

## ONE

# The Tragic Turning and Tragic Paradigm in Philosophy

---

---

Let us also reread that, at Aulis, [Agamemnon's] function as commander defines and universalizes him, that he inserts it into a world that is meaningful, but that also, at Aulis, the undeniable—yet denied—allegiance to his offspring likewise singularizes him. The other prescription expels him in advance from the world of arms and ships: a world that, in sacrificing his daughter, he plainly exalts as normative. The denied prescription makes non-meaning penetrate into the universal meaning. To think this double prescription for itself is to make tragic knowing one's own.

Toward the close of the eighteenth century, tragedy, which had been of scant interest to philosophers since Plato and Aristotle, began to move to the forefront of German thought. Not only was this tragic turning of philosophy sustained well into the nineteenth century, it also surfaced anew in the first half of the twentieth century in the work of Martin Heidegger. Whereas Plato and Aristotle were concerned with the question of the educational and political impact of tragedy, or with its poetics, the German thinkers focused not so much on tragedy as a dramatic form (although Hölderlin took pains to study it as such, and Hegel does explore it in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*), but on the very essence and philosophical thought-structure of the tragic, and ultimately on the role of the tragic paradigm in philosophy. Although such a focus is not wholly alien to the therapeutic concern that runs throughout much of the Western philosophical tradition—a concern for the assuaging of human suffering through a discipline of thought (here the interest of German Idealism in Spinoza is relevant, although Spinoza's thought did not directly motivate

Hölderlin's work on tragedy<sup>1</sup>)—the tragic turning of German philosophy is unique and striking enough to provoke a quest for an explanation. Miguel de Beistegui and Simon Sparks offer one that is perceptive and thought-provoking: tragedy, in their interpretation, offered the prospect of bridging the abyss between natural necessity and human freedom, or between pure theoretical and practical reason, that yawned in the wake of Kant's critical philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Enticing though this analysis is—particularly in the way it revisits the Kantian sublime as “the site of the presentation of the unrepresentable”—its preoccupation with the issue of freedom responds primarily to Schelling's theory of tragedy (which nevertheless is given no place in de Beistegui and Sparks's edited volume),<sup>3</sup> rather than to the tragic thought of Hegel, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, or Heidegger. Most conspicuously, the analysis does not address the prominence of the question of history or historicity in the tragic turning of philosophy from Hölderlin and Hegel to Heidegger, and beyond. It also does not seek to clarify in any way the striking prominence of Sophoclean tragedy in German philosophical discussion; for, notwithstanding Hegel's interest in Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and in Shakespearean tragedy, German Idealism remained almost obsessively preoccupied with two of Sophocles' three Theban plays: *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*; and Heidegger sustains this preoccupation. Euripides, cast by Nietzsche as a destroyer of Attic tragedy, is otherwise accorded hardly a mention; and a range of characters familiar to the Greek tragic stage, such as Ajax, Herakles, Medea, Helen, or Hekabe (Hecuba) receive little or no attention.<sup>4</sup> One wonders then just why only these very few plays have been selected out of the vaster legacy of Greek tragedy as speaking to and even defining the philosophical question(s) at issue, and, if so, what the implications may be of this restriction concerning the relationship between ancient Greece and modernity.

These critical reflections are not meant as a preamble to a fuller explanation of the tragic turning of philosophy. The question of what is philosophically at stake in this turning is one that may still have to be left open, not least because the issues are not the same for Hölderlin, Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. This book does not seek to offer a comprehensive explanation, but rather to undertake an in-depth study of the tragic thought of Hölderlin. The task that this first chapter sets itself is to delineate key aspects of the tragic turning and to interrogate the formulation of a tragic paradigm in the interest of situating Hölderlin's thought in its philosophical context.

If Plato, in *Republic* X, offered the tragic poets a chance to be readmitted to and reintegrated into the *polis*, provided that they could defend their art from a philosophical vantage point trained on ethical life,<sup>5</sup> it is Hölderlin who could truly have responded to the Platonic challenge (and who, in fact, was deeply concerned with integrating the poet's art, not of course into the *polis*, but into Hesperian and, specifically, German modernity). Hölderlin's poetic stature should not blind one to his philosophical erudition, acumen,

and creativity. However, given the history of the reception of Hölderlin's work,<sup>6</sup> it has taken a long time for him to begin to be given his due as a thinker. This is particularly true of English language philosophical discussion, which has tended to relegate Hölderlin's thought to the wider parameters of Heidegger scholarship, or else to its intersections with literary theory (here Dennis J. Schmidt's reading constitutes a welcome exception).<sup>7</sup> This book seeks then to give Hölderlin's thought on tragedy the philosophically searching reading that it demands, given that it is not only integral to the tragic turning within German Idealism (and may, in fact, have initiated it), but that it also, in important ways, challenges the tragic matrix of Idealist thought.

### HEGEL'S TRAGIC PARADIGM

The origins of the tragic turning of philosophy remain partly concealed, due to the personal and ephemeral character of Hegel's and Hölderlin's intellectual interactions during their joint residence in Frankfurt (1797–1798) and during Hölderlin's subsequent first Homburg period (1798–1800). In July 1795 and in April 1796, Hölderlin also had significant interactions with Schelling. It was Schelling who, in the Tenth Letter of his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* of 1795–1796, first gave tragedy philosophical prominence; but, as Schmidt notes, tragedy never really permeated his thought or formed its very nucleus, as it did for both Hegel and Hölderlin.<sup>8</sup> Hölderlin's response to Schelling's *Letters*, in correspondence with Immanuel Niethammer (in whose *Philosophical Journal* the work was published), does not pick up on the question of tragedy; for Hölderlin was, at the time, preoccupied with a critical reflection on Fichte's thought and with the writing of his epistolary novel *Hyperion*. He writes:

Schelling, whom I saw before my departure [for Frankfurt], is glad to contribute to your journal, and to be introduced through you to the learned world. We did not always converse with one another in accord, but we did agree that new ideas could most lucidly be presented in the format of letters [Hölderlin had, in the preceding paragraph, noted his own plan to write a work to be titled "New Letters Concerning the Aesthetic Education of Man."] He has followed, as you will know, a better path with his convictions, before having reached his goal by the worse path [he took earlier]. Do tell me your judgment about his newest things.<sup>9</sup>

From 1797 to 1799, Hölderlin worked intensively on his own tragedy, *The Death of Empedocles*, and on the body of theoretical and philosophical essays interspersed between the second and third of its three fragmentary versions.<sup>10</sup> It is clear from this body of writings that, as concerns the philosophical formulation of the question of tragedy, Hölderlin took the lead over Hegel during this period. Hegel's first discussion of tragedy appears only in his

1802–1803 essay on natural law;<sup>11</sup> and a fuller treatment had to await the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1807, and finally the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, given in Berlin between 1820 and 1829.<sup>12</sup>

In the essay on Natural Law, Hegel argues for the equal right of the singular and the whole within “the reality of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*] as absolute in-difference.” As Szondi points out, his argument is directed against the rigid opposition between law and individuality in Kant’s Second Critique and in Fichte’s *Foundations of Natural Law*.<sup>13</sup> For Hegel, the absolute, integral character of ethical life can be realized only through conflict and sacrifice, which brings about a dynamic reconciliation:

[R]econciliation consists namely in the recognition of the necessity, and in the right, which ethicality [*Sittlichkeit*] gives to its inorganic nature, and to the subterranean powers, in that it leaves to them and sacrifices a part of itself . . .<sup>14</sup>

This sacrifice is what brings about the tragic purification (Aristotelian *katharsis* reinterpreted) of *Sittlichkeit*.

Hegel moves on to consider corporeity in the context of tragedy. In the conflict that divides “the dual nature of the divine in its form [*Gestalt*] and objectivity,” the former frees itself from the death of the latter by sacrificing its own life, which is indissociable from the latter. By this sacrifice, death is vanquished. Seen from the perspective of “the other nature” (objectivity), however, the negativity of its own power is now sublated through a living union with divinity, so that:

The latter shines into it; and through this ideal [*ideelle*] being-one in spirit, makes it into its reconciled living body [*Leib*] which, as body, remains at the same time within difference and transitoriness and, through spirit, contemplates [*anschaut*] the divine as something alien to itself.<sup>15</sup>

One hears an echo of this concern for tragic corporeity in Hölderlin’s “Remarks on Antigone,” where he remarks that the purification or *katharsis* of the “infinite enthusiasm” that draws the human being into seeking an immediate union with the divine is accomplished differently in Greek and Hesperian tragic presentation (*Darstellung*). In the former, but not in the latter, the “tragic word” seizes the actual body, driving it to kill. Hölderlinian *katharsis*, unlike its Hegelian counterpart, ultimately does not accomplish union or reconciliation, but separation.<sup>16</sup>

More immediately, Hegel shares with Hölderlin, at this early period, a focus on sacrifice as the proper work of tragedy. However, for Hölderlin, the sacrificial death of his tragic protagonist, Empedocles, is not offered up for the living unity of ethical life, but rather is called for by a turning of the times (*Zeitenwende*) or epochal transition. Empedocles’ historical moment is char-

acterized, in Hölderlin's view, by the extreme antagonism of Art and Nature, or of the organic and aorgic principles (the latter is echoed in Hegel's reference to the "inorganic"). Empedocles' apocryphal self-immolation in the volcanic crater of Mt. Aetna, however, is not an unproblematic act of reconciliation. Rather, it atones for a reconciliation that was precipitous and "excessive" in that the protagonist had sought to accomplish it in his own personal life. As a tragedian, moreover, Hölderlin brings the different perspectives of various characters to bear on this sacrificial act, thus calling it into question. Whereas Hölderlin sustains his linkage of tragedy to a time out of joint, together with his understanding of the separative force of tragic purification, beyond his work on *The Death of Empedocles* and into his translations and transpositions of Sophoclean tragedies during his second Homburg period (1804–1806), he seems to have come to repudiate the idea that the sacrificial death of an extraordinary individual could be demanded by and set on course an epochal transition. This repudiation probably accounts for his abandonment of *The Death of Empedocles*.

Hegel, in his essay on Natural Law, turns not to Sophocles, but to Aeschylus, specifically to *The Eumenides* in the *Oresteia* trilogy. The confrontation between the Eumenides or Furies as "powers of law, which resides in difference" and the "indifferent light" of Apollo before the ethical (*sittlichen*) organization of Athens is unable to bring about their reconciliation. It takes Athena, the city's patron divinity, to restore Orestes to Apollo, who had himself "entangled him in difference" (by commanding him to avenge the murder of his father with matricide). By separating out the powers that converged in Orestes' sacrilege, she now accomplishes their reconciliation; and she allows the Eumenides to share in divine honors and in the contemplation of divinity, and thus to be calmed. Tragedy's essence, Hegel concludes (before moving on to a consideration of comedy<sup>17</sup>) lies in the fact that:

Ethical [*die sittliche*] nature separates from itself its inorganic [aspect] as a destiny, so as not to be entangled with it, and sets it over against itself and, by recognizing it in strife, is reconciled with the divine being [*Wesen*] as the unity of the two.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Hegel's focus on Aeschylus's *Eumenides* in the essay on Natural Law, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,<sup>19</sup> his analysis of the spiritual truth of ethicality (*Sittlichkeit*) and of the spiritual work of art is trained on Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Antigone*, especially on the latter work since, as Hegel remarks, ethical consciousness is more complete, and its guilt more pure, "when it *knows in advance* the law and the power, which it opposes, taking it for violation and wrong, for ethically accidental, [and] when, like *Antigone*, it commits the crime knowingly."<sup>20</sup> Oedipus, by contrast, acts in ignorance, so that here ethical consciousness is shrouded by "a power that shuns the light."

Sophoclean tragedy, for Hegel, explores the diremption, contrariety, and conflict within ethicality, which is lived through as a destiny culminating in the equal perdition of both contestants and, ultimately, in the historical surpassing of ethicality as a particular form of spirit. For this reason, tragedy is not, for Hegel, intrinsically timeless but is itself historically situated, or, as de Beistegui comments, it seeks to make sense only of Greek ethicality, so that “it cannot be a question of reading these pages from the *Phenomenology* as the absolute’s last word on the ethico-political. . . .”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Klaus Düsing notes that, for Hegel, Greek ethicality, as expressed in tragedy, is the ethicality of the heroic age, and that, within modern ethicality (characterized by a distinction between free subjectivity and the objectivity of action), the Greek model of tragedy no longer has a place.<sup>22</sup> This relegation of tragedy to the past contrasts sharply with Hölderlin’s efforts in *The Death of Empedocles* to write a tragedy on a Greek theme for his own age, and in the Sophocles translations to transpose Greek tragedy into a poetic form capable of speaking to the historical situation of Hesperian modernity.

The diremption within the historical actuality of spirit as ethical substance (as which it realized itself in Greek civilization) divides it into general and singular self-consciousness, manifest as the people or the state on the one hand, and as the family on the other, which constitute, respectively, the spheres of human and of divine law, and within which, again respectively, man and woman function as their “natural self and active individuality.”<sup>23</sup> Since ethicality as such remains general or universal, the family, as the immediate and natural ethical community, seeks fundamentally to elevate the singular individual who belongs to it to universality. However, Hegel argues, “the action which encompasses the entire existence of the blood relative . . . [and which] has him as its object and content as a universal [*allgemeines*] being, lifted beyond sensuous, that is, singular reality, no longer concerns the *living*, but the *dead*.”<sup>24</sup> The universality which the singular reaches naturally and as such is “pure being, death;” but since such natural universality is devoid of consciousness and conscious agency it is the duty of family members to transmute this mere natural event into conscious agency, and thereby “to lift up the powerless, pure *singular* singularity to *general individuality*.”<sup>25</sup> The family carries out this duty, which is the sole one mandated toward the individual by divine law, through the burial rites whereby it restores (literally, “marries”) its deceased member to “the womb of earth, the elementary, imperishable individuality,” thereby allowing the individual to share in a community (*Gemeinwesen*).<sup>26</sup>

One can perhaps hear an echo here of the communion of Hölderlin’s Empedocles with the primordial elements (among which fire, not earth, is preeminent and also associated with death); but Hegel’s emphasis on death and burial rites runs counter to the resistance to the passion for death (*Todeslust*) that marks Hölderlin’s late thought on tragedy. Indeed, a key

change in Hölderlin's thought between *The Death of Empedocles* and the late Sophocles translations is that nature and its primordial elements are no longer experienced rapturously in a longing for union, but rather as "the course of nature, ever hostile to man," which is oriented toward "the wild world of the dead." The "more genuine Zeus" of Hesperia forces this course "*more resolutely toward the earth*," which is, for Hölderlin, not the element that receives the dead, but rather the abode of the living.<sup>27</sup>

The woman who, within the family, most fully embodies divine law or the obscure powers is not, for Hegel, the wife, the mother, or the daughter—all of whose familial relationships involve natural affection, indebtedness, or passion—but the sister, specifically the sister of a brother. Her relationship to him is one of free equality; and through the recognition she offers to and also receives from him, she forms a bond with his alterity and singularity. For this reason, Hegel argues, he is for her strictly irreplaceable; and her familial duty toward him is her highest duty.

Human law, or the powers that prevail in the clarity of day are, on the other hand, most fully individualized in those who exercise rulership (and who, in the Greek context of ethicality, were men). The ruler constitutes "*actual* spirit, reflecting itself into itself, the simple *self* of ethical substance in its entirety."<sup>28</sup> The ruler can grant the ruled a certain latitude and autonomy (which allows the family to thrive); but he must ultimately hold them together in unity and guard them against a reversion from ethicality to natural life.

In ethicality as a whole, these constituent powers rest in harmonious balance, which is maintained by justice. Justice sustains the complementarity of what is intrinsically divided in that it comprises both the ruler's impartial enforcement of human law and the claim to redress advanced by an individual whose spirit has been violated. A person is violated by being objectified or reduced to a thing; and this reduction is most starkly the work of death, so that the redress called for coincides here with the divine law mandating appropriate burial.

This balance within ethicality, however, has so far been delineated without taking account of individual self-consciousness, which must realize itself in action. As self-consciousness, ethical consciousness directly and decisively embraces what it understands to be its naturally apportioned duty, opposing it to the claims of the contrary power. These may appear to it as willful, hybriatic, and sacrilegious (as Kreon's edict appears to Antigone), or as stubborn disobedience (as Antigone's stance appears to Kreon).

Ethicality or *Sittlichkeit* differs from a modern understanding of moral life by acknowledging no intrinsic difference between knowledge and action. However, once individuality, in seeking to realize itself in action, embraces one law and pits it against the other, it brings about the disruption of ethical balance, for which reason there can then be no innocent action. Moreover,

since individual action does not suspend the contrariety of ethical substance, but rather violates one of the contraries, it is transgressive or criminal.

Ethical consciousness must recognize its guilt; but since the *pathos*, in accordance with which it affirmed and enacted one of the opposed laws, is in fact its very character (for within ethicality the individual does not achieve true singularity), it cannot recognize its guilt without giving up its very character and effective actuality, which means that it perishes. What is called for, however, is not a one-sided subjugation; for Hegel concludes: "Only in the equal subjugation of both sides is absolute right accomplished, and ethical substance, or all-powerful just *destiny*, has made its appearance as the negative power, which devours both sides."<sup>29</sup>

In following Hegel's thought so far, it has already become apparent that the tragic paradigm, as it delineates itself in the initial tragic turning of philosophy, is far from unitary. Whereas Hegel articulates it in the context of ethicality, law, and the history of spirit, Hölderlin thinks it in the context of the human relation to divinity, of time and historicity, and, in particular, of the historical interrelation between Greece and Hesperia. The tragic *nefas* is, for Hegel, a one-sided *pathos* that disrupts the integral wholeness of ethicality, whereas for Hölderlin it is a precipitous rush to a union with divinity that violates the differential character and finitude of mortal existence and that must be purified, not by destruction, but by the painful moment of "unfaithfulness" in which divinity and man fail one another. The Hegelian *pathos* of the ethical individual drowns the claims of the opposing law in forgetfulness (Hegel is fond of the metaphor of the waters of Lethe); but the pain of faithlessness, or of the mutual abandonment of divinity and man, is, Hölderlin emphasizes, burnt indelibly into memory.



Whereas Sophoclean tragedy offered to Hegel an opening unto spirit's historical self-realization as ethicality, he returns to tragedy as such, in its full reality as a poetic and performative work, in the section of the *Phenomenology* devoted to the spiritual work of art.

In the concentrated sparseness, intensity, and directness of tragic drama, rather than in the narrative distance and dilation of the epic, spirit is able to represent the intrinsic duality of ethical substance "in keeping with the nature of the concept [*des Begriffs*]."<sup>30</sup> The tragic characters or heroes are at once "elementary *general* beings and self-conscious *individualities*," revealing themselves through a discourse which is not only free of the dissipation, contingent character, and idiosyncracies of ordinary speech, but which also expresses their conscious and lucid grasp of the inner truth of their actions, and of the *pathos* which motivates them.<sup>31</sup> They do so over against "the *general* ground" of choral commentary. In contrast to Nietzsche, who will criticize an interpretation of the tragic chorus as bringing the spectator on stage and who will recall for philosophy the origins of tragic drama in sacred



dance,<sup>32</sup> Hegel straightforwardly understands the tragic chorus as the voice of the people and of the elders, as mirroring back the spectator's representation (*Vorstellung*), and also as the source of the tragic emotions of terror and pity.<sup>33</sup>

In tragic representation, the contrariety within ethical substance also articulates itself as the contrast between knowledge and ignorance, as these inform action. As Hegel explains:

The agent takes from his character his purpose and knows it as ethical essentiality; but through the determinacy of character, he knows only one of the powers of substance, and the other is for him concealed. Present reality is therefore other [as it is] in itself and [as it is] for consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

These moments are represented as the divine figures of Apollo (whose prophecies are deceptive or misleadingly formulated precisely because the knowledge that he stands for is also a not-knowing, or a nonacknowledgment of the whole), and of the Erinys (the Fury), a chthonic power who stands here for what lies hidden, and for the right of the violated. Zeus, as the divine form of substance itself, represents “the necessity of the *interrelation*” of the two and thus the balance and repose of the whole. Therefore, Hegel comments, tragedy initiates the “depopulation” of the divine or mythic realm which, in his characterization, appears to be a movement toward monotheism:

The self-consciousness which is represented in [tragedy] thus knows only one highest power, and this Zeus alone as the power of the state or of the hearth and, within the contrariety of knowledge, [him alone] as the father of the knowledge of the *particular* that is taking form—and as the Zeus of the oath and the Erinys, of the *general* [as] of the inwardness that dwells in what is hidden.<sup>35</sup>

Hegel's Zeus, as the figure of the wholeness of ethical substance, contrasts with Hölderlin's figure of “the more genuine Zeus,” who does not preside over a surpassed spiritual-historical configuration, but who, within both modernity and Hesperia, resists death-bound passion and brings about a return to and appreciation of “this earth” and of the measures of finitude. If this Hesperian Zeus remains nevertheless a Greek divine figure, one must consider here Hölderlin's comment to Friedrich Wilmans (the publisher of his Sophocles translations) concerning the ideal of Greek simplicity:

I believe I have written throughout against eccentric enthusiasm, and thus to have attained Greek simplicity; I also hope in the future to remain with this principle . . . against eccentric enthusiasm.<sup>36</sup>

In the Greek formative passion or *Bildungstrieb*—but not (as will be explained in subsequent chapters) in the natal endowment of the Greek spirit—Hölderlin discerned a power of resistance to a death-impassioned “enthusiasm” that he, perhaps prophetically, sensed on the Hesperian horizon.



In the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel abandons an exclusive focus on the essentiality and thought-structure of the tragic (as well as the comic), offering instead a comprehensive and searching analysis of drama (for him the highest form of poetry, and thus of art as such), and of tragedy in particular. He examines not only the distinctive characteristics of drama (as compared to epic and lyric poetry), along with the qualifications of the dramatist (he must show openness and encompassing breadth of spirit), but also the poetics of drama, its theatrical production, effects on the audience, classical and modern types, and finally the concrete forms that tragedy and comedy may achieve within the framework of these distinctions.

As concerns tragedy, Hegel identifies its originary and guiding principle as the truth of divinity—not, however, in its intrinsic repose, but as realized in the world, through the *pathos* of individual agency.<sup>37</sup> In this form, spiritual substance is ethicality (*das Sittliche*).

Since the *pathos* that guides individual action becomes manifest as a power that disrupts the balanced totality of ethical substance, it provokes the opposed *pathos* and power. The essence of the tragic, however, lies not only in the mutual violation and guilt that both powers necessarily incur, but in the fact that, in their “collision,” they are both intrinsically and equally justified. Hegel comments:

Only thus do things truly get serious with those gods who . . . abide in their peaceable calm and unity, now when they really have come to life as the determinate *pathos* of a human individuality, [and] lead, all justification notwithstanding, to guilt and wrong in virtue of their determinate specificity [*Besonderheit*], and the opposition thereof to [its] other.<sup>38</sup>

This conflict, however, cannot maintain itself as the truth of substance, but must sublimate (*aufheben*) itself, which requires the perdition of the tragic characters or antagonists. The truth of substance does not, Hegel stresses, lie in “one-sided specificity,” but in *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*); and it is through reconciliation that tragedy offers a vision [*Anblick*] of eternal justice.<sup>39</sup> Hegel’s emphasis here is on reconciliation as the proper work of tragedy, which, as already indicated, contrasts with Hölderlin’s focus on its work of *separation*, or of turning divinity and man away from an impassioned and precipitate union with one another. In this context, Hegel comments on the Aristotelian *katharsis* of the emotions of fear or terror and pity to the effect that what purifies them is a shift in their content, so that fear becomes trained on the ethical power which is at once a determination of free human reason and eternal and inviolable, while pity is no longer mere condolence, but recognizes and affirms the justice of the tragic character’s suffering.<sup>40</sup>

In modern, and specifically Romantic drama, Hegel points out, a concern with subjectivity and personal passion displaces the ancient thematic of ethical right and necessity. Nevertheless, and particularly in tragedy, the

course of action must reveal a certain intrinsic necessity, attributable perhaps to providence or destiny.<sup>41</sup> In comparing Greek and modern drama, Hegel explicitly limits his discussion of the former to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes (Euripides, he thinks, verges on sentimentality). Unlike Hölderlin, he summarily dismisses the East (which certainly had its own great dramatists, such as Kalidasa) as having failed to realize the principles of individual freedom and self-determination, or of “the free right of subjectivity.”<sup>42</sup> He once again relegates classical tragedy, in its concrete development, to the heroic age and revisits the chorus and individual *pathos* as the twin aspects of the representation of ethical agency, manifesting “the non-divided consciousness of the divine, and the strife of acting which, however, appears as divine power and action, [and] which carries out ethical purposes.”<sup>43</sup> The chorus, Hegel now stresses, is not merely the reflective spectator, but ethicality in its immediate, still unitary reality. Even though historically it evolved from the sacred origins of Greek tragedy (being specifically linked to the Dionysian cult), and even though this origin is in tension with the mythic content of Attic tragedy, the chorus remains essential to its modality of representation. In contrast, any attempt to reintroduce the chorus into modern tragedy is incongruous, since here the action does not issue from an originary, undivided consciousness.

At its purest, the conflict that drives the action arises between the state, as ethical life in its spiritual universality, and the “natural ethicality” of the family, as happens in *Antigone* (which Hegel characterizes rapturously as “the most excellent, satisfying work of art”).<sup>44</sup> It may, however, also take other forms, such as that of an opposition between what a person consciously intends to do and what in fact he or she does without conscious awareness or intention (the obvious example given are Sophocles’ two Oedipus tragedies). The true development of the action, Hegel concludes, is the sublation of contrariety, or the reconciliation of the powers in conflict, so that the tragic fate and suffering of the protagonists reveals its rationality, and the spectator finds herself reconciled to it. Quite apart from its historical closure, then, classical tragedy, as Hegel understands it, is also subjected to a *philosophical* closure which allows for no ultimately incomprehensible and unreconciled negativity, nor for what Hölderlin will refer to as the bare recounting, in suffering, of the empty measures of time.

In modern tragic drama, by contrast, action is not motivated by ethicality, but by purely subjective purposes, while the characters, who are psychologically far more developed, reflect inexhaustible human diversity. They often lack inner clarity and steadfastness and are given, instead, to vacillation and discord. A tragedy driven by these subjective factors is, Hegel finds, more saddening and distressing than intellectually satisfying; and poetically the development of a character in terms of “the formal necessity of [his or her] individuality” is preferable (his example is the old King Lear’s progression from

doting folly to madness). Modern tragic drama accomplishes no reconciliation capable of revealing “eternal justice.” When justice is done, it is of a more abstract and coldly legalistic nature (thus Goneril and Regan in *King Lear* are punished cruelly but appropriately). The outcome of the action, however, may not be the result of any sort of justice, but merely of unfortunate circumstances and twists of fate (in which case there is no reason why it could not just as well be fortunate).<sup>45</sup>

In sum, then, modern drama has necessarily exceeded the classical thought-structure of the tragic. This does not, of course, keep it from reaching sometimes unparalleled literary heights, as it does, in Hegel’s judgment, in Goethe’s *Faust* (which he characterizes as “the absolute philosophical tragedy”) or in Shakespearean tragedy (he singles out *Hamlet*, in particular, to comment on). It also does not keep it from continuing its important work of confronting systematic philosophy with the challenge of the negative, even though it can no longer do so within the parameters of ethicality.

#### NIETZSCHE’S “OPTICS” OF TRAGEDY

When the young Nietzsche entered into the tragic turning of philosophy with *The Birth of Tragedy* (published in 1872 and preceded by several closely related, unpublished essays),<sup>46</sup> he broke with Hegel’s then-dominant interpretation and redefined the tragic paradigm for philosophy. This rethinking is indebted not only to the important influence of Jacob Burckhardt, who had called attention to the sinister forces at work in the Greek *polis*,<sup>47</sup> but also and above all to Nietzsche’s intensive reading of Hölderlin. Like Hölderlin, he had attempted (in 1870–71) to write a tragedy centered on the figure of Empedocles (it did not advance beyond a cluster of plans); and it is also intriguing that “Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks” breaks off at the threshold of addressing the thought of Empedocles.<sup>48</sup> This discussion will focus only on *The Birth of Tragedy* since the larger question of Nietzsche’s ongoing rethinking of the tragic, and particularly of the figure of Dionysos, would demand a separate study.

Whereas Hölderlin had, in his Sophocles translations, affirmed the continuing life of Greek tragedy and sought to make it speak to modernity, Nietzsche, like Hegel, recognizes the death of tragedy. Although, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he envisaged its possible rebirth out of the spirit of (Wagnerian) music, he castigates himself in the distanced retrospect of his “Attempt at Self-Criticism” for “tying hopes” to what left nothing to be hoped for and for his advocacy of a music that he came to consider not only as “the most un-Greek of all possible art forms,” but also as dangerous due to its being “an intoxicating and, at the same time, *befogging* narcotic.”<sup>49</sup> Yet it remains true that the fundamental concern of *The Birth of Tragedy* itself is the phoenix-like rebirth of tragedy and the need of modernity for this rebirth.<sup>50</sup>

For Nietzsche, the death of tragedy did not just follow from the exhaustion (or dialectical surpassing) of ethicality; tragedy died violently and, indeed, in a tragic manner.<sup>51</sup> It perished by “suicide,” at the hands of the last of the great tragedians, Euripides, who not only prepared the way for its successor, new Attic comedy, by popularizing its formal and exalted diction, but who, on a deeper level, sought in vain to make intellectual sense of its recalcitrant mythic material, together with the work of his predecessors. Euripides, as Nietzsche understands him, was one of those rarest of artists he speaks of in the “Attempt at Self-Criticism” (and who, he notes, might have formed the proper audience for his own book), in that he was both a highly gifted creator and an incisive analytical thinker.<sup>52</sup> As such an artist, Nietzsche remarks, even Euripides was perhaps still only a mask for divinity; but the god speaking through him was “not Dionysos, nor yet Apollo, but a wholly newborn demon called *Socrates*.”<sup>53</sup> In the terser language of the “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” tragedy perished of “the Socratism of morality, of dialectic, of the contentment and serenity of theoretical man.”<sup>54</sup> This indicates that it did not really die once and for all in antiquity, but that its death throes prolonged themselves certainly right into the Hegelian analysis. Tragedy’s work—its very life, as Nietzsche understands it—is stifled in being cast as a work of reconciliation that culminates in the sublation of contrariety within ethical life. Its proper work is one, not of reconciliation, but of presentation.

What tragedy presents is ultimately Dionysian truth, which is inherently conflictual, given that the Dionysian and Apollonian primordial art energies (which recall Hölderlin’s aorgic and organic energies or principles) require one another; they can come fully into their own only in an intimacy of strife.<sup>55</sup> In the “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche therefore emphasizes that morality (*die Moral*) or “the *moral* interpretation and significance of existence [*Dasein*],” which suppresses contrariety in its quest for justification and reconciliation, is hostile to life, given that life is “essentially amoral.” Along with morality or (Hegelian) ethicality, he castigates the scientific attitude (*die Wissenschaftlichkeit*) as “a fear of and flight from pessimism,” and thus as a ruse against truth.<sup>56</sup>

Nietzsche characterizes the “pessimism,” which he stresses in the “Attempt at Self-Criticism” (and which figures in the very title of the 1886 edition which includes this self-critical preface), as a “pessimism of strength” which shrinks from nothing and which springs, not from depressive weariness, but from exuberant vitality:

Is there perhaps a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual pre-disposition for the hard, the terrible, evil, problematic [aspects] of existence, out of its [own] wellbeing, overflowing health, its *plenitude* . . . a testing courage of the sharpest view which *demands* the horrible as the worthy enemy?<sup>57</sup>

Such a courageous vision, however, would be seared and blinded were it to gaze nakedly into the abyss; for “awful night” is no less destructive to sight

than is the solar brilliance.<sup>58</sup> If perhaps the dancing “dark, colored spots” or after-images that appear in response to excessive brightness are a healing antidote, the same, Nietzsche reflects, can be said of the luminous projections (*Lichtbilderscheinungen*) that, for one who has gazed into the abyss, configure the tragic hero. They constitute an Apollonian mask whose beauty allows tragic truth to be envisaged.<sup>59</sup>

Rather than viewing art under the distorting “optics” of theoretical knowledge, Nietzsche proposes to view theoretical reason itself under the optics of art and art, ultimately, under the optics of life, given that “all life rests upon semblance, art, deception, optics, a necessity of the perspectival, and of error.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is art that is “the properly metaphysical activity of man;” and (against Hegel, for whom art is an essentially surpassed self-realization of spirit), “the existence of the world is justified (*gerechtfertigt*) only as an aesthetic phenomenon.” Even morality or ethicality must ultimately be viewed as an appearance (*Erscheinung*).<sup>61</sup> One might perhaps say (although Nietzsche does not put it that way) that morality, at its best, consummates an art of living that lets its character as an artful creation and appearance shimmer through its perfected forms.

As Nietzsche explains, with reference to Raphael’s painting *The Transfiguration of Christ*, appearance or luminous semblance (*der Schein*) is, at its most fundamental and preartistic level, a sheer reflection (*Widerschein*) of the traumatized vision expressed by the mythic saying of Silenus (to the effect that it would be best for humans not to be born, and second-best to die soon), or of “the eternal contradiction [echoing the Heraclitean *polemos*] that is the father of all things.” Humans are caught up in this reflection in that they are constrained to experience it as physical reality, and as their own (illusional) substance.<sup>62</sup>

What allows a transfigured, visionary “new world of appearance” (*visionsgleiche neue Scheinwelt*) to emerge from and to redeem the primary reflection of discordant Dionysian truth is the Apollonian art impulse, generative of “a world of beauty” and dependent upon measure, limit, and the self-knowledge enjoined by the Delphic oracle. The supposedly naïve classical artist (personified above all by Homer) creates out of an utter self-dedication to and absorption in this visionary world. With this “mirroring of beauty,” consummated by Homer, Nietzsche comments, “the Hellenic ‘will’ fought against the talent for suffering and for the wisdom of suffering [which is] correlative to artistic talent.”<sup>63</sup>

Only after a protracted strife between the Dionysian and Apollonian energies (which, with each major new form of Hellenic art, enhanced one another through their mutual challenge) could their “mysterious marriage” ensue and give birth to Attic tragedy (Nietzsche personifies this “child” as at once Antigone and Cassandra).<sup>64</sup> This marital union, however, did not reconcile or neutralize the antagonism of the two principles. In Günter Figal’s

characterization, it constituted a particularly successful yet momentary working through of their strife, which allowed them distinctly to come into their own and reveal themselves. In an achievement of a full reconciliation, art itself would die; for, as Figal puts it, this would “annihilate the appearance which nevertheless sustains [art].”<sup>65</sup> The promised union is then forever postponed; and, as David Farrell Krell puts it, upon such proposing and postponing “hangs the fate of the Dionysian philosophy as a whole, as of every philosophy of ephemeral unification and inevitable dissolution.”<sup>66</sup>

The Greek tragedies that, for Nietzsche, are paradigmatic do not include *Antigone*. They are Sophocles’ two Oedipus tragedies and Aeschylus’s *Prometheus*. In *Oedipus Tyrannos*, Nietzsche calls attention to the sovereign serenity that results from following the intricate dialectical process by which the protagonist attains self-knowledge—a serenity that mitigates the horror of the myth. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, this same serenity becomes supernaturally exalted; it transfigures the aged Oedipus’s sheer passive exposure to suffering into “highest activity,” whereas his earlier active stance as a solver of riddles and a decisive ruler only ensnared him in passivity. In this resolution of the seemingly inextricable “knot” of the Oedipus myth, Nietzsche sees “the divine counterpart of dialectics.” However, the resolution remains part and parcel of the projected image, the healing phantom of light that conceals the myth’s deeper import: namely that Dionysian wisdom is destructive of nature as well as of the natural self.<sup>67</sup> This deeper truth recalls the “passion for death” that is the destructive pull of Hölderlin’s aorgic principle.

The Prometheus myth, by contrast, exalts the glory of active transgression, of the hybristic pride of the artist who challenges and rivals the gods. Aeschylus, with his characteristic concern for justice, or for the sovereignty of apportioning Moira, seeks metaphysically to reconcile the “two worlds of suffering,” that of the transgressor and that of the violated gods. However, his poetic interpretation of the myth is once again a luminous and ethereal image mirrored “in a black lake of suffering.” The Dionysian insight expressed by the Prometheus myth concerns the titanic drive to carry finite individuals or singular beings “higher and higher,” beyond any defining identity and (Apollonian) measure. This transgressive drive entails the necessity of suffering. Even though Aeschylus is, in his concern for justice, an Apollonian artist, his *Prometheus*, Nietzsche finds, is ultimately a Dionysian mask.<sup>68</sup>

Nietzsche, it must be acknowledged, considers the Prometheus myth to be “the property of the entire Aryan community of peoples,” casting the Oedipus myth as “Semitic,” due to its supposed focus on sin and on a fall. Matters are certainly not improved by his further assimilation of “Aryan transgression” to the figure of man, and of “Semitic sin” to that of woman. However, the fundamental Dionysian import of both myths, uniting them in their mutual opposition, underlies his further statement that between them “there exists a degree of familial relation as between brother and sister.” The

tangled interrelation of the two paradigmatic tragic myths with a fundamental duality of “peoples” and with sexual difference constitutes a more recalcitrant knot than the one Nietzsche finds resolved in *Oedipus at Colonus*.<sup>69</sup>

It is interesting, finally, that the Prometheus myth, as the myth of the creator and artist, is centered on the theft and gift of fire—the element which Hölderlin’s Empedocles exalts and with which he seeks to unite himself in death, whereas, in his “Remarks” on Sophocles, it has become the emblem of a searing desolation. For Nietzsche, fire remains the symbol of “the best and highest humans can share in,” of the radiance of human achievement. He speculates that early humans would have considered man’s disposition over fire, previously received reverently as a heavenly gift, to be sacrilegious. Thus, fire, for Nietzsche, marks both an active and creative transgression and the punishing pain that such a transgression or sacrilege necessarily entails. In this conjunction he finds “the ethical basis for pessimistic tragedy.”<sup>70</sup> Unlike Hölderlin’s conflagration, Nietzschean fire, though searing, burns brightly and does not lay waste.

#### TWO TWENTIETH-CENTURY PERSPECTIVES: HEIDEGGER, SCHÜRMAN

Heidegger is the one major twentieth-century thinker to have engaged with Hölderlin’s thought and work as a whole, in particular his thought on tragedy, not in the interest of scholarly interpretation, but of orienting his own philosophical itinerary. Given this special intellectual relationship, his two explicit and searching discussions of Sophoclean tragedy, in *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1935 and in the 1942 lecture course on Hölderlin’s hymn *Der Ister*,<sup>71</sup> are examined in the concluding chapter of this book. Of these significantly different analyses, only the second, focused exclusively on the first *stasimon* of *Antigone*, is informed by a dialogue with Hölderlin, whereas the first, which is concerned with the intimate interrelation between being, unconcealment, and *Schein*, as both radiant appearance and semblance, is indebted to both Schelling and Nietzsche. In this initial analysis, Heidegger turns to the first *stasimon* of *Antigone*, with its focus on *technē* and the limits set to it, only after having already, if briefly, discussed Oedipus, in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, as a figure of the extremity of the Greek passion for the unconcealment of being, or of “the strife [*des Kampfes*] for being itself.” This strife is enacted, for Heidegger, within the domain of knowledge or of intellectual discipline (*Wissen* and *Wissenschaft*); and he cites, in this context, the Hölderlinian saying that King Oedipus may have had “an eye too many.”<sup>72</sup>

It will be instructive to see (in chapter 7, below) the transformative force of Heidegger’s meditation on Hölderlin’s reading of Sophocles as concerns his own understanding of Attic tragedy (and of the question of the tragic in relation to both Greek and German thought); but one must bear in mind that



these two explicit analyses do not suffice as the textual basis for a full study of the question of the tragic or of tragedy in Heidegger's thought. Such a study can, of course, not possibly be undertaken here. Suffice it to remark that the textual basis it would require is not limited to works that, however briefly or even obliquely, refer to tragedy. Schmidt offers a detailed account of these, which is valuable in that it places them in historical as well as biographical context. He comments interestingly on Heidegger's quotation, in his rectoral address of 1933,<sup>73</sup> of a single line from Aeschylus's Prometheus, to the effect that *technē* is weaker than necessity although, somewhat strangely, he does not relate this citation on Heidegger's part to Nietzsche's privileging of *Prometheus* as the tragedy of the transgressor as a creator (that is, a practitioner of *technē*), and thus as supposedly the paradigmatic Aryan tragedy. Certainly this consideration would be relevant in the context of the rectoral address as well as in relation to the prominence of the issue of *technē* in Heidegger's discussion of *Antigone*.

In commenting on *Oedipus Tyrannos* in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger remarks that:

The space, as it were, that opens up in the inter-involvement of being, unconcealment, and radiance/semblance [*Schein*], I understand as *errancy* [*die Irre*]. Semblance, deception, delusion, errancy stand in a determinate relation of essentiality and historicity.<sup>74</sup>

This passage immediately recalls Heidegger's poignant analysis in his 1933 essay "On the Essence of Truth" ("Vom Wesen der Wahrheit"), of the ineluctability or error and errancy which, along with the 1942/43 lecture course on Parmenides, would be profoundly relevant for a fuller analysis of the tragic in Heidegger's thought.<sup>75</sup> The latter text includes a discussion of *Oedipus at Colonus* and of awe (αἰδώς) in Pindar (who is an essential poet for both Hölderlin and Heidegger);<sup>76</sup> furthermore, both of Heidegger's explicit discussions of tragedy are closely entwined with readings of Parmenides. A further text that would arguably be especially relevant (although it does not mention tragedy) is the 1946 essay (written on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Rilke's death) "What are Poets for?" ("Wozu Dichter?"), in which Hölderlin is characterized as "the pre-cursor of poets in a destitute time."<sup>77</sup> Concerning Hölderlin's position for Heidegger, Otto Pöggeler's comment concerning the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Contributions to Philosophy)*—which would also be indispensable to a textual dossier on the tragic in Heidegger's thought—is particularly relevant:

Heidegger's real major work, the still unpublished [at the time, in 1988] *Beiträge zur Philosophie* of 1936–1938, are determined by a conversation with Hölderlin. They want to lead out of the externalizations and omissions of the time by building a "precinct" [literally, an "ante-courtyard," *Vorhof*] in

which Hölderlin's word can be heard. 'The historical determination of philosophy,' say the *Beiträge*, 'culminates in the recognition of the necessity of making Hölderlin's word heard.'<sup>78</sup>

Given the focus of this study on Hölderlin's philosophy of tragedy, however, rather than on Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, or on the mediating role of that reading for the philosopher's own understanding of the tragic, it will be necessary to resist the temptation to enter upon a study of any of the indicated texts. The one Heideggerian text that will nevertheless be considered here, if only in part, as a kind of supplement to the 1935 and 1942 texts to be examined, is "The Saying of Anaximander" of 1946. The conception of the essence of the tragic that Heidegger articulates here, with reference to Anaximander's *διδόναι . . . δίκην . . . τῆς ἀδικίας*, carries forward his discussions of the tragic in Sophocles.<sup>79</sup>

Beings, Heidegger writes in "The Saying of Anaximander," come into their own as cast into errancy (*[sind] in die Irre ereignet*); and "errdom" (a coinage to correspond here to Heidegger's usage of the German *Irrtum*) is instituted by being itself as the essential domain of history. Every epochal coming-into-its-own of a world-configuration is an *epochē* of being, and as such necessarily an epoch of errancy.<sup>80</sup> While the notion of errancy recalls, of course, its thematization in "The Essence of Truth" and in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger here also characterizes the ec-static character of *Dasein* (or human being) as its responsive relation to being's epochal granting and self-withdrawal.

The early Greek (and, for the Occident, still, in a certain sense, future) experience of being which Heidegger finds articulated in the Anaximander fragment is the experience of presencing or manifestation as a passage out of emerging (*γένεσις*) into absconding (*φθορά*), so that what tarries (*weilt*) in presencing does so only as drawn into a double absencing. However, the presencing of beings is pervaded by *adikia* or the failure of *dikē*, which Heidegger thinks, not as a failure of justice in the juridical sense, but as an insurrection on the part of the singular against this temporalization and its own utter transience. Beings crave abiding presence or "the constancy of continued existence,"<sup>81</sup> and they do so insofar as they are released into errancy. Nonetheless, beings also find themselves constrained, by the very time-character of their presencing (by the truth that they are not, as Heidegger puts it, inserted like slices of presence between segments of absence, but are temporal through and through, and thus incapable of sheer presence) to grant *dikē* (*διδόναι . . . δίκην*), and thus to overcome *adikia*. This is the experience of being which Heidegger now calls "tragic," commenting that, to trace the very essence (*Wesen*) of the tragic, one must think the being of beings (*τὸ εἶν*, in the Archaic Greek Heidegger privileges here), such that the beings that come to presence (*τὰ εἶντα*) do so ultimately in letting the fugue-like fitting (*den fugend-fügenden Fug*) of *dikē* prevail.<sup>82</sup>

Heidegger (who subtly reinterprets the grammatical structure of Anaximander's fragment, as compared to readings ranging from Nietzsche's to John Burnet's) stresses that, together with the granting of *dikē* (which they do not grant to each other) beings are also constrained to grant to one another *tisis*, which he understands as considerate esteem, and for which he chooses, as a translating term, the archaic German noun *Ruch*: they cede to one another the privilege of coming to presence.

But then to what do they grant *dikē*? In answering this question, Heidegger interprets Anaximander's notion of τὸ χρεών as "the oldest name in which thinking brings being to language."<sup>83</sup> What comes to language in this notion is that being "hands over" presencing to what comes to presence, while also keeping it "in hand" (it is not possible here to enter upon the etymological reflections by which Heidegger supports this interpretation, or upon his translating German and Latin terms). If presencing then happens in accordance with (κατὰ) τὸ χρεών, it accords with the relational draw (*Beziehung*) by which being both releases and claims what comes to presence. Heidegger finds this thought of τὸ χρεών, which (although in a still inchoate way) thinks being and beings in their differing, akin to the thought of *Moirai*, the One, and *logos* in the thought of Parmenides and of Heraclitus, and he also hears its resonance in the Platonic notion of *idea* and in Aristotle's *energeia*.

If the experience of being articulated here is tragic in an essential sense, it might seem that Heidegger's understanding of the tragic has come to repudiate the ethical domain of action or of human destiny. This appearance, however, is superficial; for an oblivion of the differing within manifestation—the differing that the tragic thought of being seeks to bring to language—is, for Heidegger, at the root of the rampant totalization (which he discusses as "the single will to conquer" and as the errant confusion or *Wirre*) that afflicts contemporary world history. It will be instructive to see, in considering his discussion of tragedy in the 1942 lecture course, how his understanding of *dikē* and of the tragic has altered and deepened in "The Saying of Anaximander."



It may seem somewhat surprising to turn, in this context, to Reiner Schürmann as a late-twentieth-century theorist of the tragic and tragedy given that, in *Des hégémonies brisées*, he dismisses Hölderlin rather summarily as a thinker who fails to recognize tragic singularization or the conflictual character of presencing; and he does so on the basis of little more than a brief and casually interpreted quotation.<sup>84</sup> As a consummate interpreter of Heidegger,<sup>85</sup> however, Schürmann may find himself in the wake of Hölderlin even when he repudiates him. More importantly, tragedy retains, for Schürmann, its contemporary philosophical relevance, so that his work constitutes, in this respect, an answer to a question Simon Sparks raises with reference to Walter Benjamin's view that tragedy has reached its epochal closure. Can one

really, Sparks asks, exclude tragedy from philosophy without “passing all too quickly over the trace of the tragic which would lie at its origin?”<sup>86</sup>

For Schürmann, tragedy offers both a model and a module (in the sense of an intensification in a concentrated format) of the conflict (*le différend*) between the contrary impulses of natality and mortality that, respectively, maximize and fracture the *archai* or governing principles which, as “hegemonic phantasms,” are the ultimate referents of a given epochal configuration of meaning. In *Des hégémonies brisées*, Schürmann searchingly examines three such epochal phantasms: the Greek principle of the One (with reference to Parmenides and Plotinus), the Latin principle of Nature (in Cicero, Augustine, and certain medieval thinkers), and the modern principle of the subjectivity of consciousness (with reference to Luther and Kant), together with the discordant temporalization that, for Heidegger, is the tragic origin that disappropriates hegemonic phantasms. Schürmann’s constellation of texts examined for each epoch is intended to juxtapose those that inaugurate the epochal configuration with those that subvert it.

Hegemonic maximization of an epochal principle is accomplished at the cost of cutting all ties with the singular phenomena that the principle is informed by, for, to function as an *archē*, it must render itself inaccessible to any possible experience. In contrast to this de-phenomenalization (under the aegis of which the singular becomes the particular, a mere instance or exemplification), mortality singularizes: “It renders us essentially alone, estranged, silent. And in haste, for it is mortality—being-toward-death—which constitutes temporality. . . . Mortality renders us familiar with our *singularization-to-come*.”<sup>87</sup>

Mortality erodes any governing hegemonic principle or law in the manner of what Schürmann characterizes as a destabilizing and withdrawing undertow. The integrative violence of the establishment of a phantasmatic principle is thus counteracted by the dissolving violence of singularization, so that, as Schürmann puts it, “the tragic knowledge [*savoir*] of the conflict has as its content the legislative-transgressive fracture.”<sup>88</sup>

The tragic hero, Schürmann stresses, comes face-to-face with, and is thus forced to see, binding laws in conflict (and leaving no alternative), as Aeschylus’s Agamemnon finds himself under a double and irreconcilable obligation to the Argive navy that he commands and to Iphigeneia, his daughter. He confronts an ineluctable nomic conflict between a certain principle of effective governance and concern for the men under his command, and a singular familial bond. No sooner, however, does Agamemnon confront this double bind in agony than he “resolves” it by an act of forcible self-blinding (an act which, whether metaphoric, as in *Agamemnon*, or physically enacted, as in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, recurs in Greek tragedy). Agamemnon blinds himself to one of the laws in conflict, or to the claim it has upon him (predictably to the one that concerns a woman and the familial sphere), and he brazenly sacrifices his daughter. His denial shows an inherent escalation in

that it is itself denied: from one moment to the next he pronounces it right and good to sacrifice the girl; he sees and treats her as though she were a sacrificial goat (the animal symbol of tragedy); and agony cedes to audacity.

Tragedy, Schürmann notes, traces out a line of sight—or perhaps rather (as this book argues in its analyses of Sophoclean tragedies) of its loss and its restoration at the point where a deliberate but partial self-blinding has become an encompassing and inextricable blindness, the point of *atē*, which is at once delusion and disaster. Only at this point is blindness transmuted into tragic insight, or into a visionary recognition of discordant temporalization.

If the model and module of tragedy remains philosophically pertinent today, the reason is that, as Schürmann writes:

No age, before our own, has known planetary violence. None, therefore, is in a better position to unlearn phantasmatic maximization, to learn the tragic condition, and to hold on to it. A privilege which itself is a *deimon*. The task, then, of grasping how violence is born of a trauma that thought inflicts on itself will not exactly be disinterested.<sup>89</sup>

Although no brief and summary discussion can hope to do justice to the complexity of Schürmann's posthumous book (and even though he repudiates Hölderlin), these remarks will perhaps have succeeded in indicating the parameters against which Hölderlin's philosophy of tragedy needs to be situated today. It is time, therefore, to engage now with Hölderlin's thought.