**TRAGIC RECOGNITION**
**Action and Identity in *Antigone* and Aristotle**

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> This unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and speaker's life; but as such it can be known, that is, grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end.
>
> —Hannah Arendt[1]

### I. RECOGNITION, ANAGNÔRISIS, AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Over the last decade, the explosion of interest in problems of identity and difference in contemporary politics, together with the renewal of attention to the concept of *Anerkennung* in German idealism, has led many political theorists to reconceive justice as a matter of equal or mutual recognition.[2] The key insight behind this move, in Charles Taylor's words, is that "a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves."[3] The ideal of recognition responds to this vulnerabil-

ity by demanding that people extend each other a distinctively thick kind of respect, grounded in and expressing the undistorted cognition of each other's particular social identities: as Taylor, glossing Hegel, puts it, "the struggle for recognition can find only one satisfactory solution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals."[4]

As fans of drama and readers of Aristotle will know, however, this is not the only discourse in which the term "recognition" plays an important role. Against the background of the tradition of recognition-scenes in Greek literature—Oedipus's shattering self-discovery; Electra's recognition of Orestes via his footprints and hair—Aristotle declared recognition, *anagnôrisis*, to be one of the constitutive elements of the best tragedies; since then, recognition has been a central concept in poetics, and has continued to be an important literary device.[5] Yet on the tragic stage, recognition looks startlingly different. In political theory, recognition is typically cast as a source of satisfaction or fulfillment, capable of emancipating people from the destructive effects of ignorance and prejudice. It is a social good, an object of ethical and political aspiration. Scenes of tragic *anagnôrisis*, by contrast, may also be moments of catastrophic loss, occasions for mourning, provocations to strike out one's eyes. So tightly intertwined are the satisfactions and dangers of *anagnôrisis* that Jocasta's penultimate words to Oedipus—"May you never know who you are!"—seem to be meant at once as a curse and as a blessing.[6]

What do recognition and *anagnôrisis*, so different in valence, have to do with each other? The standard English translation of *anagnôrisis* notwithstanding, recognition in contemporary political theory and *anagnôrisis* in tragedy are not simply two words for the same thing. Their relationship is less direct than that, and more complex. On the one hand, recognition and *anagnôrisis* open out onto what we might call common ontological terrain, for both phenomena have something to do with the relationship between action and identity in human life.[7] The ideal of recognition is founded on the notion that what we do (and what others do to us) is rooted in who we are (and who we are taken to be); likewise, *anagnôrisis* in tragedy matters precisely because our interactions are shaped by what we know, or what we think we know, about who we and others are. As Aristotle says, *anagnôrisis* is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, and *thus to either love or hate*, on the part of the personages marked for good or evil fortune."[8] On the other hand, the discourses of recognition and *anagnôrisis* also offer us sharply contrasting perspectives on the ontological terrain they share. The difference in valence between recognition in political theory and *anagnôrisis* in tragedy, I shall suggest, is the symptom of an underlying disagreement about the nature

of the relationship between action and identity—and this disagreement has substantial ethical and political consequences.

To understand exactly where recognition and *anagnôrisis* diverge, recall that the politics of recognition has its roots in controversies over the nature of human agency and its relationship to identity in the so-called liberal-communitarian debate of the 1980s. There, Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, and others challenged what they took to be liberalism's conception of the self as a "disengaged" or "unencumbered" chooser, insisting that our ends may also be constituted by unchosen attachments and circumstances. On this view, agency involves not only *choosing* one's ends, but also *knowing* one's location in social and historical context.[9] And in the nineties, the politics of recognition emerged as a pluralist variation on this critique of the unencumbered subject, in which "identity" took the place of "community" as the preferred vocabulary for talking about encumbrance, and in which "recognition" came to stand for the sort of knowledge of self and other that enables agency.

Importantly, in characterizing the self as encumbered, theorists like Taylor and Sandel often took themselves to be criticizing a wrongheaded ideal of agency as mastery, independence, or sovereignty, reminding us instead of the ineliminability of human finitude, mutual dependence, and vulnerability.[10] Yet this critique of the aspiration to sovereign agency was less thorough than one might think. It rested on a claim about how we acquire the purposes on which we act, asserting that these arise not only out of what we choose, but also out of the larger contexts in which we find ourselves embedded. The heart of the ideal of sovereign agency, however, lies elsewhere: not in its conception of agency's ground, but in the idea that agency is straightforwardly a matter of control or efficacy in carrying out one's own purposes—*wherever* those purposes come from, and whether they are chosen or discovered. Thus, while the critique of the unencumbered self did deal a serious blow to one version of the ideal of sovereign agency—the ideal of sovereignty through disengagement—the fantasy of sovereign agency could easily reassert itself, albeit in different form, even within accounts of the self as encumbered.[11] The politics of recognition is a case in point. Abandoning the notion of agency as the masterful carrying out of one's own radically free choices, it imagines an ideal-typical agent who is empowered, both by self-knowledge and by the confirming recognition of others, to act in accordance with her identity.[12] Such an agent is not isolated or aloof, but her life among others is nevertheless untouched by vulnerability: she has won her sovereignty in the thick of history and context, rather than above it.

Tragedy challenges the straightforward association of agency with control that underlies *both* of these versions of the aspiration to sovereignty. It does

so by focusing our attention on what, in an Arendtian spirit, I shall call the "impropriety" of action. Impropriety, in this context, is meant to suggest not an ethical failing but an ontological condition: it refers to action's tendency to outrun or exceed the ends through which we attempt to govern it, whether those ends are grounded in identity, choice, or both.[13] Tragedy teaches us that such impropriety is a constitutive feature of human action, not a contingent affliction: the very conditions that make us *potent* agents—our materiality, which ties us to the causal order of the world, our plurality, which makes it possible for our acts to be meaningful—also make us potent beyond our own control. From this perspective, efforts to achieve sovereign agency, whether through choice *or* through recognition, are themselves ethically and politically problematic *mis*recognitions—not misrecognitions of the identity of another, as that term usually implies, but failures to *acknowledge* key aspects of our own fundamental situation, including especially our own finitude in relation to the future. Tragic *anagnôrisis*, I shall suggest, brings acknowledgment thus conceived into the foreground, highlighting its difference from, and potential for conflict with, recognition, and ultimately enabling us to reconsider the nature of injustice on the terrain of identity and difference.

To spell out these claims, this essay turns to one vivid example of tragedy—Sophocles' *Antigone*—along with key portions of Aristotle's philosophical treatment of tragedy in the *Poetics*. The *Antigone*, of course, has often been read through the lens of identity. One standard approach to the play, usually traced back to Hegel, sees Antigone and Creon as representatives of conflicting positions within ancient Greek society, with Antigone acting as a personification of the *oikos*, kinship, and the female, and Creon serving as representative of the *polis*, law, and the male.[14] Jean Bethke Elshtain's appropriation of Antigone as a heroine of difference feminism, whose "primordial family morality" can still be taken up in acts of resistance to the tyranny of modern Creons, is a noteworthy example of this approach.[15] Others invert this reading: criticizing what she sees as the antipolitical character of Elshtain's feminism, Mary Dietz argues that Antigone's obedient sister Ismene is the real representative of family morality, while Antigone herself is best understood as the bearer of a *political* identity. In her resistance to Creon, she acts as "a citizen of Thebes" who represents "the customs and traditions of a collective civil life, an entire political ethos, which Creon's mandate and he himself threaten."[16]

Each of these interpretations shows us something important about the *Antigone*—or, more precisely, each of these interpretations shows us something important about Antigone, for Elshtain and Dietz focus more on the character of Antigone than on the action of Sophocles' play. For Elshtain and Dietz, understanding the *Antigone* is simply a matter of recognizing who

Antigone is—member of the family or political actor—yet the trouble is that both of these apparently incompatible readings are *partly* persuasive, and neither Elshtain nor Dietz accounts for Antigone's uneasy fit with the categories through which they attempt to recognize her.[17] The partiality of such readings of *Antigone*, I shall suggest, lies in their exclusive focus on *who* Antigone is—an approach against which Aristotle warns us in the *Poetics* when he insists that "the most important of the six [parts of tragedy] is the combination of the incidents of the story," because "tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life" (1450a15-17).

To invoke the *Poetics* in the course of an interpretation of the *Antigone* may seem a risky approach, particularly since the *Poetics* is often taken to be a distortion of tragedy, which "tame[s] its subversive vigor" by insisting that the world of tragedy is, in the end, both intelligible to reason and "intrinsically shaped to human interests."[18] In some respects this concern is valid. Aristotle's distaste for plots organized around divine caprice or sheer chance, as well as his (inconstant) preference for the drama of averted catastrophe, suggests that he is indeed working to defend tragedy's place in the city by eliding some of its most troubling dimensions.[19] Yet the case is sometimes overstated. In her detailed critique of the *Poetics*, for example, Michelle Gellrich argues that Aristotle, in his drive to render the tragic world intelligible, domesticates tragedy by subordinating action to *êthos* or "character," which determines its nature and direction.[20] In his peculiarly untragic version of tragedy, she concludes, "an action will be of the same quality as the character who conceives it: if the character is good, as Aristotle says he must be, his action will be good."[21] Of course Gellrich is right that such a view—reminiscent of Plato's claim that "the good isn't the cause of all things, then, but only of good ones"—would do violence to tragedy.[22] And it is also true that Aristotelian ethics does aim at the stabilization of conduct through the cultivation of virtuous character. But to stop there would be to miss the force of the equally Aristotelian principle on which I focus in this essay—that in tragedy, plot and action take priority over character. Just as Aristotle's meditations on the vulnerability of the virtuous and the fragility of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics* mark his acknowledgment of the limits of his own ethical project, his claim about the priority of plot over character, I shall suggest, reflects a broader view of human action as at best imperfectly governable by choice or *êthos*, as well as a sensitivity to the fact that willful blindness or sovereign hostility to contingency can be even more disastrous than contingency itself.[23] To say this is, to be sure, to draw a "universal" lesson from tragedy, but it is a lesson that cuts against the rationalist fetishization of "coherence and order" Gellrich attributes to Aristotle, aligning him—at least momentarily—*with* rather than *against* Sophocles.[24]

In the following sections, I linger over this momentary alignment, reading Aristotle's maxim about the priority of action in tragedy together with Sophocles' *Antigone*.[25] Aristotle's claim about the priority of action in tragedy, I shall argue, helps bring into focus the ways in which Antigone and Creon both try *and* fail to act in character; at the same time, in this double movement of attempt and failure, the *Antigone* itself elegantly juxtaposes recognition and *anagnôrisis*, shedding light on the meaning of *anagnôrisis* in Aristotle's poetics, and on its wider ethical and political significance. On the one hand, the *Antigone* stages a paradigmatic struggle for recognition. Its central characters attempt to achieve sovereign agency by acting on the basis of their understandings of who they, and others, are, and by demanding respect from each other on the basis of the identities that animate them. (No doubt it's because Antigone and Creon articulate their identities so forcefully, and so persuasively, that character-based readings of the Antigone have been so attractive: these antagonists *want* to be recognized, and they have seduced many interpreters into indulging them.) On the other hand, in keeping with Aristotle's insistence on the ultimate priority of action over character, the movement of the *Antigone* cuts against Antigone's and Creon's pursuits of sovereignty, offering us powerful examples of the impropriety of action, and setting the stage for moments of tragic *anagnôrisis* quite different from the satisfying recognitions Antigone and Creon had sought.

## II. THE PURSUIT OF RECOGNITION IN THE ANTIGONE

In what sense is Sophocles' *Antigone* framed as a conflict over recognition?[26] As I have indicated, issues of recognition typically arise at the intersection between identity and action—that is, when crucial practical questions seem to hang on the question of *who* someone is—either oneself or another or, more typically, both. In the *Antigone*, recognition in this sense is first and most obviously at issue in connection with the dead Polyneices, whose body is the principal object of controversy in the *Antigone*, and the source of the deadly conflict between Creon and Antigone. This body raises a problem of identity not because there is any doubt about whether the body is Polyneices, but because there is a serious question about who Polyneices is—that is, under what description he ought to be recognized. On the one hand, Polyneices is a native of Thebes, a member of the ruling family, the brother (and more, since this is the house of Laius) of Antigone and Ismene, and the nephew (and more) of Creon himself; and under these descriptions, he unquestionably ought to be buried.[27] On the other hand, Polyneices is a traitor, who has just raised an army against Thebes out of jealousy and vindic-

tiveness toward his brother, and this seems to demand that Polyneices be treated differently in death: only the patriot should be buried, while the traitor should be left to rot.[28]

Yet the *Antigone*'s struggle is not only about recognizing Polyneices. Although his death is the immediate occasion for the conflict between Antigone and Creon, the significance of their confrontation quickly widens, for both ground their obligations toward the corpse not only in their descriptions of Polyneices but also in accounts of their *own* identities. It should come as no surprise that the identities of Antigone and Creon are drawn into the controversy over Polyneices, for funeral ritual is at least as much about the living as about the dead: rites of burial and lament memorialize, but they also help the mourner to work through loss.[29] The linguistic and physical artifacts produced as a part of funeral ritual—laments, eulogies, grave markers—cannot replace a lost person; but in the production of such artifacts, and through participation in the symbolic systems that govern funeral procedure, mourners work to reconstruct the agency that the traumatic event of death had interrupted.[30] That agency, in turn, is never experienced immediately and abstractly, but only by occupying particular roles and identities in the social world; and since the roles and identities through which different people experience agency may make incompatible demands in a single case, an instance of mourning can quickly become the occasion for broader social conflict. In this way, the struggle over Polyneices turns into a struggle for recognition *between* Antigone and Creon, as they try, unsuccessfully, to compel each other to recognize not just some facets of *Polyneices'* identity, but the legitimacy of their *own* identities—of the locations in the ethical world from which they try to address the personal and civic losses Polyneices' body represents.

Antigone and Creon introduce themselves, and articulate the identities in which they ground their acts, in the first two episodes of the play: Antigone's exchange with Ismene, and Creon's speech to the chorus. As Simon Goldhill and others have observed, one of the most important ways Antigone and Creon identify themselves and each other in these speeches is via their contrasting uses of the opposition between *philos* and *ekhthros*, which both characters initially employ with reference to Polyneices.[31] As a concrete noun, *philos* is usually translated as "friend"; as an adjective, the same word is rendered as "dear," "beloved," or "loving"; and the related noun *philia* is translated as "friendship" or "love." Correspondingly, *ekhthros*, as a concrete noun, is translated as "enemy"; as an adjective, it is rendered as "hostile" or "hated"; and the abstract noun *ekhthra* is translated as "hatred" or "enmity."[32] Yet these translations do not do justice to the semantic range of the words, especially in the case of *philos* and *philia*, which could be used in the context of nearly any "positive" reciprocal relationship, including bonds among kin,

strategic alliances, the extension of hospitality to strangers, self-love, and the ties of marriage, as well as the class of personal relationships of mutual affection and support that we normally call "friendship."[33] Precisely because of their semantic breadth, these words are well suited to become the focus of a struggle over the legitimacy and priority of different kinds of social bond. Antigone and Creon make good use of this potential, transforming what is initially a debate about Polyneices into a conflict over the proper sense of *philos* and *ekhthros*—and thereby announcing their *own* deepest commitments to each other, and to the audience.

Antigone's exchange with Ismene, for instance, is framed by the theme of *philia*. In the opening lines of the play, Antigone approaches Ismene with news of Creon's edict: "Have you heard anything?" she asks, "or don't you know that the foes' [*ekhthrôn*] trouble comes upon our friends [*philous*]?" (10). Antigone implies that in denying burial not only to the six fallen Argive commanders but also to Polyneices, Creon has brought an evil appropriate to an *ekhthros* upon a *philos*.[34] But why does she consider Polyneices *philos*? The first and most obvious source of her attachment is *kinship*: when Ismene expresses her surprise at Antigone's plan of disobedience, Antigone justifies herself simply by referring to the fact of family ties: Polyneices is "my brother, and yours, though you may wish he were not," Antigone says. Second, Antigone also indicates that her obligations of *philia* to Polyneices arise from what she will later call the "unwritten and unfailing laws" of "the gods below" (451, 455), which govern reproduction and death.[35] When Ismene declares that she feels compelled to obey the city (65-67), Antigone responds that she regards the underworld as of greater import than the world of the living, and suggests that once she has "dared the crime of piety," she will be able to lie alongside Polyneices, *philos* with *philos* (73-74). Finally, although the gendering of the conflict between Antigone and Creon is more explicit in Creon's speeches, Antigone does some of the work of gender identification in her initial exchange with her sister. Although the contrasting case of Ismene, who submissively cautions her sister to "remember that we two are women" who should not fight with men (61-62), might be taken to be indirect evidence of Antigone's *resistance* to any identification with conventional gender roles, the truth is more complex. The vocabulary of kinship with which Antigone refers to her siblings is itself gendered: the ordinary words for brother and sister, *adelphos* and *adelphê*, literally indicate kinship through the womb (*delphus*), and Antigone calls attention to this mode of kinship when she later calls Polyneices *homosplanchnos*—a less ordinary word that also means "of the same womb" (511).[36] As Charles Segal has explained, this vocabulary "makes kinship a function of the female procreative power," in direct contrast to the patrilineal system of kinship on which membership in the *polis* was

based, and from which women were excluded.[37] Moreover, Antigone's iden-tification with (at least some) conventional gender roles is later borne out by the manner in which she performs her duties of *philia* to Polyneices. Although she does initially declare her intention to "pile the burial-mound" for Polyneices (80)—a task that was generally performed by men—she does not actually bury the body but merely sprinkles dust on the corpse, "enough to turn the curse," as the guard says (255). Later, just before being led away by Creon's guards, she describes her action in a way that conforms quite pre-cisely to classical norms governing the role of women in funeral rites: "All three of you have known my hand in death," she says, referring to Oedipus, Jocasta, and Polyneices; "I washed your bodies, dressed them for the grave, poured out the last libation at the tomb" (900-902).[38] And, finally, Sophocles describes Antigone's lament over Polyneices' corpse with a familiar, gendered image specifically associated with the mourning of mothers for their children: "the sharp and shrill cry of a bitter bird which sees the nest bare where the young birds lay" (423-24).[39]

If Antigone regards Polyneices as *philos* by virtue of kinship, treats her own obligations to him as a matter of chthonian piety, and expresses a gender identity in the way she grounds and performs these obligations, Creon's early speeches sharply contest this understanding of *philia*. First, although Polyneices is Creon's kinsman too, Creon treats him as *ekhthros*, not *philos*, because for Creon the criteria of *philia* are exclusively political: "He who counts another greater friend [*philon*] than his own fatherland [*patra*], I put him nowhere," Creon announces (182-83), already invoking the principle of patrilineal descent that underlay membership in the *polis* against Antigone's matrilineal vocabulary of kinship. Only the ship of state, "sailing straight," can make it possible for us to "have friends [*philous*] at all," Creon asserts (189-90). For Creon, Polyneices ceased to be a *philos* the moment he raised an army against Thebes, and after she violates the city's laws, Antigone too will be called a "false friend" [*philos kakos*] (652).[40] In identifying himself instead as a citizen and ruler whose deepest commitment is to the all-important law of the *polis*, Creon trumps both the principle of kinship *and* the eternal and unwritten chthonian law that supposedly assigns duties within the family. Unsurprisingly, Creon's exclusively civic conception of *philia* is also rigidly *masculine*. As Creon's polemical use of the word *patra* as a synonym for the *polis* has already indicated, citizenship and rulership are properly the business of men, and only men. The intertwining of gender identity with the distinction between *polis* and *oikos*, already implied in Creon's first speech, runs so deep that Creon, upon hearing the guard's report that Polyneices' corpse has been buried, thinks only to ask "what man [*tis andrôn*] has dared to do it" (248). The fact that Antigone has disobeyed thus turns out to be an

especially potent threat to Creon's authority: it throws into question not just his authority in this particular case, but his masculinity, the condition of the possibility of his political authority *as such*. In response, Creon's gendering of the *polis* becomes more explicit, insistent, even hysterical: he repeats in different ways and to various people that he will never let himself be conquered, ruled, defeated by a woman.[41] In one remarkable passage Creon ties together his renunciation of the ties of kinship as grounds of *philia* and the preservation of his own masculinity:

> I am no man and she the man instead
> if she can have this conquest without pain.
> She is my sister's [*adelphês*] child, but were she child
> of closer kin than any at my hearth,
> she and her sister should not so escape
> their death and doom. (484-89)

The portraits that emerge in this way out of Antigone's and Creon's self-identifications, and out of the different stances they adopt toward Polyneices' body, are familiar; they show that the so-called Hegelian tendency to associate Antigone and Creon with *oikos* and *polis* (kinship and the civic, woman and man) *does* capture something crucial in the self-understandings these characters announce in the opening episodes of the play. But to say *simply* that Antigone and Creon "stand for" *oikis* and *polis* would be too simple, for it would take these characters' own projects of self- and other-recognition at face value, ignoring the ways in which their own conduct comes into conflict with the identities they announce.[42] In other words, to stop our reading the play here would be to ignore its action, which, Aristotle tells us, is the "first essential [*archê*], the life and soul [*psuchê*], so to speak, of tragedy" (1450a38-39).[43]

### III. "AN IMITATION NOT OF PERSONS BUT OF ACTION"

In chapter 6 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle makes a famous claim about the relative importance of the constituent parts of tragic drama: "The most important of the six [parts of tragedy]," he says, "is the combination of the incidents of the story," for "tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life" (1450a15-17). Thus, for Aristotle, "the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of tragedy is the plot," while "characters [*êthê*] come second" (1450a38-39); indeed, character is included for the sake of the action rather than the other way around (1450a20-22).[44] Before we can bring this claim to bear on the themes of action and identity in the *Antigone*, however,

we need to answer some daunting preliminary questions. First, what is the relationship between Aristotle's understanding of character (*êthos*) and the notion of identity? Isn't Aristotelian *êthos* a matter of one's specifically *moral* qualities (e.g., courage or generosity) as opposed to the axes of identity and difference that preoccupy theorists of recognition (e.g., sex/gender or nationality)? And, second, is Aristotle's claim about the priority of plot over character just technical advice to poets who wish to compose effective tragedies, or is there some sense in which Aristotle understands action to be "prior" to character in life as well as in the dramatist's craft?

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle does not define *êthos* as such. But in book 2 of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle says that *êthos* is a "quality [*poiotês*]" that we possess in respect of our "capacities for affections [*dunameis tôn pathêmatôn*]" such as anger, fear, shame, or desire; as well as in respect of the states or habits (*hexeis*) that determine how we experience and respond to those affections (1220b5-20). A quality, Aristotle says elsewhere, is a "differentia [*diaphora*]"; it is simply "that in virtue of which people are said to be such and such."[45] And because the states or habits that differentiate us are "lasting and firmly established,"[46] when we give an account of the *êthos* of a person, we are saying something about what we take to be that person's *persistent* qualities with respect to affection, rather than their momentary attributes. In sum, as Nancy Sherman says, Aristotelian character "has to do with a person's enduring traits; that is, with the attitudes, sensibilities, and beliefs that affect how a person sees, acts, and indeed lives."[47] These enduring traits, in turn, are the objects of *mimêsis* in dramatic characterization, which lets us see not just a man charging across the stage, sword in hand, but—depending upon the characterization—a courageous man, a reckless man, an ill-tempered man, whose action is neither a random happening, nor a whim, but an expression of who he is.[48]

Now, on the one hand, Aristotle's focus on *êthos* as a quality of the nonrational part of the soul does mean that "external" social characteristics are not necessarily aspects of *êthos* in Aristotle's sense: to depict a woman, a man, a Theban, an Athenian is not *yet* to depict a person's character. But, on the other hand, social characteristics *may* be related to *êthos* in at least two important ways. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle suggests that a wide variety of social attributes, including gender, age, noble birth, wealth, and nationality, may tend to produce distinctive *êthê*, presumably by shaping the ways in which people regularly experience and respond to desire and other affections.[49] Yet the link between social characteristics and *êthos* is not only causal. Later in the *Poetics*, when Aristotle discusses exactly how character ought to be incorporated into drama, he indicates that the *êthê* of the people depicted should be "appropriate," and the example he offers—not irrelevant

to the *Antigone*, as we shall see—is that while a person may be courageous (*andreios*, which also means "manly"), such an *êthos* is not appropriate to a woman (1454a22-24). As this passage reminds us, for Aristotle, people are not virtuous or vicious in the abstract, but in relation to whatever is appropriate or fitting to them, as the sort of people they are: this is why Aristotle insists in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtue, as a mean, is relative to the agent and the situation, and is thus "neither one nor the same for everybody" (1106a29-33). So, while social characteristics on their own do not amount to *êthos*, some social characteristics (normatively loaded ones, we might say) are nevertheless necessary constituents of *êthos*: they form the background against which assessments of the excellence of character can be made.

These considerations suggest how closely related Aristotelian *êthos* and identity actually are. In contemporary discussions of the politics of recognition, after all, "identity" refers not merely to some set of social characteristics a person bears, but to a set of such characteristics that are taken to have practical force in both of the ways I have described. On this view, a person's identity is constituted in part by her location in a variety of dimensions of social space, and that social context helps orient her in practice, both causally, by helping to shape the ways in which she experiences and responds to desire and other affections, and normatively, by making certain courses of action obligatory and prohibiting others. Thus when Antigone and Creon, through their speeches, demonstrate how heavily their understandings of their obligations and responsibilities have been shaped by their respective social positions, it makes sense to say that these speeches are representations of their *êthê*. Antigone and Creon present themselves as acting out of the virtue of *philia*—but neither one can make sense of *philia* in the abstract, without reference to the social identities that establish who, for each of them, is properly *philos*.[50]

This discussion of *êthos*, however, raises a second question about the meaning of Aristotle's claim that action has priority over character in tragedy. As we have seen, Aristotle's view of *êthos* in his ethical writings emphasizes the capacity of *êthos* to introduce predictability, pattern, and order into our activity: as Sherman says, *êthos* shows us "not merely why someone acted this way now, but why someone can be counted on to act in certain ways."[51] This, however, seems to give *character* a kind of priority over *action*—as we might expect from the intellectual grandfather of contemporary virtue ethics, which focuses on the underlying qualities, formed through practice, habituation, and education, that can reliably produce right action. Thus some interpreters have concluded that the perspectives of Aristotle's ethical writings and the *Poetics* are incommensurable.[52] Elizabeth Belfiore, for example, argues that the claim about the priority of action over character in tragedy refers only to poetic technique—first, the poet devises a plot; then, he adds

character to the play in order to flesh out the meaning of the action—while in "real-life situations," by contrast, "action is caused by *êthos* and thought."[53] If this is right, it would be pointless to look to Aristotle's claim about action and character for guidance in understanding the world depicted in Sophocles' play: at best, it could help us understand the world of the writer's garret. But Belfiore's distinction is not ultimately persuasive. Consider, again, the passage in which Aristotle first makes his claim about the priority of action over character in the *Poetics*:

> Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. *All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions— what we do—that we are happy or the reverse.* In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action. (1450a16-22, emphasis added)[54]

Importantly, Aristotle's claims in the emphasized sentences refer not only to the representation of action and character on the stage, but to action and character *simpliciter*, which suggests that the priority of action over character in tragedy should, somehow, correspond to the relationship between action and character in real life.[55] Aristotle's insistence here that happiness is an activity rather than a quality provides an important clue, for it points us back to certain crucial parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, including the discussion of the acquisition of virtue in book 2, and the famous treatment of happiness and misfortune in book 1.[56]

In book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle stresses that the ethical virtues are formed through habituation, even speculating that the words for character (*êthos*) and the ethical (*êthikê*) are derived from the word for habit (*ethos*).[57] Habituation, in turn, consists in repeated activity: as in the arts, we learn virtue by doing, and this is why it's crucially important that we "perform the right activities" (1103a31-33, 1103b23). For this reason, then, the relationship between *êthos* and action in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is not one sided, but reciprocal: it's not *only* that the virtue of bravery causes or is actualized in courageous acts, for example, but also that bravery itself is formed through the doing of brave deeds (1104a28-b4).[58] But if the relationship between character and action is reciprocal, it is not perfectly symmetrical. Character, we might say, pushes out into the world by shaping the kinds of things we do; *and* it is at the same time formed and reformed by our worldly activity. Yet because action takes place in the world, this circuit of mutual constitution *is not closed*: action, and, by extension, character itself, is exposed to various forms of worldly contingency—a prospect Aristotle himself concedes in book 1, chapter 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he sug-

gests that people cannot be called happy without qualification until they are dead, if even then.[59]

What are these forms of worldly contingency that afflict activity, and, through activity, character? First, action projects human beings into a world of causality, initiating sequences of events that, once begun, proceed without necessarily respecting the agent's intentions. This fact of the causality of human action most obviously threatens our capacity to control the *consequences* of our actions, but in a sense it also limits our ability to control the very *content* of our actions, insofar as it prevents us from locating a natural and uncontroversial boundary between our actions and the events that follow from them. Of course, we rely on such boundaries all the time, particularly in the law, where we often need to decide whether an event is to be imputed to an agent as *his act*, for which he may be held responsible. Yet while these conceptions of the limits of responsibility or imputability may *represent* themselves as reflections of some sheerly factual line of demarcation between, say, the willed and the caused, it is, in a way, the very *absence* of such a line that allows imputability to arise as a problem in the first place. Will and agency only become possible sources of injury or damage because they are *not* isolated from a separate world of causes and effects, but are themselves sources of causation—and this absence of a firm qualitative distinction between will and causation makes it difficult to fix, once and for all, the limits of what may be imputed to us as "our" doing.[60] Aristotle confronts this problem in his treatment of responsibility in book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which begins with a telling equivocation: an involuntary act, Aristotle says, is one in which nothing is contributed by the "agent or the person acted upon [*ho prattôn ê ho paschôn*]" (1110a3). Here, as in tragedy, doing and suffering, *prattein* and *paschein*, seem to be two sides of the same coin rather than mutually exclusive opposites, and Aristotle's subsequent treatment of responsibility does not ultimately manage to separate them.[61]

The fact that our action inserts us into chains of causality not wholly under our control can, of course, manifest itself in numerous ways, and is perhaps most strikingly visible in cases of natural disaster in which nonhuman forces undermine our plans (and often destroy us altogether) in unpredictable, sometimes even utterly meaningless ways. But the capriciousness of nature is not quite the stuff of tragedy, at least not directly.[62] A second form of contingency—and, from the perspective of tragedy, an even more important one— is the fact that human beings act in a world inhabited by a *plurality* of other acting persons: the fact of human freedom, which is the condition of the possibility of the effective agency, also limits our practical capacities because it is not exclusively ours but is mirrored in others.[63] Here, again, the point is not only that human plurality limits our control over the consequences of our

action, but also that the *meaning* of our deeds is not wholly at our disposal, for the very terms through which we make assessments of significance are not exclusively our own, but intersubjective.[64] The importance of human plurality as a source of vulnerability in human action is acknowledged by Aristotle too, perhaps most prominently in his praise of what Martha Nussbaum has called "relational goods," including, especially, *philia*.[65]

These general features of action share a distinctive structure: they involve the *doubling back* of some human capacity upon itself—a recursivity, in which a source of possibility also operates as its own limitation. If human beings were not themselves parts of the causal order of the world, the will would be impotent; yet the very fact of our implication in the causal order of the world both connects our deeds to chains of events that lie beyond our control *and* blurs the boundaries between action and event that might help us fix and master the meaning of our actions. Similarly, our capacity to engage in *meaningful* action depends upon the presence of a plurality of others—and, at the same time, the presence of others also subjects us to the uncertainty of others' responses to what we do, on which the meaning of our action partly depends. This peculiar structure of enabling conditions that are always also limitations places human actors in ontological double binds, rendering us dependent on the very forces that, in action, we seek to transcend. This constitutive openness of action to worldly contingency—to what I have called "impropriety"—is, I suggest, the feature of "real life" that ultimately lies behind Aristotle's claim about the priority of action over character in the *Poetics*. To make this portrait of action's impropriety more concrete, however, we need to turn from Aristotle back to Sophocles' play, where we have left Antigone and Creon on the cusp of the deeds that undo them.

## IV. THE IMPROPRIETY OF ACTION IN THE ANTIGONE

The notion of human beings as constitutively caught in a double bind, rendered vulnerable by their potency, recalls one of the best-known passages in the *Antigone*: the first choral ode, often called the "Ode to Man," which famously describes humankind with the polysemic term *deinos*.[66] As Robert Goheen has noted, *deinos* suggests both "marvellous capability" and "strange danger," a range of meanings well captured in Wyckoff's translation of the first line of the ode: "Many the wonders [*deina*] but nothing walks stranger [*deinoteron*] than man."[67] Indeed, as the ode proceeds, it combines praise for the masterful power of human beings (who cross the seas, plough the earth, snare birds, harness the horses) with a sobering acknowledgment of the risk and uncertainty that attend human activity: "Clever beyond all

dreams/the inventive craft he has/which may drive him one time or another to well or ill" (366-67). As we have seen, Antigone and Creon each seek to achieve a kind of masterful agency through recognition, yoking their acts to their own identities (and Polyneices'). The movement of the play, however, bears out the chorus's warning: in action, Antigone and Creon do, and become, more and other than they intend; and ironically, the consequences of this impropriety are intensified and rendered deadly by Antigone's and Creon's own futile efforts to overcome the vulnerability and uncertainty to which they, like all human actors, are subject.

Antigone's and Creon's acts exceed the terms of the identities of which they are supposedly expressions in two general ways. First, both Antigone and Creon do *more* than they intend. Antigone frames her action as an expression of the pious devotion of sister to brother, and she underscores this identification through her refusal of the vocabulary of politics. Whenever Antigone is confronted with a claim about the city, she replies exclusively in the vocabulary of the family, refusing the possibility of *any* distinction between her brothers, even one more attenuated than Creon's.[68] However, Antigone's expression of family piety has political dimensions she does not acknowledge: despite her refusal of the vocabulary of politics, she finds herself in political space, performing an act that challenges the authority of a tyrant.[69] Similarly, Creon's act turns out to have implications in the realm of family that he, focused exclusively on the *polis*, does not acknowledge. Creon is, after all, not only the ruler of Thebes but also the head of the *oikos* to which Antigone belongs; indeed, he is doubly tied to her both as Jocasta's brother and as the father of her fiancé. But in his encounter with Antigone, Creon notably does *not* explicitly invoke his *familial* authority; instead, he continues to assert the political distinction between Polyneices and Eteocles, just as Antigone repeatedly counters him in the vocabulary of kinship.[70] Similarly, when Haemon arrives on the scene, he invites his father to speak the language of family by offering a conventional expression of filial loyalty, but Creon refuses the invitation, introducing the metaphor of "a soldier posted behind his leader" to describe the proper relation of son to father (640), and thereby swallowing family into *polis*.[71] Yet Creon's act, like Antigone's, exceeds the identity from which it proceeds. Just as Antigone's act of family piety became an act of political subversion, Creon's defense of political order also turns out to be an assault on his own family, first in the person of Haemon, whose love for Antigone leads him to join her in death, and second in Eurydice, driven to suicide by the loss of her son.

Antigone and Creon do not merely turn out to have done *more* than they intended, however, for their actions place them into conflict not only with what they disavow, but also with their own deepest commitments. Antigone's

relationship with Ismene is a telling example of this second kind of impropriety. Although Antigone is willing to suffer death out of loyalty to a blood relative, in the pursuit of her goal she behaves toward her sister—whom, on her own understanding of *philia*, she ought to love—with cold, vindictive hostility. When Ismene tries to warn Antigone that it is foolish to pursue her goal against the irresistible force of the *polis*, Antigone responds: "If that's your saying, I shall hate you first, and next the dead will hate you in all justice" (93-94). And when Ismene shows her belated support for her sister by falsely declaring to Creon that she had been an accessory to the deed, Antigone declines the offer of solidarity, insisting that she "cannot love a friend whose love is words" (543).[72] Similarly, Antigone's action undermines her identification with conventional gender roles: as we have seen, by preparing Polyneices' body for burial, scattering dust on the corpse to symbolize the burial that she herself does not perform, lamenting Polyneices' death, and pouring a final libation, Antigone follows the norms governing female participation in funeral ritual. But Antigone acts amid circumstances that make it impossible for her to conform to *this* traditional role without also *violating* equally central norms of gender. These violations become evident in the course of Creon's hysterical response to her disobedience, which reminds us that the very appearance of women in civic space threatened the constitutive boundary between *oikos* and *polis*. But they are also evident in Antigone's own final speeches, in which she laments that her fate will prevent her from following the conventional trajectory from girlhood to marriage and reproduction:[73] "No marriage-bed, no marriage-song for me," she sings, "and since no wedding, so no child to rear" (917-18).

Creon's acts, like Antigone's, not only exceed but also undermine his own identifications. Just as Antigone's ruthless devotion to her family leads her to treat her own sister cruelly, for instance, Creon's monomaniacal pursuit of civic order turns him from a leader into a tyrant. After Creon shifts the terrain of his exchange with Haemon from family to city, Haemon criticizes his father's style of rule, at first gently and then with increasing passion and frustration. After reminding Creon of the murmurs of support for Antigone among the citizens of Thebes, Haemon warns his father: "do not have one mind, and one alone," for "whoever thinks that he alone is wise" will, "come the unfolding, sho[w] his emptiness" (705-9). Here already we have a pointed suggestion that Creon is betraying his own values, since he himself had earlier mocked Antigone for acting in isolation from the rest of the city (510); Teiresias will confirm the suggestion by insinuating that Creon is not a king but a "tyrant" (1056), and by forecasting the devastation that Creon's misrule will bring, not only upon his family, but upon the entire city (1080-84). And, just as Antigone's action exceeds and frustrates her identification as a

woman, Creon's deeds, though meant to secure his masculinity, actually undermine it. For Creon, as we have seen, masculinity is closely tied to political rule, and therefore (he insists) to the rejection of the normative force of kinship. But consanguinity was what brought him the political power through which he expresses his manhood: he rules Thebes by virtue of being Jocasta's *adelphos*—the very same relation in which Polyneices and Antigone stand. His disavowal of the import of kinship leads to the death of his own son, Haemon, in a violent rush of blood (*haima*). As Creon is graphically reminded of the blood ties he had repressed, his fragile economy of identification and disavowal collapses like a house of cards. "So insistent earlier on the separation of gender roles and scornful of the female," Segal observes, "Creon now performs the characteristically (though not exclusively) female role of lamenting over a 'child,'" expressing the anguish and bitterness that his edict had tried and failed to keep out of public view.[74]

Although there is a fearful symmetry between, on the one hand, Antigone's and Creon's initial acts, and on the other hand, the deviations and reversals that afflict them, it is crucial to attend not only to the irony of these outcomes but also to the mechanisms by which they occur, for Sophocles does not represent Antigone's and Creon's reversals as the inexorable results of cosmic necessity, divine justice, or other extrahuman forces; rather, he suggests that they are the contingent results of the unpredictable interactions among a plurality of persons. It's true, of course, that Antigone does seem to have known from the beginning what the consequences of her act would be: "I know that I must die, how could I not?" she asks (460). But while Antigone *does* die by the end of the play, her death does not in fact occur in the way she expects, nor does it have the significance she anticipates. When Antigone first announces her intention to bury Polyneices, and her willingness to die doing it, she has just told Ismene that the punishment for the burial is to be death by stoning at the hands of the citizenry of Thebes—a form of punishment "felt to be particularly appropriate for traitors," and which, crucially, relied on the cooperation of the citizens who were to carry out the sentence.[75] Importantly, Antigone believes she will die with honor (95-97), a claim she later repeats in her exchange with Creon (502-503), whom she taunts by suggesting that the citizens of Thebes are sympathetic to her, and approve of her action, but are muted by fear (504-5).[76] But Antigone does not die by stoning—she dies at her own hand, after having been confined to a living death in a cave.

Why does Creon change his mind? Perhaps he realizes that he will not need to rely on the shaky loyalty of the citizens to carry out *this* punishment; perhaps, as his own casuistical speech suggests, he thinks the fine distinction between death and living death will absolve him, and Thebes, of responsibil-

ity for yet another death in the royal family (773-80).[77] But Creon's decision also seems to respond to his sense that Antigone threatens his status as a man (and, relatedly, as a ruler), a sense that is sharpened in the course of their increasingly strident confrontation at 441-525,[78] and further heightened by the intervention of Haemon, whose efforts to moderate his father's anger seem only to intensify his gender panic.[79] The punishment Creon finally chooses for Antigone responds to this threat by mimicking the conventional enclosure of women within the *oikos*, as Antigone herself notices, calling the cave her "marriage-chamber" and her "hollowed-out house" (891-92).[80] Whatever Creon's motivation, from Antigone's perspective, this change of plans is catastrophic, for it seems to deprive her of the *glorious* death she had anticipated. Unwitnessed, she fears, her death will not be mourned and remembered: when the chorus suggests consolingly that she will still win fame in death (836-38), she objects that they are mocking her (839-41), and as she is led away, she laments that she will die "with no friend's mourning" (844).

Creon's "fate," too, proceeds in and through the contingencies of human action. Indeed, perhaps the most powerful image that the *Antigone* offers of the capacity of actions to exceed the intentions and control of agents comes near the end of the play, as Creon tries to undo what he has done. After confronting Teiresias, who finally gives Creon an account of his crimes and foretells the destruction that awaits him and his city, Creon yields, and tries to stave off his fate, announcing that he has "come to fear it's best to hold to the laws of old tradition to the end of life" (1113-14). Some of what happens next we witness or learn through the reports of a messenger before Creon does, but the special force of the sequence of events emerges if we examine it in strict chronology and from Creon's perspective. First, as the messenger recounts, Creon and the chorus went to bury Polyneices' corpse, hoping to reverse the pollution that the exposed body had brought upon the city (1197-1200). It's not clear whether Creon accomplishes this in time to turn the curse or not, since Teiresias has said that other cities, whose hearths have been polluted by the animals that fed on the exposed corpses, are already preparing to make war on Thebes (1080-84). With no time to speculate, Creon and his rescue party proceed toward Antigone's tomb, from which, at a distance, they hear the "keen lament" of Haemon's voice (1208). Antigone has already hanged herself, and while Creon was busy burying Polyneices, Haemon found the tomb and discovered her fate. When Creon finally reaches the burial chamber, he finds Haemon mournfully embracing Antigone; Haemon says nothing to his father, but lashes out at him with his sword, and then turns his weapon on himself, dying in a bloody embrace with Antigone (1220-40). At this point, the messenger leaves Creon and the rest of the party to attend to the

bodies and rushes back to the palace, where he informs Eurydice (and us) of all the preceding events; she leaves the room without a word, followed in short order by the messenger, who is concerned that her silence "may portend as great disaster as a loud lament" (1251-52). Creon arrives shortly thereafter—and just as he is confessing his crimes to the assembled chorus, the messenger returns to announce that Eurydice, too, has taken her own life (1282-83). Once Creon has given it life, we might say, his action breaks the bonds of intention and identity and goes off on its own, interacting in unpredictable ways with the actions of others, and wreaking havoc. Creon rushes from the house to the deserted plain to the rocky cave and back to the house, all in a desperate attempt to chase down and subdue his errant deed, but the act and its reverberations always remain one tragic step ahead of its agent. In the case of the messenger's early departure from the tomb, the deed, or at least its "signification," is *literally* a step ahead of the doer. Here, the character of the messenger vividly personifies the gap between the actor's performance of a deed and the imitation or recollection of the deed in which its significance is expressed, offering tragic confirmation of Arendt's observation that "nobody is the author or producer of his own life story."[81]

## V. ANAGNÔRISIS, *ACKNOWLEDGMENT, AND INJUSTICE*

We are now in a position to return, finally, to the theme of tragic *anagnôrisis*, and its relationship to the concept of recognition. Aristotle first defines the concept of *anagnôrisis* in chapter 11 of the *Poetics*, in the course of elaborating the nature and components of the tragic plot: "A recognition is, as the very word implies, a change from ignorance [*agnoias*] to knowledge [*gnosin*], and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortune."[82] Aristotle proceeds (both in this chapter and later) to list some examples of recognition, including the recognition of Odysseus by his scar (1454b25-8), Electra's recognition of Orestes by "reasoning" in Aeschylus's *Choephori* (1455a4-6), and Oedipus's recognition that he himself is his father's killer (1452a32-3). It is tempting to conclude on the basis of these examples that *anagnôrisis* in the *Poetics* has the same sense that it did in the contemporary politics of recognition: after all, the examples all seem to suggest that recognition is the recognition *of an identity*, either one's own or another's.[83] This is not altogether wrong, but it is misleading. A somewhat different view emerges if we situate the concept of recognition within Aristotle's larger account of the structure of tragedy, and tie it back to the account of *êthos* and action discussed earlier.

It is important to acknowledge that for Aristotle, recognition is closely linked to another component of what he calls "complex" tragic plots, *peripeteia* or "reversal"; indeed, Aristotle says that the "finest form" of recognition is the one accompanied by reversal (1452a32-33). Reversal, in turn, is a particular form of change (*metabolê*) in the fortune or circumstances of an actor; specifically, it is a change that takes place through a relatively abrupt shift in the trajectory of the action.[84] The presence of such abrupt shifts or reversals in the action, in turn, can be understood as Aristotle's way of spelling out what it means for the events that make up a tragic plot to occur "unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another" (*para tên doxan di' allêla*) (1452a4), which is a feature that he says characterizes the most effective tragic plots.[85] But what does it mean for events to occur "unexpectedly and at the same time in consequence of one another"? Obviously, this phrase could refer to the results of our ignorance of causal processes; or, again, it could refer to the consequences of straightforward cases of the ignorance of identity: Oedipus kills Laius and sleeps with Jocasta, not knowing that they are his mother and father; and everything that follows from that is, for Oedipus, tragically "unexpected." Yet the *Poetics* and the *Antigone* also suggest that there is another, deeper meaning to "*para tên doxan di' allêla*," for even when we have adequate knowledge of causal processes, and even when we have all the names right, what I have called the "impropriety" of action—its exposure to an unpredictable and uncontrollable future—can *also* introduce a crucial gap between our expectations and our action.[86] Aristotle's original claim about the order of priority of action and *êthos*, and our parallel understanding of the impropriety of action with respect to identity, thus turn out to be intimately connected to recognition: action's impropriety is a central occasion for tragic *anagnôrisis*.

This way of situating *anagnôrisis* suggests a different account of its meaning, as well as of its ethical and political force. If the priority of action over *êthos* and identity is an occasion for reversal and thus for *anagnôrisis*, then perhaps the "shift from ignorance to knowledge" involved in *anagnôrisis* is best understood not only as the discovery of someone's true identity, but also and more fundamentally as what I would call an "ontological" discovery, a shift from ignorance to knowledge about the real conditions of one's own existence and activity, and especially about the very relationship between *êthos* or identity and action. On this account of tragic *anagnôrisis*, to be sure, *anagnôrisis* may indeed take place through the discovery of something about who one is—or, in any event, who one has become under the weight of action and its consequences. But what differentiates this sort of *anagnôrisis* from recognition as Antigone and Creon pursued it is that this sort of *anagnôrisis* does not satisfyingly consolidate and strengthen a practical identity—a

coherent set of commitments and values that enables an agent to know what to do. Instead, this sort of *anagnôrisis* comes *after* action, shattering without yet reconstituting the coherence of the identificatory scheme with which the agent has tried to govern his activity. Tragic *anagnôrisis*, we might say, is the acknowledgment of finitude under the weight of a (failed) effort to become sovereign through the recognition of identity.

This understanding of tragic *anagnôrisis* is borne out by the text of the *Antigone*, for while the *Antigone*'s struggles for recognition do indeed fail, the play nevertheless contains moments of "successful" (though unhappy) *anagnôrisis* in this sense. The first such moment comes, appropriately enough, at the end of the first choral ode, and the agent through which the *anagnôrisis* occurs is neither Antigone nor Creon but the chorus itself. Earlier, I noted that the so-called "Ode to Man" moderates its praise of human masterfulness with an acknowledgment of the risks that attend human activity, which can lead people "one time or another to well or ill" (366-67). Immediately after this qualification, however, the chorus makes an attempt to tame the force of this uncertainty by splitting these two possibilities apart and assigning them to "two distinct kinds of people," those who "hono[r] the laws of the land and the gods' sworn right," and those who "dar[e] to dwell with dishonor" (368-71).[87] This distinction enables the chorus to dissociate itself from people of the latter sort, declaring confidently that it will never let such people share its hearth or its thoughts (373-75), a move that echoes Antigone's and Creon's own earlier efforts to organize the world into *philos* and *ekhthros*. But Sophocles, as if to underline the radical implications of the notion of humanity as *deinos*, immediately calls into question the chorus's effort to draw an easy distinction between its friends and its enemies, for at this moment, Antigone is led onstage by the guard, who is about to present her to Creon as "the woman who has done the deed" (384). Antigone's appearance brings the ode to an end, and suddenly collapses the chorus's confidence: "My mind is split at this awful sight," it declares; "I know her. I cannot deny Antigone is here" (376-78). This *anagnôrisis* is not the *satisfying* recognition of the identity of another; instead, it undermines the chorus's recognitive distinction between someone who is *deinos* in a good, just, orderly way and someone who is *deinos* in an uncanny, terrible, dangerous way, leaving it caught between the desire to deny, and the evident impossibility of denying, what is before its eyes.

This moment of acknowledgment anticipates Antigone's and Creon's own *anagnôriseis*. It is tempting to think that these will find expression in straightforward confessions of guilt, as for instance when Creon, frightened by Teiresias's prophecies, accepts the chorus's counsel and rushes off to bury Polyneices and free Antigone. But the trouble is that there is no correspond-

ing confession involving Antigone herself: the only parallel episode comes near the end of Antigone's self-lament, and is more equivocal than Creon's plain reversal: "Should the gods think that this [i.e., her punishment] is righteousness, in suffering I'll see my error clear," she says. "But if it is the others who are wrong, I wish them no greater punishment than mine" (926-29). To say that she admits her guilt here would be to overstate the case, for she only professes uncertainty about whether the gods will find her righteous or culpable.[88] Yet to suppose on these grounds that only Creon experiences a moment of *anagnôrisis* is both to overlook something important about Antigone's words *and* to misunderstand what this moment of tragic acknowledgment involves. In the first place, we must be careful to avoid a false choice between an Antigone who straightforwardly confesses her guilt and an Antigone who remains as resolute as ever to the end. In fact, both are untrue to the text. Both Antigone's self-lament *and* her admission of the *possibility* that the gods will judge her guilty represent real transformations of Antigone's earlier rigidity. In her opening speeches, Antigone had defiantly welcomed the prospect of death (70-72), but now she *mourns* her fate, and in so doing, explicitly acknowledges that her act has deprived her of the very goods she pursued, including *philia* and motherhood (878-81, 918). In fact, by conceding that the question of the real significance of her act is out of her hands and rests instead with the gods, Antigone expresses a more sophisticated acknowledgment of human finitude, of the gap between identity and action, than a simple avowal of guilt would have indicated. After all, even after Creon changes his tune, he is no more master of his fate than he had been earlier; in fact, his worst suffering is still to come. Creon's real moment of *anagnôrisis* in this sense comes *after* the deaths of his son and wife. As he laments his fate and prays for a quick death, Creon's own words reflect his belated awareness not of his wrongdoing, exactly (for he has already seen *that*) but of the gap between his intentions and his actions: "Take me away at once," he pleads, "the frantic man who killed my son, against my meaning" (1339-41). What Antigone and Creon have acknowledged, in different ways, is a version of the predicament described by the chorus in its famous closing words (1343-52): to avoid the catastrophes that action's improprieties bring, we would need to possess as actors a kind of knowledge that we acquire only in retrospect, and too late.

Tragedy thus leaves us with a contrast—even a conflict—between the recognition of identity and the acknowledgment of the circumstances or conditions that surround one's own activity. Tragedy does not, of course, suggest that human beings can live without recognition, nor does it suggest that there are no genuine and valuable goods to be found in the many human relationships that are sustained by exchanges of recognition. But in its account of the relationship of action to identity or *êthos*, tragedy helps us understand both

why a perfect regime of recognition is impossible, and, more importantly, why this impossibility is not only a regrettable limitation but itself a condition of the possibility of agency—the flip side, as it were, of freedom. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt, meditating on Aristotle's discussion of happiness as an activity in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, suggests that anyone who wants to become a truly sovereign agent—to be "indisputable master of his identity," leaving behind a story he has designed and engineered himself—would "not only risk his life but expressly choose, as Achilles did, a short life and premature death."[89] To will truly successful recognition, in other words, is to exchange one sort of social death for another, sacrificing the uncertainty of the plural, futural social world for the final word, the perfect subjection, of the eulogy—an exchange Antigone herself is willing to make.

But that is not the only lesson of the play. Throughout this essay I have stressed the moments of symmetry between Antigone and Creon, but it is important to note, however belatedly, that this symmetry is only partial. Creon, after all, *survives* his catastrophe, though undoubtedly scarred and perhaps chastened, while Antigone *dies*: it matters—it is a matter of life and death—that this play occurs against an all-too-familiar background of profound social and political inequality, most obviously between men and women. And this fact brings us back to the question of the relationship between tragic *anagnôrisis* and the politics of recognition, not only in these texts but in contemporary politics and theory; for it is inequality of just this sort that the contemporary discourse of recognition rightly takes as its object of concern. To conclude this essay, then, I shall briefly suggest one way in which tragedy's account of acknowledgment might contribute to our understanding of the sources and operation of injustice on the terrain of identity and difference. The politics of recognition, as I have suggested, parses this sort of injustice as a matter of the unfair or inappropriate distribution of respect, rooted in the failure to grasp *who* a person or group really is. There is something to this: identity-related injustices do often manifest themselves through the reproduction and dissemination of distorted characterizations of people and groups. But are these characterizations the root or the symptom of injustice? Are they genuine cognitive mistakes that might be corrected through the production and dissemination of truer pictures of who we and others are? Or are they more deeply motivated representations, representations that have less to do with the people who are their putative objects than with the aspirations or desires of those who hold them?

An analysis of injustice centered on the concept of recognition can tell us that Creon—like many men—holds false and demeaning views of women; or that he unfairly belittles kinship as a mode of human relationship. But it cannot help us understand the way in which these tendencies are driven by his

own panicked defense of a position of privilege within a hierarchical social order. An analysis of injustice centered on *anagnôrisis* understood as acknowledgment, by contrast, might help us get at the underlying structures of desire that animate systematic relations of inequality, for it suggests that dominative social relations and the images and representations that accompany them may be supported in part by the (impossible) aspiration to achieve sovereign agency. Structures of systematic inequality, on this account, can be understood as ways of sustaining that aspiration by insulating *some* people or groups from the experience and force of its impossibility, leaving others to bear the weight of the contradictions, reversals, and failures that forever frustrate the desire for mastery.[90] And if this is right—if domination is rooted in the failure of acknowledgment rather than in the failure of recognition—then the politics of recognition may misunderstand the nature and sources of the injustices it hopes to combat. Worse, by preserving the fantasy of sovereign agency—by imagining that we might all be recognized in advance as who we authentically are, thereby overcoming the uncertainty and risk that mark social interaction—the politics of recognition may inhibit acknowledgment, thereby helping reproduce the structures of desire that sustain injustice. And that would be a tragedy.

### NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 193.

2. Key texts include Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994); and Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997).

3. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 25.

4. Ibid., 50.

5. For this history, see Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1990). For Aristotle's definition see *Poetics*, 1452a29-b8; on its importance to "the finest form of tragedy," *Poetics*, 1452b30-34. Except where otherwise noted, I use the translation in Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry*, ed. and trans. Ingram Bywater (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1909), although I reverse his practice of capitalizing the first letters of such words as "tragedy" and "plot," and I change his rendering of *anagnôrisis* as "Discovery," substituting the (more common and more literal) "recognition." For Greek text and other useful translations see Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. D. W. Lucas (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1972); Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); and Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

6. Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, 1068.

7. In this context, I intend "ontological" to mean "pertaining to fundamental features of the world or of the human condition"; cf. Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) and William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), chap. 1.

8. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a29-32 (emphasis added). See also Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 85.

9. Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), especially vol. 2, pt. 2; on the contrast between choice and cognition as two ways of "possessing" one's ends see Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 54-59.

10. For example, Taylor, *Philosophical Papers*, 4-5, describes his target as a "flattering and inspiring" picture of the human agent that is linked to "ideals of efficacy, power, [and] unperturbability"; cf. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 177.

11. I track a similar reassertion in Taylor's work in chapter 2 of *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2003). For a different account of this reassertion and its consequences within Sandel's thought, see Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), chap. 6.

12. James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7. As Tully puts it, these struggles aspire to achieve "self rule in accord with one's own customs and ways."

13. What I mean by "impropriety" corresponds to what Arendt referred to as the "boundlessness" and "unpredictability" of action, which together make up its "non-sovereign" character (*The Human Condition*, 190-92, 234). I use the term "impropriety" because it seems to me to capture all of this in a single word that is less awkward than "non-sovereign," and because it highlights the transgressive relation of action to that which is *proper* to the self, defined either in terms of choice or in terms of identity (so one might also say: our acts are never our property). For a different account of the Aristotelian and Sophoclean background to the chapter on action in *The Human Condition* see Robert C. Pirro, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Tragedy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

14. In *Bound by Recognition* I argue that Hegel's reading is more complicated than this attribution allows: while he does begin by assigning Antigone and Creon to different spheres, the point of his treatment of the *Antigone* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to highlight the ways in which they break out of, or fail to represent, the spheres to which they are assigned.

15. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Antigone's Daughters," *democracy* 2, no. 2 (April 1982), 53, 58-59.

16. Mary G. Dietz, "Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking," *Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (1985): 20, 29.

17. Judith Butler has recently made a similar argument, criticizing the project of making Antigone into the "representative" of kinship and suggesting instead that "Antigone's own representative function is in crisis" by virtue of her implication in "incestuous legacies that confound her position within kinship" (*Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2000], 2, 24). For Butler, however, Antigone's impropriety turns out in the end to be a matter of *who* she is: her departure from established norms of kinship and politics has always already happened by virtue of her genealogy and history, which afflict her with an "unliveable" desire, at least under the reigning system of kinship, and which condemn her to death in advance of the action of the play. This reading is valuable because it lets Butler use Antigone to figure the ways in which existing norms of kinship render certain lives and desires unlivable; at the same time, it slips back into something like a character-based reading of the

play—though a psychologically deeper and sociologically richer one—in which the action of the drama becomes a playing out of who Antigone has been all along. And such a reading risks inadvertently reinforcing the political investment in *recognition* as an unequivocal source of emancipation. Here, by contrast, I argue that the impropriety of action arises not only out of the weight of an actor's past but also out of the contingency of the future—and this helps us understand why the desire for and pursuit of recognition itself can involve a potentially tragic misrecognition of the conditions of one's own agency, one that ironically helps to reproduce the structuring of social relations in fatefully dominative ways.

18. The first phrase is from Michelle Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict since Aristotle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), xiii (Gellrich develops this argument at length with reference to Aristotle in chapter 2); the second is from Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 163, arguing that on this issue "Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel are all on the same side" while "Sophocles and Thucydides" are on the other. Thanks to Peter Euben for pressing me to address this concern.

19. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451b32-52a10 and 1454a3-8, respectively. For a good discussion of these issues see Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), chap. 7. Sheila Murnaghan's "Sucking the Juice without Biting the Rind," *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 755-73, importantly reminds us not to idealize tragic practice as a site of untamed conflict and disorder: both tragedy *and* Aristotle's theorization of it, she argues, are caught between the conflicting imperatives of representing *and* distancing the terrible.

20. Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 104 ff.

21. Ibid., 115.

22. Plato, *Republic*, 379b (trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1992], 55).

23. This also suggests a different way of reading Aristotle's preference for plots that turn on human *hamartia* rather than sheer contingency: the point of that preference is not to *deny* the place of contingency in human affairs, but to focus attention on the deadly intersection between contingency and the impossible pursuit of masterful agency.

24. Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, 114-15.

25. Reading Aristotle alongside an ancient rather than a modern drama may be particularly appropriate given the tendency in modern drama to focus on psychological conflict *within* characters, which might seem to efface the relationship between action and *êthos* that Aristotle highlights. (Hegel discusses the modern development of character in *Hegel's Aesthetics*, trans. T. M. Knox [Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1975], 2:1223 ff.) But it would be an oversimplification to treat all modern drama as character-driven rather than plot-driven; and in any case, the modern interest in the psychological does not so much *obscure* the priority of action over *êthos* as shift the locus of action, conflict, reversal, and *anagnôrisis* inward (see Cave, *Recognitions*, pt. 2), raising important issues about the relationship between the social and the unconscious as sites of "impropriety," which I hope to explore in future work.

26. Parenthetical citations to the *Antigone* refer to line numbers, and unless otherwise noted, quotations from the play follow Elizabeth Wyckoff's translation, in the first edition (only) of David Grene and Richard Lattimore, eds., *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, vol. 2, *Sophocles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959). For Greek text and textual commentary see Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Mark Griffith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Sophocles, *The Antigone*, pt. 3, *The Plays and Fragments*, ed. and trans. Richard Jebb, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1900).

27. On the conventional obligation to bury one's kin, see W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Auckland: University of Auckland, 1980), 148; on the legal obligation see S. C.

Humphries, *The Family, Women, and Death: Comparative Studies*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 83.

28. On the legitimacy of the prohibition of burial, see Vincent J. Rosivach, "On Creon, *Antigone*, and Not Burying the Dead," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 126, nos. 3-4 (1983): 193-211; D. A. Hester, "Sophocles the Unphilosophical: A Study in the *Antigone*," *Mnemosyne*, 24, ser. 4, (1971): 19-21, 55; and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning: Reading Sophocles' Antigone," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109 (1989): 137-38, especially note 20. It has been suggested that Creon's edict overstepped his legitimate authority by at least implicitly prohibiting burial even outside Thebes (see Peter Euben, "*Antigone* and the Languages of Politics," *Corrupting Youth* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997], 155; and the sources in Rosivach, "On Creon," 20). I am unconvinced that Creon's decree is meant to seem like an overstepping of his legitimate *territorial* authority, since the language of the edict (both in Creon's words at 204-7 and in Antigone's at 21-30) is explicit about *what* is prohibited and *to whom* the edict extends but makes no explicit claim to govern space outside of Thebes; moreover, while Polyneices' body has been left outside the city walls, Rosivach ("On Creon," 208 n. 49) and Hester ("Sophocles the Unphilosophical," 20) both suggest that the body remains within Theban territory—as perhaps it must if the point of leaving him unburied is to let his disgraced body be seen by the townspeople (see Griffith's commentary to ll. 205-6 in *Antigone*, ed. Griffith, 162). Creon might with more justice be faulted for failing to follow the practice of letting family members bury a traitor elsewhere, but as Griffith observes, that issue is never mentioned in the play (commentary to ll. 26-36 in *Antigone*, ed. Griffith, 127).

29. The *locus classicus* is Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *Collected Papers* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), vol. 4; see also Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), chap. 1; and Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), chap. 1.

30. This dimension of funeral ritual is reflected in Hegel's gloss on the practice of burial in Greece as a way of humanizing death by supplementing a natural and "irrational" event with "an action *consciously done*." G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 270.

31. On the significance of *philos* and *ekhthros* in the *Antigone*, see Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 79-106, to whom I owe in particular the insight into the connection between *philia* and recognition (p. 85). See also Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 106-48; David Konstan, "Greek Friendship," *American Journal of Philology* 117 (1996): 82-85; Charles Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 185-86; and Matt Neuburg, "How Like a Woman: Antigone's 'Inconsistency,'" *Classical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1990): 70-76.

32. See the sources in the preceding note as well as the relevant entries in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., rev. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1968).

33. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 79-83.

34. On this line see Jebb's note in his edition of Sophocles, *The Antigone*, part 3 of *The Plays and Fragments*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 10-11; and Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies*, 107 n. 5.

35. On the distinction between the chthonian and Olympian in the context of *The Antigone*, see Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization*, 171.

36. Ibid., 183-84. When contested, citizenship was established by demonstration of enrollment in the phratry, a patrilineal kinship organization into which daughters were not introduced.

37. The question of the nature of kinship and its relation to gender was a live issue for the Greek audience: as Segal says, Antigone's use of matrilineal kinship words "reopens, on a personal level, the debate between Apollo and the Erinyes in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*," where the issue was precisely whether the father's seed or the mother's womb played a more important role in reproduction. Ibid., 184.

38. See Helene Foley, "Tragedy and Democratic Ideology," *History, Tragedy, Theory*, ed. Barbara Goff (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 146 n. 11 (responding to Sourvinou-Inwood, "Assumptions and the Creation of Meaning," 140). On the roles of men and women at funerals see Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), chap. 3; and Humphries, *The Family, Women, and Death*, 83-88.

39. Charles Segal, "The Female Voice and Its Contradictions," *Religio Graeco-Romana: Festschrift für Walter Pötscher*, ed. Joachim Dalfen (Graz, Austria: Institut für Klassische Philologie, 1993), 66-72; see also his *Sophocles' Tragic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 120.

40. Jebb's translation; Wyckoff translates *philos kakos* as "a friend no friend."

41. See his statements to the chorus (484-85), to Antigone (525), and to Haemon (678-80).

42. Peter Euben also argues that it is problematic to treat Creon and Antigone as simply "standing for" *polis* and *oikos*, and so on ("*Antigone* and the Languages of Politics," 154ff, 164ff). However, Euben focuses on the ways in which Creon and Antigone fail to represent these terms from the beginning (for instance, by noting Creon's tyrannical behavior toward the chorus of elders even in his first speech [155], or Antigone's difference from Ismene even in the opening scene [166]), whereas I track the ways in which these failures of representation develop, becoming more acute and more obvious, across the course of the play—which has the advantage of highlighting the ways in which Antigone's and Creon's *attempts* at self- and other-recognition, however imperfect these attempts may be, nevertheless contribute to their fates.

43. Aristotle is referring here to the plot (*muthos*), which is the combination of the *pragmata*, which is usually translated as "incidents or events" but which is cognate with *praxis* (action) and certainly includes the *praxeis* of the actors (*prattontes*, meaning the agents in the story, not the Athenians who played them on stage). On Aristotle's vocabulary see Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics, 138-42.

44. The translation of *êthos* as "character" can be misleading, because in English "character," especially in the context of drama, can have the minimal sense of "one of the people in the play" (in which case Aristotle's claim at 1450a23-24 that you can have tragedy without *êthos* would become nonsensical). It may be useful to note that, until the nineteenth century, the standard English translation of Aristotle's term *êthos*—in the *Poetics* as well as in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Rhetoric*—was not "character" but "manners"; and that medieval (and later) Latin translations consistently rendered *êthos* as *mores*.

45. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1020a33; *Categories*, 8b25. (The translations are by W. D. Ross and E. M. Edghill, respectively, both in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon [New York: Random House, 1941].)

46. Aristotle, *Categories*, 8b27.

47. Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character: Aristotle's Theory of Virtue* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1.

48. Charles Chamberlain, "From 'Haunts' to 'Character': The Meaning of *Êthos* and Its Relation to Ethics," *Helios* 11 (1984): 97-108. Chamberlain has shown that *êthos* originally referred to the "haunts" of an animal—that is, to the places where animals of a particular type were typically or characteristically found—and later came to refer to the regularities of behavior of human beings. Chamberlain also notes that "*êthos* comes from the Indo-European root

*swedh*, see also in the Latin *suus* and *suesco*, meaning 'one's own' or 'proper'"; so we might say that something's *êthos* is just that which leads it to do what is proper to it, as the sort of thing it is.

49. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1388b31-34 ff, 1408a25-31; see the discussion in Mary Whitlock Blundell, "*Êthos* and *Dianoia* Reconsidered," *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 164. As Chamberlain notes, *êthos* was sometimes used to refer to "the peculiarities which people of a certain *polis* acquire as a result of being brought up under its particular laws and customs" ("From 'Haunts' to 'Character,'" 101).

50. The *Poetics* itself says that *êthos* (here used in the sense of "characterization," or the dramatic depiction of "character"—on this see Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics, 150-51) is that which "shows us the nature of a *prohairesis*" (1450b8-9, Halliwell's translation); certainly Antigone's and Creon's efforts to ground their actions in their identities show us aspects of the nature of their choices.

51. Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, 1.

52. Going a step beyond Gellrich's claim (discussed above) that Aristotle's subordination of action to *êthos* in the ethical writings distorts his view of tragedy, this view takes seriously Aristotle's prioritization of action in the *Poetics*, but concludes from this that the *Poetics* must represent a sharp break from the ethical treatises.

53. Elizabeth S. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

54. On controversies surrounding the text of this passage see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 378-79 and accompanying notes.

55. Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics, 157; and Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 379-82.

56. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty notes the echo of the discussion of happiness and misfortune in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.10 in "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy," in *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics, ed. Rorty, 21 n. 14.

57. Aristotle performs this etymology with *êthikê* at *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a17-18, and with *êthos* at *Eudemian Ethics*, 1220a39-b1.

58. On the relationships among *dunamis*, *energeia*, *hexis*, and *praxis*, see Jill Frank, "Democracy and Distribution: Aristotle on Just Desert," *Political Theory* 26 (1998): 795-96.

59. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100a10-1101b23. The epigraph to this essay, from Arendt's *Human Condition*, widens this idea, suggesting that *identity* cannot decisively be ascribed to a person while she is still acting into a contingent future. On vulnerability in Aristotle in general, see Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 380-82 and chaps. 11-12; Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics, chap. 7; Rorty, "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy"; and Aryeh Kosman, "Acting: *Drama* as the *Mimêsis* of *Praxis*," and Nancy Sherman, "*Hamartia* and Virtue," both in *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics, ed. Rorty.

60. See Thomas Nagel's discussion (in the context of an argument about luck and responsibility in ethics) of the apparently irresolvable split between the "internal" and "external" perspectives on our actions in "Moral Luck," *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 37. See also Kosman, "Acting," 65.

61. For a good reading of Aristotle's account of responsibility, which stresses that he neither finds nor seeks to find some objective characteristic of an agent in virtue of which he can be said to have been either responsible or not, see Marion Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chap. 2.

62. On the inferiority of tragic plots based on "mere chance," see Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a1-11; good discussions can be found in Sherman, "*Hamartia* and Virtue"; Rorty, "The Psychology

of Aristotelian Tragedy"; and Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), chap. 8.

63. This is the source of action's impropriety that Arendt emphasizes; see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190-93, 233-234; *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 169-71; cf. Rorty, "The Psychology of Aristotelian Tragedy," 11. Arendt, in distinguishing among labor, work, and action, tries too hard to disentangle the problem of plurality from the problem of material causality, as though relations among actors took place alongside, but were not intertwined with, relations among things and bodies (e.g., see *The Human Condition*, 182-83).

64. Seyla Benhabib calls this the "interpretive indeterminacy" of action: *Critique, Norm, and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 136.

65. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, chap. 12; see also Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, chap. 8.

66. On the ode, see Euben, "*Antigone* and the Languages of Politics," 171-76; and Robert F. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles'* Antigone (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 53-56.

67. Goheen, *The Imagery of Sophocles'* Antigone, 141 n. 1 (and accompanying discussion at 53).

68. As Nussbaum puts it, "if one listened only to Antigone, one would not know that a war had taken place or that anything called 'city' was ever in danger." *The Fragility of Goodness*, 63-64.

69. As Euben observes, in the course of the play Antigone moves from "the enclosure of the most immediate family," in her opening conversation with Ismene, to "the public world" (in her final speech to the chorus of citizens ["*Antigone* and the Languages of Politics," 168]). It's important to note, however, that while Antigone both steps and is thrust *into* political space, she never quite takes up the vocabulary *of* politics: her act is not framed as a political challenge to Creon, though it becomes one despite her.

70. Although Creon nominally acknowledges that Antigone's disobedience is an instance of disorder within the *oikos*, he does so only in order to *deny* that Antigone's kinship ought to influence his action, and to reinforce his subordination of all other concerns to political rule. To permit disobedience among relatives, Creon says, would compel him to permit it in the city at large; thus, enforcing the edict against Antigone is *just another instance* of ensuring "justice in the *polis*" (662).

71. On this as an expression of specifically filial devotion, see Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 62; and Joan V. O'Brien, *Guide to Sophocles'* Antigone (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 77. On the military language, see Jebb's note to line 640 and O'Brien, *Guide to Sophocles'* Antigone, 79, from which the quoted words are taken.

72. On Antigone's treatment of Ismene see Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies*, 111-15.

73. On this see Matt Neuburg, "How Like a Woman: Antigone's 'Inconsistency,'" *Classical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1990): 66-67; Sheila Murnaghan, "*Antigone* 904-20 and the Institution of Marriage," *American Journal of Philology* 107 (1986): 192-207; and Christina Elliot Sorum, "The Family in Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Electra*," *Classical World* 75 (1982): 206.

74. Segal, *Sophocles' Tragic World*, 131.

75. Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Griffith, 129 (Griffith's commentary to ll. 35-36); on the dependence of stoning on citizen cooperation, see Danielle Allen, *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 208-9.

76. The notion that the Theban citizenry quietly sympathizes with Antigone is repeated by Haemon at 690-95, raising the tantalizing question of whether Antigone expected to die: might she have been banking on the sympathy of the Theban citizens to rescue her from a form of pun-

ishment that Creon was powerless to carry out on his own? On Creon's dependence, see Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, 209.

77. For the former hypothesis see Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, 209; on the latter, see the discussions in Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Griffith, 253-54, and Sophocles, *Antigone*, ed. Jebb, 144.

78. The idea that this exchange somehow makes matters worse for Antigone is supported by Creon's speech at 473 ff, in which he takes particular offense at the fact that she not only did the deed but is now boasting of it to him; indeed, her boasts are the immediate occasion for his first explicit expression of a crisis of masculinity ("This girl was expert in her insolence when she broke bounds beyond established law. Once she had done it, insolence the second, to boast her doing, and to laugh in it. I am no man and she the man instead if she can have this conquest without pain" [480-485]).

79. Particularly after Haemon, unwisely, begins mocking his father: after Creon says, in an aside to the chorus, "it seems he's firmly on the woman's side," Haemon replies: "If you're a woman. It is you I care for" (740-41). The idea that Creon's plans for Antigone are, at this point, still unclear is brought home by Creon's subsequent command that Antigone be brought out of the house so that she can die then and there, in Haemon's presence, a cruel response to his son's mockery that is only thwarted by Haemon's sudden departure (758-61).

80. Emily Vermeule notes that in Sophocles' description the cave has all the architectural features of a Bronze age chamber tomb, which was itself called an "*oikos* for the dead." *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 54. See also Rush Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), chap. 4; and Richard Seaford, "The Imprisonment of Women in Greek Tragedy," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 110 (1990): 76-90. On the propriety of enclosure as a form of punishment for women, see Allen, *The World of Prometheus*, 208-9.

81. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184. Arendt specifically mentions the use of messengers within tragedy as an illustration of the gap between perspective of the actor and the perspective of the narrator in *Between Past and Future*, 45.

82. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a29-32.

83. Thus I dissent from John Jones's (*On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* [London, UK: Chatto and Windus, 1962], 15-16) effort to correct the overemphasis on character in the interpretation of tragedy by claiming that "the text makes it plain that we can't" read *anagnôrisis* as the recognition of an individual's identity. As the examples indicate, there is some sense in which it's impossible *not* to say that recognition is the recognition of a person (on this see Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, 352-53); the point is that this is not the recognition of a coherent practical identity in the sense (and with the unambiguously positive valence) presupposed by the politics of recognition.

84. On the suddenness of *peripeteia*, see Else, *Aristotle's* Poetics*: The Argument*, 345; Else persuasively interprets *peripeteia* as a subset of *metabolê* at 343.

85. On the importance of this phrase and its connection to *peripeteia* and *anagnôrisis*, see Else, *Aristotle's* Poetics*: The Argument*, 329ff; Halliwell, *Aristotle's* Poetics, 212.

86. Thus Halliwell's gloss of this gap as the "disparity between the knowledge or intentions of the dramatic characters and the underlying nature of their actions" is too restrictive, insofar as it suggests that the nature of one's action is something "underlying" it (i.e., something that could have been known in advance, if only we were sufficiently attentive or aware) (*Aristotle's* Poetics, 212).

87. On the grammatical splitting see Griffith's commentary to ll. 368-71, in Sophocles, *Antigone*, 189.

88. See Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, *Woman, Nature and Psyche* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 28-29.

89. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 193.

90. In *Bound by Recognition* I argue that Hegel's account of lordship and bondage follows this pattern: there, the experience of finitude and of physical and social dependence is assigned, forcibly, to one party, who performs labor without enjoyment in order to enable the other's experience of pure consumption. Although this social relationship does not *actually* provide the lord with the sovereignty he seeks, it provides him with something like an enjoyable simulation of that mastery, for it insulates him from the experience of his own dependence (even if only imperfectly and temporarily).

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