illegitimate. By so doing, both parties fail to recognize that their law is necessarily bound up with the law to which they deny all legitimacy. Thus, both parties are guilty of a self-contradiction since to deny the opposite law is in fact simultaneously to deny their own law. Both sides represent a right, and thus the conflict is not between good and evil, right and wrong; but instead it is between right and right. But each right is

18. PhS §473; PhG p. 257.

19. PhS §465; PhG p. 251.

incomplete without its complement: »the opposition between them appears as an *unfortunate* collision of duty merely with a reality which possesses no rights of its own.«<sup>20</sup> Since this stage of Spirit is that of immediacy, in the sense that the individuals have an immediate relation to the law that they represent, no peaceful resolution is possible. Neither side can prevail since both are incomplete on their own. The result is a tragic outcome, a »dreadful fate which engulfs in the abyss of its single nature divine and human law alike, as well as the two self-consciousnesses in which these powers have their existence.«<sup>21</sup>

The respective fates of Antigone and Creon symbolically represent the one-sidedness of their positions. Antigone, who denied the validity of the state and disobeyed its decrees, forfeits her citizenship and her community. But without a community, she is also deprived of the possibility of being the person who she is. She hangs herself in a place outside the city which symbolizes both her loss of self and her permanent alienation from the community. Her end is that of a criminal against the state: »for as simple, ethical consciousness, it has turned towards one law, but turned its back on the other and violates the latter by its deed.«<sup>22</sup> No less does Creon lose himself, for while he insists one-sidedly on upholding the public, objective laws of the *polis*, he simultaneously loses his family. Creon's son, Haemon, to whom Antigone was betrothed, commits suicide upon learning of Antigone's death. In turn Creon's wife commits suicide in grief over Haemon's death. Only then does Creon realize that his identity is in fact bound up with the family to which he attributed no legitimacy. Only then does he realize that he has denied an essential domain of ethical consciousness: »This is my guilt, all mine. I killed you [sc. Haemon], I say it clear. / Servants, take me away, out of the sight of men. / I who am nothing more than

20. PhS §466; PhG p. 252.

21. PhS §464; PhG p. 251.

22. PhS §468; PhG p. 254.



nothing now.«<sup>23</sup> Both Antigone and Creon are martyrs for their own principle. Antigone suffers for her unwavering loyalty to the divine law; similarly, Creon suffers for upholding the law of the state.

The lack of mediation results in the destruction of both sides and in the fall of the Greek *polis* as a viable form of life. The roles represented by Antigone and Creon are universals which stand for the institutions of the Greek *polis*. Neither side is able to gain the upper hand: »for neither power has any advantage over the other that would make it a more essential moment of the [sc. ethical] substance.«<sup>24</sup> What is required for a peaceful solution is mediation. This would amount to a recognition of the validity of the opposite law. The problem of the Greek *polis* was that of immediacy: »This ruin of the ethical substance and its passage into another form is thus determined by the fact that the ethical consciousness is directed on to the law in a way that is essentially *immediate*.«<sup>25</sup> This failure indicates the need for mediation. Only with institutions which are aware of their own finitude and limitations and which recognize their interdependence with other institutions can the internal destruction be avoided. Only when the elements mutually recognize the validity of each other does the social whole become a stable unit.

Immediacy must be overcome if freedom is to be attained in history. Freedom is the goal of history, as Hegel says in his lectures: »The history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom.«<sup>26</sup> Freedom is conceived as the

23. *Antigone*, 1319-1321.

24. PhS §472; PhG p. 256.

25. PhS §476; PhG p. 260.

26. Phil. of Hist. p. 19; VPG p. 46. Cf. PR §342; RP p. 447: »World history is the necessary development, out of the concept of mind's freedom alone, of the moments of reason and so of the self-consciousness and freedom of mind.« Cf. MAURER, Reinhart Klemens, »Teleologische Aspekte der Hegelschen Philosophie,« in his *Hegel und das Ende der Geschichte*. Freiburg and Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 1980, p. 192.

ability to give a law to one's self and to formulate one's own decisions. Thus, this is freedom as autonomy, independent of any adventitious authority. In immediacy there is no autonomy, for when individuals immediately identify with laws and customs of their culture, they lack reflection which is a necessary condition for a genuinely autonomous decision. Antigone and Creon cannot be said to be acting autonomously since they are incapable of reflection on their respective ethical laws. In order for freedom to be achieved, reflection and mediation must be introduced.

## B. KIERKEGAARD'S INTERPRETATION

Let us now turn to Kierkegaard's *Antigone* interpretation which is located at the end of a longer analysis of the nature of ancient and modern drama.<sup>27</sup> In that discussion his claim is that what characterizes modern drama is a sense of individuality that is lacking in ancient drama. Kierkegaard's discussion here is not so much an interpretation of the ancient tragedy by Sophocles as a retelling of it with significant changes in order to illustrate specific aspects of modern and ancient tragedy. Thus, Kierkegaard's use of the *Antigone* is in a sense quite different from Hegel's. I will try to show that the modifications to the play that Kierkegaard effects are intended to turn the ancient Greek tragedy into a modern tragedy. This Kierkegaard does by using Hegel's definition of modern tragedy from the *Lectures on Aesthetics* and modifying key aspects of *Antigone* in order to bring it into accordance with this definition and thus to make it a modern tragedy. He thus presents us with his own modern version of the story along the lines sketched by Hegel. According to Kierkegaard's version, the conflict of the drama is not between the family and the state, i.e. between Antigone and Creon, but

27. EO I pp. 153-164; EE I p. 130-141.



rather between two conflicting forces within Antigone herself. Kierkegaard, following Hegel's definition, has devised a way to make the conflict an inward one within Antigone herself.

Let us begin by looking very briefly at Hegel's account of the difference between ancient and modern tragedy as he presents it in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. According to Hegel, the tragic heroes in ancient drama are motivated by the substantial nature of their characters and their substantial ethical relations. By contrast, in modern tragedy, these things no longer carry any weight, and the motivation becomes more arbitrary. He writes,

Generally speaking, however, in modern tragedy it is not the substantive content of its object in the interest of which men act, and which is maintained as the stimulus of their passion; rather it is the inner experience of their heart and individual emotion or the particular qualities of their personality, which insist on satisfaction.<sup>28</sup>

This understanding of the motivation of action also changes the nature of the tragic conflict in modern drama. According to Hegel, while the tragic conflict in ancient drama was between two external things such as the family and the state, the tragic conflict in modern drama takes place within the individual. Hegel writes,

The heroes of ancient classic tragedy discover circumstances under which they, so long as they irrefragably adhere to the *one* ethical state of pathos which alone corresponds to their own already formed personality, must infallibly come into conflict with an ethical power which opposes them and possesses an equal ethical claim to recognition. Romantic characters, on the contrary, are from the first place within a wide expanse of contingent relations and conditions, within which every sort of action is possible; so that the conflict to which no doubt the external conditions presupposed supply the occasion, essentially abides within the *character* itself.<sup>29</sup>

28. *Aesthetics* IV, p. 334; *Aesthetik* III, p. 565.

29. *Aesthetics* IV, p. 335; *Aesthetik* III, p. 567.

Thus, the move from ancient to modern tragedy is a move from outer to inner. Modern tragedy is then more psychological in the sense that its focus is the soul of the individual himself and not the external circumstances. Hegel's example of this is the character of Hamlet: »The real collision [in *Hamlet*], therefore, does not turn on the fact that the son, in giving effect to a rightful sense of vengeance, is himself forced to violate morality, but rather on the particular personality, the inner life of Hamlet.«<sup>30</sup> The focus is on Hamlet's wavering back and forth, his uncertainty and procrastination, in short on the inner psychological forces battling for hegemony over his character.

It is this Hegelian account that Kierkegaard makes use of in his reworking of the story of Antigone. The claim for a Hegelian influence here is strengthened by the fact that Kierkegaard was familiar with Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. He had already made use of these lectures in *The Concept of Irony*, where he quotes from them directly. Indeed, he also quoted from them in this section of *Either/Or*.<sup>31</sup> Even more important are his reading notes to the third volume of these lectures. These notes, which are quite detailed, come from the years 1841-42, i.e. just prior to *Either/Or*.<sup>32</sup> Here it is clear that Kierkegaard has read carefully the section III, entitled »The Several Generic Types of Poetry.« Under this heading come »A) Epic Poetry, B) Lyric Poetry and C) Dramatic Poetry.« It is in this final section on dramatic poetry that Hegel discusses the differences between ancient and modern drama analyzed in the previous paragraph; indeed, Hegel's section is entitled, »The Difference Between Ancient and Modern Drama.« This title is strikingly similar to Kierkegaard's title,

30. *Aesthetics* IV, pp. 334-335; *Aesthetik* III, p. 566.

31. *EO* I p. 147; *EE* I pp. 124-125.

32. *Papirer* III C 33-34. (*Papirer* I-XVI = *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, 16 volumes, edited by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torsting. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909-1948; supplemented by Niels Thulstrup. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968-1978.)



»The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic of Modern Drama.« Thus, there can be no doubt that Kierkegaard was familiar with Hegel's analysis, and his use of parts of it in *Either/Or* can hardly be regarded as accidental.

At the beginning of his treatment Kierkegaard indicates that he is changing and modifying the story of Antigone to suit his own purposes. He briefly explains the main events of the narrative and then hints that he wishes to make some modifications of it: »So, then, the family of Labdakos is the object of the indignation of the Gods: Oedipus has murdered his father, married his mother; and Antigone is the fruit of this marriage. So it goes in the Greek tragedy. Here I deviate. With me, everything is the same, and yet everything is different.«<sup>33</sup> Then Kierkegaard goes on to indicate which changes in the story he wishes to make. He proposes the following: »Everyone knows that he [Oedipus] has killed the sphinx and freed Thebes, and Oedipus is hailed and admired and is happy in his marriage with Jocasta. The rest is hidden from the people's eyes, and no suspicion has ever brought this horrible dream into the world of actuality. Only Antigone knows it.«<sup>34</sup> The essential difference that Kierkegaard wishes to introduce is that no one besides Antigone knows that Oedipus has killed his father and married his mother. All of the rest of Thebes regard the marriage as a legitimate and happy one. This knowledge is Antigone's secret alone.

Kierkegaard then analyzes Antigone's situation in terms of the concept of anxiety. Anxiety is typically modern due to its inwardness. Like Hegel, Kierkegaard uses Hamlet as an example of a modern tragic figure characterized specifically by this emotion: »Anxiety, therefore, belongs essentially to the tragic. Hamlet is such a tragic figure because he suspects his mother's crime.«<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard's claim is that sorrow is what characterizes

33. EO I p. 154; EE I p. 131.

34. EO I p. 154; EE I p. 131.

35. EO I p. 155; EE I p. 132.

ancient Greek tragedy, whereas anxiety is what characterizes modern tragedy. Then it becomes clear why he wishes to make the modification he does in the story of *Antigone*: in the ancient tragedy of Sophocles, Antigone suffers sorrow but not anxiety, and, by contrast, in Kierkegaard's modern version she suffers from anxiety. Her anxiety comes from the secret which she knows about the truth of Oedipus.

Kierkegaard makes use of Hegel's analysis in his characterization of the ancient world as lacking in subjective reflection, which is the sign of modern thought. Kierkegaard writes in very Hegelian language: »the ancient world did not have subjectivity reflected in itself. Even if the individual moved freely, he nevertheless rested in substantial determinants, in the state, the family, in fate. This substantial determinant is the essential fateful factor in Greek tragedy and is its essential characteristic.«<sup>36</sup> This characterization is drawn directly from Hegel's analysis which sees the substance of the Greek Spirit as resting in the institutions of the family and the state. Kierkegaard's characterization of modern tragedy also has a profoundly Hegelian ring to it: »in the modern period situation and character are in fact predominant. The tragic hero is subjectively reflected in himself, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, kindred, and fate but often has even reflected him out of his own past life.«<sup>37</sup> This follows very closely Hegel's account of modern tragedy which sees the element of reflection as being first introduced by modern tragedy. Hamlet is the tragic figure *par excellence* characterized by reflection.

Let us compare the two versions as Kierkegaard does in order to illustrate the difference between the ancient and the modern accounts. We take first the original story as it appears in the play by Sophocles: »In Greek tragedy, Antigone is not occupied at all

36. EO I p. 143; EE I p. 121. Cf. also EO I p. 149; EE I p. 126. EO I p. 154; EE I pp. 130-131. EO I pp. 155-156; EE I p. 132.

37. EO I p. 143; EE I p. 121.





with her father's unfortunate fate. This rests like an impregnable sorrow on the whole family.«<sup>38</sup> There is thus a general sense of sorrow surrounding the history of the family but no anxiety. Kierkegaard then goes on to analyze the modern Antigone which he proposes, i.e. the Antigone who alone knows of Oedipus' incestuous marriage. He contrasts the Antigone of Sophocles with his own version: »Whereas the Greek Antigone goes on living so free from care that, if this new fact had not come up, one could imagine her life as even happy in its gradual unfolding, our Antigone's life.«<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the ancient Antigone, Kierkegaard's Antigone is eaten up inwardly with the secret that is hers alone. Thus, she cannot live happily or be carefree as the Greek Antigone.

Kierkegaard distinguishes between two tragic collisions in his version of the story. The first is the conflict between protecting the good name of Oedipus and Antigone's own happiness prior to the *entrée* of Haemon. With respect to her familial duties, Kierkegaard writes, »She is proud of her secret, proud that she had been selected in a singular way to save the honor and glory of the lineage of Oedipus. When the grateful nation acclaims Oedipus with praise and thanksgiving, she feels her own significance, and her secret sinks deeper and deeper into her soul, ever more inaccessible to any living being.«<sup>40</sup> Thus, Antigone feels honored to carry the secret alone and by so doing she is responsible for Oedipus' success and is linked with his fate. It is this secret which separates her from everyone else. It is her duty to extol and maintain the memory of Oedipus. Here Antigone gladly gives up her own personal happiness and lives in suffering with her secret in order to preserve the good name of Oedipus:

38. EO I p. 155; EE I p. 132.

39. EO I p. 156; EE I p. 133.

40. EO I p. 157; EE I p. 134.

»She dedicates her life to sorrowing over her father's fate, over her own.«<sup>41</sup>

The second collision is when Haemon enters the scene, and Antigone must sacrifice her love for him in order to keep the secret: »The second colliding force is her sympathetic love for her beloved.«<sup>42</sup> Her most sacred duty towards Oedipus comes into conflict when Antigone falls in love with Haemon. She is bound morally to keep the secret and thus to honor her father: »To confide in any other living being now would be to dishonor her father; her life acquires meaning for her in its devotion to showing him the last honors daily, almost hourly, by her unbroken silence.«<sup>43</sup> But to keep a secret from one she loves, i.e. Haemon, would be a betrayal of that love. Kierkegaard describes this as follows:

Now my Antigone is no ordinary girl, and her dowry likewise is not ordinary—her pain. Without this dowry, she cannot belong to any man—that, she feels, would be taking too great a risk. To conceal it from such an observant person would be impossible; to wish to have it concealed would be a breach of her love—but with it can she belong to him?<sup>44</sup>

If Antigone keeps the secret to herself, then she is being pious to her father, Oedipus, but untrue to her lover Haemon. If by contrast she reveals her family secret to Haemon, then while she is true to him, she sullies the reputation of her father.

Kierkegaard imagines the situation of this second collision and the tragic end of this modern Antigone. Haemon knows that Antigone is keeping some sort of a secret from him and does everything he can to extract it from her. He knows clearly of her deep piety and veneration for her father and pleads in his name

41. EO I p. 158; EE I p. 135.

42. EO I p. 163; EE I p. 139.

43. EO I p. 161; EE I p. 137.

44. EO I pp. 162-163; EE I p. 139.



for her to reveal the secret. This only makes Antigone suffer more since it is precisely for the sake of her father that she keeps the secret. As long as she lives, Antigone must live with the torment of keeping the secret in the face of Haemon's entreaties. For Kierkegaard, when she yields and betrays the secret of Oedipus to him, she must die: »Only in the moment of her death can she confess the fervency of her love; only in the moment she does not belong to him can she confess that she belongs to him.«<sup>45</sup> Antigone cannot continue to live with the thought that she has betrayed the memory of her father, and thus she must die. But up until that point her life is nothing but suffering in harboring the secret. This is for Kierkegaard a truly tragic situation.

### C. OTHER POINTS OF COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Aside from Kierkegaard's use of Hegel's definition of modern tragedy to recast the *Antigone*, there are a number of other aspects of Hegel's analysis which he takes over. One point of similarity is Kierkegaard's understanding of history and the role of the individual, which is decidedly influenced by Hegel. In the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes, »Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time.«<sup>46</sup> Kierkegaard seems to paraphrase this when he says, »Every individual, however original he is, is still a child of God, of his age, of his nation, of his family, of his friends, and only in them does he have his truth.«<sup>47</sup> This seems to contradict Kierkegaard's repeated statements about the absolute nature of the individual. In a similar vein, Kierkegaard writes at the very beginning of the chapter: »If someone were to say: The tragic, after all, is always the tragic, I would not have very much to urge to the contrary, inasmuch as

45. EO I p. 164; EE I p. 140.

46. PR p. 11; RP p. 35.

47. EO I p. 145; EE I p. 123.

every historical development always lies within the sphere of the concept.«<sup>48</sup> This also seems to follow Hegel's conception of history in terms of a general concept of the historical period. In the first case, it is the individual who is equated with the whole, and in the second, it is the individual historical phenomena. In both cases the emphasis is placed upon the wider perspective beyond the individual.

Perhaps the most obvious point of contact in this section is when Kierkegaard alludes to Hegel directly and quotes from the *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Here Kierkegaard comments upon Hegel's understanding of compassion or pity:

It is well known that Aristotle maintains that tragedy should arouse fear and compassion in the spectator. I recall that Hegel in his *Aesthetics* picks up this comment and on each of these points makes a double observation, which, however, is not very exhaustive....Hegel notes that there are two kinds of compassion, the usual kind that turns its attention to the finite side of suffering, and the truly tragic compassion. This observation is altogether correct but to me of less importance, since that universal emotion is a misunderstanding that can befall modern tragedy just as much as ancient tragedy. But what he adds with regard to true compassion is true and powerful: '*das wahrhafte Mitleiden ist im Gegentheil die Sympathie mit der zugleich sittlichen Rectigung des Leidenden.*'<sup>49</sup>

Here Kierkegaard's assessment of Hegel's conception of compassion is in fact quite positive. He wishes merely to supplement it or to point out a different aspect, but there is no trace of criticism here; on the contrary, Hegel's assessment is lauded as »true and powerful.« Kierkegaard then goes on to indicate the difference between his view and that of Hegel: »Whereas Hegel considers compassion more in general and its differentiation in

48. EO I p. 139; EE I p. 117.

49. EO I p. 147; EE I pp. 124-125.



the difference of individualities, I prefer to stress the difference in compassion in relation to the difference in tragic guilt.«<sup>50</sup>

Finally Kierkegaard, like Hegel, makes use of the concept of dialectic. This is of particular interest since Kierkegaard hails himself as a dialectical thinker and makes use of a dialectical methodology in any number of other works. In connection with the issue of tragic guilt he writes, »Here I am face to face again with the curious dialectic that places the family's iniquities in relation to the individual. This is what is inherited. Ordinarily, dialectic is thought to be rather abstract—one thinks almost solely of logical operations. But life will quickly teach a person that there are many kinds of dialectic, that almost every passion has its own.«<sup>51</sup> Here it is clear that Kierkegaard is speaking of Hegel's dialectic since the passage concerns the relation of the universal, in this case, the family, to the particular, i.e. the family member. It is this relation of universal to particular that Kierkegaard later develops in the concept of repetition. In addition, the issue of hereditary sin and the relation of the individual to the human race in general is explored in *The Concept of Anxiety*. In any case, the issue of dialectic is one that Hegel and Kierkegaard share. Even though Kierkegaard indicates that he has a conception of dialectic which removes it from purely logical analysis and puts it in the sphere of actuality and life.

From this analysis it seems clear that Kierkegaard's use of *Antigone* is very much inspired by Hegel's accounts of this work. Even though what Kierkegaard does with it is original, it is clear that he takes his point of departure in Hegel's distinction between ancient and modern tragedy. It is conceivable that Hegel's section »The Difference Between Ancient and Modern Drama« from the *Lectures on Aesthetics* was an inspiration for his chapter, »The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic of Modern

50. EO I p. 147; EE I p. 125.

51. EO I p. 159; EE I p. 136. Cf. also EO I p. 151; EE I p. 128.

Drama,« here in *Either/Or*. In addition Kierkegaard seems to make use of Hegel's *Antigone* interpretation from the *Phenomenology*, with the talk of ethical substance and reflectivity. Thus, even though Kierkegaard changes the events and in fact is analyzing a different story than Hegel, his account is full of Hegelian elements.