

SOPHOCLES



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III

ANTIGONE

73 As we have seen, Sophoclean tragedy has its starting-point in the positioning of the vital centres of its main characters and in their remoteness from the centre of the divine or—what comes to the same thing—the daimonic forces that surround them. Hence this tragic discrepancy can develop into drama either by a single, violent downfall and destructive isolation—as in the *Ajax* and the *Oedipus Tyrannus*; or the centres of two human beings, both equally remote, may move around the same invisible central point, each equally thrown off balance and off course. The unity of action is then no longer to be seen in the isolation of one figure, but in the relation of each to the other and the relation of both to the centre of the daimonic ambience, which remains invisible, and can only be guessed at and hinted at. This second type is the basic form of those tragedies which may be grouped under the general heading of tragedies dealing with a double fate, of which the *Antigone*, as well as the *Trachiniae*, is an example.

On the other hand, the usual concepts and categories, with which there has been such a struggle since the time of Hegel to penetrate to the true nature of the *Antigone*—the victorious and the defeated cause, plot and counterplot, right against right, idea against idea, family against the state, tragic guilt and atonement, freedom of the individual and fate, individual and society (state, *polis*)—all these are borrowed from the aesthetics of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, and they are either so general that they are just as applicable to German drama—which means that they are too vague; or they seem to fit the *Antigone* but then do not fit any other of the surviving tragedies of Sophocles—which means that they are too precise. It is no good thinking up a formula for the *Antigone* which breaks down when applied to the other plays.¹

74 Now it is true that the difference between the *Trachiniae* and the *Antigone* as tragedies of double downfalls is that in the former play

the contrast between the two human centres remains restricted to the sphere of what is vitally heroic: home and abroad, house and adventure, feminine and masculine . . . whereas in the *Antigone* the contrasts are so extended and deepened that now on the one side we have what is to our way of thinking a very diverse collection—family, cult, love for one's brother, divine command, youthfulness and unselfishness to the point of self-sacrifice; and on the other side imperiousness, the maxims of the state, the morality of the *polis*, pettiness, rigidity, narrowness of heart, the blindness of age, insistence on the letter of the law to the point of breaking a divine commandment. In the face of such a variety of themes it is understandable that it has been thought that what appears to us diverse should perhaps be traced back to some unity, some single idea, in fact to a clash of ideas—traced back to a conflict of two principles each justified in itself, as if Sophocles were a dramatist like Schiller, Kleist or Goethe.² And yet the opposing sides in this drama, personified in Antigone and Creon, have no conflict within themselves; one side is not in itself attacked by the other, nor does one side convert the nature, law, idea of morals of the other to its own—as Goethe's Tasso, Kleist's Prinz von Homburg and Schiller's Wallenstein do; Antigone is not a sacrifice which Creon has to force himself to make for reasons of state, nor does Antigone have to fight against her own nature and innate tendency to obedience to make her self-sacrifice. Still less does Creon come to perceive that in the case of Antigone he had disregarded a law which was alien to him and directed against him. Thus his final downfall comes about not because the tangled events were just (in human terms), or because it is necessary to atone for the blood spilt by him, but because his own blindness as he loses all sense of moderation drives him into *hybris*. Nor is the theme of the *Antigone* a conflict of norms, but the tragedy of two human downfalls, separate in nature, daimonically linked, following one another as contrasting patterns.³

75 And yet there was some justification for the satisfaction which the Hegelian thirst for dialectic discovered in this play. Instead of the human ways or centres of existence separating from each other, suffering because of each other, without suspecting that they are sending themselves to destruction, remaining alien and unaware of each other, like Ajax and Tecmessa, Heracles and Deianira—instead

of this, in the *Antigone*, and in the *Antigone* alone, a conflict develops, one nature is opposed to another, the pros and cons are presented, and at the same time the opposing spheres are more extensive, more real, more far-reaching (downwards as well as upwards), and their conflict touches on the difference between mortal and immortal commandments, the laws of a particular state and eternal laws. Thus this conflict too emerges finally as a kind of 'dialectic' in spite of everything; but that is not something to be assumed in advance, but rather something which follows from the special nature and position of the two centres.

Now we must forget for a moment our threadbare contemporary theatre if we are to realize what a new phenomenon in the Attic theatre this conflict is: no longer an *agon* like the stationary debate in the *Ajax*, but an advancing, continually shifting, changing collision, driving towards an obscure goal; no longer is it a matter of attitude set against attitude or fate against fate, but will set against will, strength against opposition, deed against deed. Compared with both the *Ajax* and the *Trachiniae*, the *Antigone*, taken together with the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the plays which follow, belongs to a new phase as regards its scenic form. From now on one can take any scene from any play and compare it with any scene from the two earlier plays or indeed any earlier play, and see a changed aspect, discover a changed structure; now for the first time the drama of the older style has become a play in the sense familiar to us. Now for the first time there arises out of a drama of contrasts a drama of *developments* which takes control not only of the whole but also of each single feature, not only of the greater series of scenes but also of the lesser transitions from one reply to another. Developments: that means that there is now not only what there has been since Aeschylus—a movement up and down and to and fro, hope and anxiety, announcement and appearance of what is feared, hesitation and final decision—but a gliding advance from one position to another, with continuous change of the dramatic constellation, from act to act, scene to scene and from the beginning of each scene to its end.

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* is thoroughly permeated by the new form right down to its smallest detail, but the *Antigone* is already strongly in its grip. For what is to become a mere recipe for scene structure in modern drama is here still the outpouring of a religious and poetic passion. The new dramatic style arises because the daimonic ambi-

ence begins to treat the self-absorption of human nature with irony. What moves, what creates the reversals, what drives the centres around each other, is not the poet's assured command of his theatrical technique, nor the dramatic deployment of the inner conflict of a mind suffering as a result of internal or external causes, but the experience of that sport by means of which the gods love to show up the human as human and to change human intention and purpose into fate and destiny.⁴

Even the beginning of the prologue is governed by an action of reversal. It opens with a harmony than which nothing could be more heartfelt:

Antigone

My sister, my Ismene . . . *

The news of the new ruler's prohibition is clothed in the form of a question full of expectation, imbued with the emotions of Antigone, who has tremendous hopes of support and is ready for anything: 'Have you yet heard? . . .' But because of this hope of unity, discord arises all the more violently, the separation of two entire types of existence follows all the more abruptly: the way of Ismene who clings faithfully to the familiar, and the way of Antigone who sacrifices herself for an extreme, ultimate purpose. What the one calls madness, the other calls sanity (47 ff.):

Ismene

O hard of mind! When Creon spoke against it!

Antigone

It's not for him to keep me from my own.

Antigone's contact with an alien nature, as soon as it is recognized as such, is enough to transform her warmth to coldness, her pleading to aversion. The more gently her sister's loving incomprehension speaks to her in the familiar second person, the more abruptly her insistent ego sees itself repulsed. And the game of reversal is all the more fascinating for being played between such young girls (69 ff.):

*[Reinhardt here cites Hölderlin's translation: 'Gemeinsamschwesterliches, o Ismenes Haupt! . . .']

Antigone

I wouldn't urge it. And if now you wished to act, you wouldn't please me as a partner. Be what you want to; but that man shall I bury. For me, the doer, death is best. Friend shall I lie with him, yes friend with friend, when I have dared the crime of piety. Longer the time in which to please the dead than that for those up here.

The only effect of her sister's objections is steadily to intensify her aversion, until it culminates in a cry of woe (82 ff.):

Ismene

Oh my poor sister. How I fear for you!

Antigone

For me, don't borrow trouble. Clear your fate.

Ismene

At least give no one warning of this act; you keep it hidden and I'll do the same.

Antigone

Dear God! Denounce me. I shall hate you more if silent, not proclaiming this to all.

In the end the reversal has put Ismene in the place of Antigone as the unsuccessful pleader. . . . And yet her closing words, after the rupture, have the sound of a gentle harmony (98 ff.):

Ismene

Go, since you want to. But know this: you go senseless indeed, but loved by those who love you.

But the sport of the gods does not become perceptibly the content of the new form of scene until the entrance of Creon. When the new occupant of the throne comes before the leaders of the community, the phrases and maxims with which he introduces himself are neither resounding platitudes nor the exposition of a moral or political principle. Creon is neither merely an example of the swollen *hybris* of a tyrant,⁵ nor a representative of the claims of state, nor

of the idea of the *polis* in opposition to the individual and the family. No principle, no moral or idea is speaking through his mouth; he is a human being confined within his own orbit, and subject to his own limitations to the point of blindness.⁶ But the circle in which he moves, although it is illuminated by no higher principle, is not merely empty illusion from the beginning either: it is well-known to us as a political reality from the history of the sixth and fifth centuries. In Creon's world, Polynices' campaign of vengeance no longer has the significance of the old feud between brothers that it had in the epic,⁷ but is the enterprise of a hostile party of political exiles. And as usual in such cases, here too there are apparently secret alliances between the enemy of the country and a discontented underground faction within the city. But now, after a successful defence, it is a question of attacking those citizens who had been the undercover supporters of the vanquished enemy; and his aim is, if not to annihilate them, at least to keep them in a state of such fear that there will be no future attempt at an uprising.

Creon begins with his own situation, but in such a way that one has to draw one's own conclusion from every word. His declaration contains a veiled threat: 'It is impossible to know a person's soul, temper and intention until he has made it manifest in law and office.' Even if this is primarily intended to be applied to himself, all the same the leaders of the community who face him are in the same position: I am this—and what are you? And step by step, as his suspicion develops, so too Creon himself develops. Hidden at first behind the gestures and words of a leader, his aim, his nature, his identity are gradually revealed. For he is one of those who are not what they make themselves out to be, and this can be seen by the way in which he speaks, and from the situation in which he speaks.⁸ Out of the first enigmatic, general phrases, 'best decisions' (*ἀρίστων βουλευμάτων*), there suddenly emerges the specific threat of a politician who has diagnosed the situation with which he finds himself confronted. Beneath the noble, statesman-like words we can hear as it were the undertone: 'Don't think that I don't know you!' As the feeling of superiority which he entertains from the beginning becomes threatened by insecurity, he tries to assert it at any price.

What he now fears, soon regards as proven and seeks to attack, is two-fold: undercover resistance, and the secret or open support of the party which has been defeated at the gates (184 ff.):

Creon

So I—may Zeus all-seeing always know it—
could not keep silent as disaster crept
upon the town, destroying hope of safety.
Nor could I count the enemy of the land
friend to myself, not I who know so well
that she it is who saves us, sailing straight,
and only so can we have friends at all.

When the command to honour one of the fallen brothers and dishonour the other is put into this context, it no longer means the same as it had done in the epic; it now becomes a touchstone of political allegiance. The treatment of the dead is to be the gauge and yardstick for the 'punishments' and 'rewards' which the survivors are to expect from their ruler (207 ff.):

Creon

Such is my mind. Never shall I, myself,
honour the wicked and reject the just.
The man who is well-minded to the state
from me in death and life shall have his honour.

Just as misfortune (*ἄτη*) and the welfare of the city (*σωτηρία*) are contrasted here, a distinction is also to be made between 'friend' and 'foe', between different political standpoints, and between 'good' and 'evil', and no liaison or allegiance (*no κτᾶσθαι τοὺς φίλους*) should dare to bridge this chasm. The order to dishonour the dead is no longer an expression of blind revenge but has now become a means of uncovering the obviously concealed attitude of the nobility of the community. What effect will it have? After the solemn proclamation with its sanctions the ruler continues watchfully, almost as if he were lying in wait—watching all the more closely the more openly he is answered (215 ff.):

Creon

Now you be sentinels of the decree.

Chorus

Order some younger man to take this on.

Creon

Already there are watchers of the corpse.

Chorus

What other order would you give us, then?

Creon

Not to take sides with any who disobey.

Chorus

No fool is fool as far as loving death.

Creon

Death is the price. But often we have known
men to be ruined by the hope of *profit*.

So this 'profit', the motive so often decried in feuds and party struggles, the means of corruption employed in revolutions and coups, is what the new ruler and *strategos*, who has only just assumed power, imagines is at work against him.⁹ His last phrase betrays the aim of his whole speech. But at this point he is interrupted.

The game which the gods play with man the more he takes refuge in his own cleverness begins straight away with the arrival at this very moment of the fateful news, begins indeed with the appearance of the secret opposition in the foolish figure of the cringing watchman, miserably squirming. With him there enters a whole area of humanity which undermines high office by its mere existence. This is how the mighty man looks, suddenly seen from below!—seen by a creature who shrieks and shakes, is chosen by lot, dilly-dallies, and comforts himself tragically with 'fate'. . . . But just as all this depends on the mighty man's nod, the mighty man himself feels dependent on it and does not know in what way. . . . The sport of the gods is continued in his first, bewildered question, in which the two worlds which are soon to come into collision are already beginning to separate (248):

Creon

What are you saying? What man has dared to do it?

It continues in the description of the discovery, which has something about it of a riddle, of a miracle (249 ff.):

Guard

I wouldn't know. There were no marks of picks,
no grubbed-out earth. The ground was dry and hard,
no trace of wheels. The doer left no sign . . .

What is to be reported is no longer something in the past which has now been caught up with and is now tacked on like the reports in the *Trachiniae*, but something which thrusts its way in, creates a situation and is itself charged with the quality of a situation. Although it takes the form of a report, there is not a single word without significance for the present, without a meaning which adds to the tension arising from the clash of forces.

The gods have their sport, and man, who is always made in such a way that he fits divine nature as a hollow mould is filled by its content—man, in the belief that he can penetrate the mystery before him, rushes still further into blindness; now his suspicions begin to speed ahead with a full wind, sails swollen by everything he hears (278 ff.):

Chorus

Lord, while he spoke, my mind kept on debating.
Isn't this action possibly a god's?

Creon

Stop now, before you fill me up with rage,
or you'll prove yourself insane as well as old.
Unbearable, your saying that the gods
take any kindly forethought for this corpse.
Would it be they had hidden him away,
honouring his good service, his who came
to burn their pillared temples and their wealth,
even their land, and break apart their laws?
Or have you seen them honour wicked men?
It isn't so.
No, from the first there were some men in town
who took the edict hard, and growled against me,
who hid the fact that they were rearing back,
not rightly in the yoke, no way my friends.
These are the people—oh it's clear to me—
who have bribed these men and brought about the deed.

The game intensifies: a new, more forceful oath. . . The talk of

'profit' as the chief danger to the city, that masterpiece of political rhetoric, thrusts its way with its threats into a vacuum; the further it reaches out and the more moral its tone becomes, with its inflated appeals to law and state as though it were a question of the preservation or destruction of the *polis*, the less it corresponds with reality. And again, the further it thrusts its way into a vacuum, the more forcefully the oath with which the ruler concludes rings out, as if his overstrained voice were beginning to break. . . . Here the gnomic style, in its failure to correspond with the reality to which it is applied, itself creates a dramatic situation. The chorus, to whom the speech is addressed, makes no reply. Instead, interrupting and spoiling the effect of the ruler's powerful peroration, to his great annoyance, there comes the voice of the cringing agent: 'And what will become of me? . . .' The dignity of the scene can only just be saved by a further brief threat and a rapid exit. The cringing guard, suddenly finding that he is no longer under fire, makes off while the going is good. His exit is the ironic reply to Creon's.

Although what thwarts Creon, what crosses his will, is the deed of a human being, the *manner* in which it crosses his will and plays with him does not belong to the deed in its human aspect—for the woman who performed the deed was thinking of very different matters—but is a part of the divine setting which acts on human beings through the deed. To confuse human cleverness still further, to enmesh the mighty man more tightly in the game, the sense of the human situation is actually violated, and the burial, instead of being performed once, which would have sufficed to satisfy tradition, has to be performed twice. For it is only by the repetition of the deed that the attitude of the man of power is mocked and his limitations revealed.¹⁰ And when the chorus fears that what has happened could have been brought about by the gods, they are wrong in so far as they believe in a miracle, but in essence what they say is only too true. Admittedly the sport of the 'gods' with men had been shown and exemplified in the *Ajax*, but there it had not as yet given rise to a drama with human content. It is not until the *Antigone* that the irony of the divine begins to permeate the action on the stage.

The next *epeisodion* is divided from the one that precedes it by a chorus in praise of man's glory which, however, contains allusions to the earlier scene; the new *epeisodion* again stands in the relation-

ship of a complete reversal to what has been revealed so far. Just as the rapid return of the messenger is a repetition of his first entrance, but with its tone reversed, the inquiry which follows is very much the reverse of the ruler's unhappy pronouncement about 'profit'. In the agent himself there is shown—concealed, but all the more noticeable for that—the hand of the elusive opposition. And the beginning of his speech is gnomic and explanatory in a way reserved previously for the most serious matters: it takes the same form as Tecmessa's and Deianira's opening words, but now (388 ff.):

Guard

Lord, one should never swear off anything.
 Afterthought makes the first resolve a liar.
 I could have vowed I wouldn't come back here
 after your threats, after the storm I faced.
 But joy that comes beyond the wildest hope
 is bigger than all other pleasure known.
 I'm here, though I swore not to be . . .

The agent now feels as proud and happy as he had previously stood bowed and outcast. And—this is perhaps even more ironic—Sophocles places the most wonderful words of praise in his lowly mouth.¹¹ For again the deed is a sign. But whereas previously the person who had done it had left no trace, there now appears from out of the commotion of all the spaces of the divine universe, from the dust flung up by the midday whirlwind, the girl, lamenting—that is how in Sophocles divine power can be revealed! (421 ff.):

Guard

. . . We shut our eyes,
 sat and endured the plague the gods had sent.
 So the storm left us after a long time.
 We saw the girl. She cried the sharp and shrill
 cry of a bitter bird which sees the nest
 bare where the young birds lay.

Next the interrogation shifts to the silent captive. But here too matters turn out contrary to expectations. Power had been expect-

ing to meet with resistance here; instead a voluntary sacrifice presents itself. She denies neither the deed nor the knowledge that it was forbidden. Instead, in her actual confession there is the beginning of a kind of resistance on a different level, coming from a now unattainable region. The divine sphere which mysteriously frames the human world in each of Sophocles' tragedies is here for the first and last time acknowledged in the dialogue, by a human speaker, to be incomparably superior to the human sphere (450 ff.):

Antigone

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

Separated from its context, that might almost be a theological pronouncement—if it were not spoken by the girl, who loses nothing of her own nature even when the poet speaks through her mouth. By comparison, it is remarkable how little of the theological element in the *Ajax* stemmed from the true nature of Athena. And this is so very much Antigone's own tone of voice! It is not a case of a god possessing her, nor of another voice speaking through her. How easy it would have been for another poet to reach for the types of ecstasy which lay ready to hand in this situation! But Sophocles seems opposed to everything of that kind. In contrast with Aeschylus and Euripides, his plays keep away from any kind of divine possession.¹² His seers have knowledge, it is true, but are not possessed by ecstatic 'enthusiasm'. Unlike the other two dramatists, Sophocles did not write about the forms of interpenetration of man and god, supernatural visions and 'divine madness', *Bacchae* and *Cassandras*. It is only the second *Oedipus* play that is, to some extent, an exception, but it would be a misapprehension of the unique significance of this last work, written as death was drawing near, if we expected to find in the earlier works the new rapprochement, finally achieved, of the divine and the human which we find in the *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Nor is Antigone, although like Cassandra she is sacrificed in the service of the gods, possessed by the god as a driving force within her. What permeates her is indeed some kind of knowledge; this knowledge of hers tells her that just as human society has its own justice which punishes offenders, so do the gods have theirs—she leaves it vague where and when; if she were to be more precise she would be transferring the terms of this world to the world beyond.¹³ But this is very far from making her into a martyr or a saint. Guarantee and surety for that other order does not come to her from above; her knowledge is not from heaven, nor does it emerge from subterranean, mysterious depths; it rises from her own ties of blood and her own nature. What does injury to the divine is identical with what inflicts torment upon the nature of man (465 ff.):

Antigone

And so, for me to meet this fate, no grief,
But if I left that corpse, my mother's son,
dead and unburied I'd have cause to grieve . . .

Is she concealing a secret which has been revealed to her alone? There is nothing to indicate that. When she commends herself to the divine, the eternal totality, when she remains obedient both to Zeus in heaven and Dikē in the underworld, and fulfils the unwritten law—then what she does for her brother, or, as she puts it even more clearly, her 'mother's son', fits into that divine order, and what arises from her nature receives its universally valid significance. What she names together with Zeus and Dikē, heaven and earth, is the all-embracing, the whole, of which this deed of hers is a part. ('Zeus' and 'Dikē' are the two terms of a polar expression here.)¹⁴ And the unwritten law here is none other than that of which the chorus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* (865 ff.) sings the praises:

. . . in word and deed
prescribed by the laws that live on high:
laws begotten in the clear air of heaven,
whose only father is Olympus;
no mortal nature brought them to birth,
no forgetfulness shall lull them to sleep . . .

There is no indication that this law is valid only for blood relationship or only for the relationship between the living and the dead; it is enough that what her dead brother demands is also subject to the universal order. And this is again no more than what the nature which she shelters within her desires. And even when this demand finds itself in the position of a higher duty opposed to the mere will to live, it does not entail any command of 'Thou shalt' unless that command also comes from the voice of her own nature, knowing itself to be at one with her neighbour. Is that too simple for us? That is Greek religion.

But the clearer, the freer it all is, and the brighter the proclamation of divine truth, the more the circle of human power closes in. Whatever opposes it must be *hybris*, revolt, and anything which does not fit in appears as a cloak and extenuation for *hybris*. As if it were a question of defeating an equal opponent, the ruler surrounds himself with the images of his world—the overheated steel which becomes brittle, the horse which will not obey the bridle—without realizing how his own nature is being reflected. His own narrowness drives him on, the captive of his own oath, and subject to his own proclamation. For the sake of self-assertion Creon must humiliate the opposition, bring it down to his own level and attack it with the means at his disposal. This is not right against right, idea against idea, but the divine, the all-embracing with which the young girl knows she is in harmony, against the human, which appears as limited, blind, self-pursuing, self-deceiving and distorted.

The sudden demand for her accomplices, the ruler's command that Ismene (whom he had seen inside the house and believes to be in despair) should be brought out to him, also spring from the strong man's need for some resistance against which to direct his anger (493 f.):

Creon

The sly intent betrays itself sometimes
before the secret plotters work their wrong.

Thus the cut-and-thrust dispute (*stichomythia*) which follows is not a conflict of rights and principles either. Although the two characters use the same words when they speak and develop their

pros and cons, the content of their speeches does not result in an antithetical relationship. Rather, the opposition is between two *realms*: word for word, and meaning for meaning, they *separate* from each other. Creon presents the concepts of his first speech again, but now he comes up against something that blunts his weapon. What he calls 'dishonour' is holy to his opponent; what he calls 'pious' is not so to her, and the same with 'friend' and 'foe' and 'good' and 'bad' (514 ff.)

Creon

Your act of grace, in his regard, is crime.

Antigone

The corpse below would never say it was.

Creon

When you honour him and the criminal just alike?

Antigone

It was a brother, not a slave, who died.

Creon

Died to destroy this land the other guarded.

Antigone

Death yearns for equal law for all the dead.

Creon

Not that the good and bad draw equal shares.

Antigone

Who knows that this is holiness below?¹⁵

Creon

Never the enemy, even in death, a friend.

Antigone

I cannot share in hatred, but in love.

It is only when we realize that the inner form of this conversation is a parting of the ways that we discover how it leads up to the last couplet. In the assonance of the last two lines (*οὔτοι — οὔτοι*) the two realms face each other in utter opposition for the first time; the division between them is brought to its sharpest form. For even the much-quoted saying about love and hate does not defend one ethical principle against another; its meaning is 'I was not born into the circle which believes "Hate your enemy", but into the one

where love between blood-relations knows itself to be in harmony with its like.'¹⁶ Not that Antigone is the personification of love, but her hate and her love spring from a different level from that which produces Creon's friendships and enmities. Moreover, in Greek 'love' is the same word that in Creon's world stands for a band of men of like-minded political views; and what we translate as 'hate' is the same word as 'enemy'. Thus, though outwardly they echo each other, the contrast of the different meanings tears the two spheres all the more sharply asunder.

But at the end, when Ismene is brought forward, the ruler finds himself faced with something which he finds completely incomprehensible: instead of the breakdown which he expected, the two girls engage in a dispute which is the prologue in reverse, a dispute over precedence, a real girls' fight, before his very eyes, about the right to have done the deed and to be allowed to share the consequences. . . . Creon, with his authoritarian mind, can only draw the conclusion (561 f.):

Creon

One of these girls has shown her lack of sense
just now. The other had it from her birth.

* * *

If one considers all the many contradictory attempts to characterize and categorize the figure of Antigone, to pin down its essence by psychological or metaphysical, sociological or ontological methods, one is forced to the conclusion that she does indeed present an enigma—an enigma which has baffled others besides Creon. But if there is one thing that helps to illuminate the darkness around her, it is the great scene containing the lyrical dialogue between Antigone and the chorus and then Antigone's speech, which stands in the middle of the tragedy, just as the monologue of Ajax stands in a central position in his play—Antigone's final lament in the face of death.

But here we see that the nature of the foundations beneath her actions of entering, deciding and departing, the supporting, deeper, more general basis which gives rise to her particular action, is something no less fundamental than the nature of Deianira, or Ajax, or Heracles; only in this case it is something more remote from our

way of thinking: the cult of the dead and myth of the dead of the classical period. If we turn to Attic funerary *lekythoi* and grave reliefs with their scenes from girls' lives, we meet Antigone in person. In the plays of Aeschylus, on entering the realm of the dead, we come, as it were, into the presence of archaic statues of heroes. Here it is as if we were looking at a scene of farewell or lamentation in a work of art in the style of the middle of the fifth century. And just as in the pure forms by which death is depicted in this style, forms set free from magic and fear, we find that rite and nature and cult and kinship are interwoven, so too the all-embracing world with which Antigone's figure is linked partakes of the same sanctity and humanity both in this life and in the life beyond. It hardly matters whether one speaks of race, family, love, rite, religion, right, or ethical idea. None of them is wrong, yet all of them together are not enough. In the nobility of this cult they are all one, and deepest awe, the legacy of former times, is joined in them with the relaxation and freedom of the newly-awakened realization of the beauty of existence.

Perhaps we find it easier to imagine and to listen to the saints, blessed ones, martyrs and brides of God, who are in possession of heaven, and yet are defeated by the power of this world. For the images of Christianity are closer to us than the myth of the ancient world.¹⁷ But Antigone has none the less a sphere of her own, even though it is not heaven which opens to her but the much more restricted fellowship of those from whom she comes and to whom she goes.¹⁸

What are celestial ecstasies, glories descending from heaven, deathbed visions, compared with this attitude to death? The images are melodious but simple: the shore of Acheron, Hades who puts all to sleep. . . The burial chamber as bridal chamber and Acheron as bridegroom are scarcely even metaphors: it all grows to such an extent out of the living popular tradition in which the world of death was depicted. It was an Attic custom to place wedding vessels on the graves of the unmarried dead.¹⁹

But death becomes dramatic—that is, it becomes not just the drama of a person dying, but of death itself, represented, it is true, by the case of one girl—only when life breaks in upon the inevitability of a fate she has already voluntarily accepted, and the two realms, life and death, struggle against each other. As in the German

song where death the enemy suddenly turns into death the friend, death here finally changes from being the force that separates and tears a person abruptly from existence, and becomes something obscurely protective and welcoming.²⁰ Such comforting things as the Christian heaven provides are not, it is true, part of the welcome. But in the vacillation, hovering, to-and-froing between the two abandonments, that of life which is rejecting her, and that of death which awaits her, it is the latter which seems in the end the gentler. The dead do not exclude, they set no bounds to love.

It is in the lament, the *kommos*, that we first hear the mournful note that comes from a sense of having been abandoned. For even the rock-chamber grave in which Antigone is buried alive, which belongs to the traditional story, becomes an image of her halfway position, her rootless hovering. To have been abandoned by all—that means in the first place to be judged by everything to belong somewhere else, in life and death at the same time. In this Antigone resembles the dying Niobe, who turned to stone but still wept. . . But then the abandonment becomes a state of being nowhere, neither in life, in contact with the living, nor in death, among the dead (842 ff.):

Antigone

O city of wealthy men,
I call upon Dirce's spring,
I call upon Thebe's grove in the armoured plain,
to be my witnesses, how with no friend's mourning,
by what decree I go to the fresh-made prison-tomb.
Alive to the place of corpses, an alien still,
never at home with the living nor with the dead.

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The hereditary curse of her family, too, here takes on the meaning of her rejection and abandonment (862 ff.):

Antigone

My mother's marriage-bed.
Destruction where she lay with her husband-son,
my father. These are my parents and I their child.
I go to stay with them. My curse is to die unwed.

be used for the sake of brevity; if we grant the validity of the human and general circumstances which make sense in the light of the *nomos*, then the 'calculation' yields to a proof which can hardly be disregarded any longer: just as Antigone follows divine law, and her own nature, so too she follows the *nomos* of love for her brother. For Sophocles the one embraces the other.

The dying Ajax called once more upon the light of day, the sun, his whole world; turning back for the last time to life, he entered into death. By contrast, Antigone stands facing the realm of death: as Ajax had called on the light and the landscape, she calls on the bridal chamber of Hades and the dead of her own blood; that is her realm. A generation later Sophocles depicts death again—not merely a person dying, but death as something which receives a man—as the end of his second Oedipus play. What death was to mean to him in the end—that is something to which we shall return later.

* * *

In between and after the sacrifice of consideration for the gods, which leads to disrespect, rebellion and 'madness' in the eyes of men, the rest of the tragedy shows the sacrifice of consideration for men, leading to disrespect, rebellion and madness in the eyes of the gods. But in order to link the first sacrifice with the second, which is its reverse, and to join both with a causal link, Sophocles here, as in the less developed *Trachiniae*, makes use of an intermediary figure, who without himself being of equal significance to either has a share in the fates of both. Haemon is linked with both Creon and Antigone, as Hyllus was with Heracles and Deianira. But as a character he is not necessary either for Antigone's fate in itself, nor for the ruler's fate in itself, for that too runs its own self-absorbed course. Although Haemon is betrothed to Antigone and is Creon's son, as a character he does not make Creon into a tragic father nor Antigone into a tragic lover. In the epic, the Sphinx demanded Haemon as Creon's 'most youthful, most handsome son' as a final and most cruel sacrifice. Of this Sophocles has left him the youthfulness—he is still Creon's 'youngest son' (627)—the handsomeness, and the early death, but has placed him in a new position between the fates of the two main characters. Just as it is only through him that Antigone's deed finds an echo in a youthful heart, devoted admira-

tion and imitation, so it is only through him and his death that the ruler's deed rebounds onto the doer. We need only compare Haemon with Hyllus in order to see how much more pregnant with fate, how much more definite, how much richer in emotional appeal and how much closer to the other characters this supporting figure has become, in comparison with the colourless and inactive character of the typical son of the earlier play.

Two dialogue scenes, the first containing the defiance of the young man, through which at the same time the voice of the *city* makes itself heard, the second containing the defiance of the old man, Tiresias, through which at the same time the voice of the *gods* makes itself heard, hang like a pair of pendants, as it were, on either side of the laments sung by the victim as she is led to her death.

Creon's speech of admonition to his son is, in its weight and extent, a repetition of his official speech, but at a higher level, in a heightened version; just as in the former speech Creon the ruler struck the wrong note before his nobles, so now does Creon the father. And his speech again starts with an attempt to anticipate an imaginary danger: he speaks as if it were a question of warding off an evil which is threatening father and son alike. This is the speech of a man who has to feel himself in agreement, and tries to enforce agreement by a demand, a man half intimidating, half seeking a foothold, becoming more and more morally perverse—what he commands will be accomplished, but in a way very different from that which he has in mind—(653 f.):

Creon

Oh spit her forth for ever, as your foe.
Let the girl marry somebody in Hades.

Once again law and obedience and the well-being of the whole city, in war and peace, seem to depend on one thing: just as before they had depended on the prohibition proclaimed in a single announcement, so now they depend on the punishment which rests on a single decision. Once again the *stichomythia* which follows brings a reversal, when the appearance of harmony develops into such disharmony that two people are thrown off course. Two types of blindness confront one another, the noble blindness of youth and the corrupt blindness of age. Or rather two kinds of blindness

on each side. Haemon's first blindness, his false idea of his own strength, is that he believes he has the power to teach this father of his a lesson; his second blindness is that he believes that his father's mistake is simply the result of not knowing something that he, the son, has discovered, and that he believes that he has to do no more than mention it. . . Without this blindness he would not go astray, fly into a passion and plunge to his death. In Creon's case also his first blindness is his false idea of his own strength, when he thinks himself equal to the *polis* and his judgment equal to *nomos*. But he believes this only so long as the idea exalts him; as soon as there is a danger that it may bring him down he reverses his position and pits himself and his strength alone against the whole city. Thus his argument goes round in circles and cancels itself out. Shaken out of state morality, which sounds well but is false when it comes from his mouth, he flings himself into *hybris*, rather like Xerxes in Herodotus, in that he too needed the large cloak to disguise his own pettiness from himself. It is unfortunate for those who see this as a drama of 'principles' that they have to take their *polis* principle from this speech where the speaker is so grievously deluded.²⁴—Creon's second blindness leads him to suspicions of his son's sincerity, as if the latter were speaking under the spell of a Circe. Suspecting his motive, he tries to shuffle off a truth which he cannot allow to be a truth. Thus blindness fights against blindness; each misses the other with his thrusts. And yet Sophocles needed only to have let the lover, as well as the son and youth, speak—as Euripides did afterwards in his *Antigone*—and the two would have had common ground on which to fight. But then they would not each have been separated from the other's world and have escaped each other, to hurtle to their extremes.—Scenes of this kind had not been possible in the *Ajax* or in the *Trachiniae*, if only because of their language. It is not until this play that the conflict ends not simply because the contestants have had enough, but also because the end of the scene has become a literal separation, and this separation, instead of being merely the ending of the speeches, becomes their aim and consequence.

Whereas the argument with Haemon had developed into *hybris* in the sight of men, the argument with the seer Tiresias soon develops into *hybris* in the sight of the gods. It is again a question of 'teaching a lesson' to the unteachable; before, the lesson had come from the

bold approach of the young man, now it comes from the painful advance of the blind old man, leaning on the boy who guides him. What was true of the form of the scene with Haemon is also true of this scene. As on the one side fear and respect are transformed into accusation and mockery, so on the other side benevolent encouragement is transformed into angry condemnation. Once more the second half of the scene becomes the reversal of the first half. The relationship between line 997:

Creon

What is it? How I shudder at your words!

and line 1055:

Creon

Well, the whole crew of seers are money-mad.

is the same as that between the words of Tiresias (1031):

I speak for your own good. And I am right. . . .

97 and its reverse (1084 ff.):

A Bowman, as you said, I send my shafts,
now you have moved me, straight. You'll feel the wound.

What has been prophesied no longer lies in the background, it breaks out, with the effect that it is the seer's anger that seems to be calling forth the immediate future: his words develop into a curse. And here, too, it is characteristic of the difference between the two centres, which simultaneously attract and repel each other, that the same word is used in two meanings. Like 'friend' and 'foe' in the argument between Antigone and Creon, 'profit' (*kerdos*) here has two meanings, in one case the sense of sordid advantage and monetary gain, and in the other the sense of true salvation (1031 ff.):²⁵

Tiresias

I speak for your own good. And I am right.
Learning from a wise counsellor is not pain
if what he speaks are profitable words.

Creon

Make profit, trade in Lydian silver-gold,
pure gold of India; that's your chief desire.
But you will never cover up that corpse.
Not if the very eagles tear their food
from him, and leave it at the throne of Zeus . . .

Unlike the forms of *hybris* in the two earlier plays, the arrogance of a boorish conqueror and of a hero who falls victim to the daimon of blind obsession with fame, Creon's *hybris* is of a later, riper form appearing in the garb of soundness and rightness. The sentence in which it culminates is of such a kind that the enlightened propaganda of Xenophanes or Euripides might have made brilliant use of it, in fact did make use of it in order to distinguish the truly divine from its counterfeit, the *physis* of the divine from its *nomos* (1043):²⁶

Creon

. . . For I know
no mortal being can pollute the gods.

What would delusion be if it did not surround itself with the appearance of truth? But just as this passage already hints at forms of human delusion which will not be developed more fully until the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, that play is already foreshadowed here by the way in which a firm tread gives way to slipping and sliding; and it is also foreshadowed by the persecutor's outbreak of delusion, as though he alone were being persecuted; and again by the increasing number of signs of human frailty revealed by Creon in his lack of moderation when he tries to secure and fortify his own position (1033 ff.):

Creon

Old man, you all, like bowmen at a mark,
have bent your bows at me. I've had my share
of seers. I've been an item in your accounts.

Whatever differences there may be between the figure, the intention and what we call the character in each case, yet the sport of the

daimon and the nature of man's limitation is identical both in this play and in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Taken as a whole, the end of the Tiresias scene unites three motifs, which have also occurred, singly or in pairs, in the *Ajax* and the *Trachiniae*: first the prophecy, the divine sign, secondly the change from delusion or *hybris* to fear and awareness, and thirdly the motif of 'too late'. If one compares each of these three from the point of view of form, then in each case the first two examples clearly prefigure the more developed use of them in the *Antigone*.

In the *Trachiniae* the warning sign had to be exhaustively explained in narrative (678 f.):

Deianira

. . . I want to tell you this
in detail, so you may know the whole story.

The two earlier plays were both characterized by a development away from the forms of report and narrative, a development which was not yet complete. The new departure whereby in the *Antigone* the omen itself becomes drama has already been pointed out in the chapter on the *Trachiniae* (cf. 51, above); it is not until the *Antigone* that Sophocles holds both the divine and the mortal *sphere* within his grasp, that the long explanatory speech comes to invade the present, and that the person who delivers the message becomes an incarnation of the forces themselves.

In so far as the Tiresias scene presents at the same time a prophecy and its *interpretation*, it is comparable with the prophecy of Calchas in the *Ajax*. But in the *Ajax* the prophecy and the interpretation did not form a unity, nor did the interpretation and the visible figure of Ajax. The interpretation did not grow out of the events on the stage, but was tacked on to recapitulatory narratives of previous events. If we turn to the *Antigone*, we find a very great difference in the way in which the character of the person concerned now grows out of the action and pervades the prophecy. Now it becomes part of the tension, part of the conflict; kept back until this moment, called forth by the insult, the revelation comes pouring forth from the old man's lips: this is what you are and this is what you are doing! What he prophesies for the future does not differ from the present, but is only the future shape of what now is; and his

language takes on some of the colour of the mysterious nature of the sacral (1064 ff.):

Tiresias

Know well, the sun will not have rolled its course
 many more days, before you come to give
 corpse for these corpses, child of your own loins.
 For you've confused the upper and lower worlds.
 You sent a life to settle in a tomb;
 you keep up here that which belongs below,
 the corpse unburied, robbed of its release.
 Not you, nor any god that rules on high
 can claim him now.
 You rob the nether gods of what is theirs . . .

The seer's abrupt conclusion, his departure, is itself the last and deadliest of the arrows which he sends to their mark. In what earlier play had an exit ever achieved this effect? Left alone, Creon stands at first perplexed, then embarrassed, he vacillates, asks what he should do, stoops, loses control. . . Just as the 'tree-trunk' must first 'resist against the storm' if it is to be broken (713), just as the 'sail', before it 'overturns', must first be overstrained (715), so Creon has overstrained himself; his breaking-point was already contained in his overstraining, his weakness and anxiety in his abuse. And now, too, his 'yielding' is no longer the kind of yielding spoken of, the action of prudence, but the beginning of his downfall.²⁷

But this is the first time that Sophocles has achieved this degree of creativity. In the *Trachiniae*, the change from delusion to awareness remained concealed in the narrative form;²⁸ no supernatural sphere forced its way through. The *Ajax* contained the prolonged argument about the burial, but did not use the power of words to call upon the sphere of the divine; the 'law of the gods' demanding burial was touched on only once, when it was mentioned in passing during the *stichomythia* (1130); it was fame and honour that were the subject of the furious quarrel. Here, in the *Antigone*, even the Erinyes, whose approach is foretold by Tiresias, no longer appear as the vengeful spirits of a man or a corpse, as they are generally conceived, but as 'avengers of Hades and the gods' (1075), i.e. avengers of a wrong done to the spheres of the divine, instead of to

an individual. 'Hades and the gods' is just as much a polar concept for the whole as 'above' and 'below' had been shortly before.

And so we have almost already arrived at the main point about the motif of 'too late'. It is true that in the *Ajax* the seer already brings about a decision within a limited period of time, a fate is contracted to a moment on the razor's edge (*Ajax* 786; cf. *Antigone* 996). But this was not something which grew naturally out of the drama itself; in order to be presented, the time factor had to take on narrative form, and the sequence of great emotional scenes did not yet bear the stamp of the concentration in time imposed by the daimon. It is true that this motif of 'too late' had already appeared in the *Ajax*, but only for those who were afraid for the hero; it entered into the contrast of tones and outward tensions, linked the hero to the chorus, but still was not linked to the hero himself and to his nature. Creon, on the other hand, both by his own nature and in his appearance on the stage is the 'man who learns too late' (*ὀψιμαθής*);²⁹ a human being with his mortal limitations he is by his own nature in the power of time and the daimon, and the motif of 'too late' is part of his character just as much as it is in the case of Xerxes in Herodotus (vii. 14). Creon comes 'too late', not because things develop more quickly than could have been foreseen, nor because he goes to the dead Polynices first instead of straight to the burial chamber: the daimon peers out from behind every word as he speaks and as he breaks off; Creon comes too late because he is such a limited person; and what follows is only the outward consequence of what was already determined by his breakdown (1102 ff.):

Creon

This is your counsel? You would have me yield?

Chorus

Quick as you can. The gods move very fast
 when they bring ruin on misguided men.

Creon

How hard, abandonment of my desire . . .

But his closing words when he at last decides to make haste only reveal again how deluded he is in his belief that human will can 'set free what it has bound' (1111 f.):

Creon

Now my decision has been overturned
shall I, who bound her, set her free myself.³⁰

The end of the tragedy then concentrates on raising this fate—the fate of a man who realized too late—as far as possible to the level of a symbol, an example of the survivor, the desperate man who stands between his dead son and his dead wife, the victims of his own blindness. The messenger's speech takes the continuation of the scene between son and father as far as the catastrophe: the two meet once again, as in the drama, but this time in the rocky tomb, next to the dead girl, Creon begging and beseeching, Haemon raging and rushing upon the man who has slain his beloved, then taking the sword which he had drawn against his father and plunging it into his own body. Eurydice hurries up to hear the terrible news and then hastens away (her exit is a weaker repetition of Deianira's departure)—but here, where blindness and error are to develop into fate and action, it becomes obvious that the main figure of the second half lacks the support of the myth to sustain him.³¹ Nor can all the piling-up of the forms of narrative and *kommos*, all the profusion of tragic means of expression, make up for the loss of the myth, which takes its revenge, as it were, on the drama for being overlooked. The survivor, full of self-accusation, weeping uncontrollably between the dead, enters, alive, but living a life which is no better than death (*ἔμψυχον νεκρόν*, 1167). 1272 ff:

Creon

. . . It was a god who struck,
who has weighted my head with disaster; he drove me to
wild strange ways,
his heavy heel on my joy.

It makes no difference whether he blames his own stupidity, or a god: here the daimon's work does as little to make Creon innocent as it does in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* to make Oedipus guilty. And yet Creon is piled around with misfortune rather than struck at in the root of his being. Ajax, Deianira, Heracles lost what they were; Creon lost only what he possessed, and his possessions had not previously appeared as being dearest to his heart. The other con-

sequence of his blindness, the revolt in the city, is hinted at (1080 ff.) without being developed into drama.

But there is one respect in which Sophocles should not be reproached with the emptiness of this conclusion: it is the very emptiness of this fate that makes it into the opposite of the fullness of the other. Thus at the end Creon stands in contrast to Antigone exactly as the two kings in the *Ajax* stood in contrast to the dead hero—except that they had no fate in that early play—and exactly as Heracles stood in contrast to Deianira. But how much deeper, more powerful, more embracing the contrast has now become! It is not until the *Antigone* that the play of realms of meaning enters into the play of fates. It is not until now that the figures are surrounded by a contrast of spheres, an above and a below, and divine significance is set in contrast with human insignificance. The fullness of Antigone's death invests her life with human fullness; like a woman conscious of having a mission, she is justified and dedicated. . . . By contrast, Creon ends as the personification of nothingness. For if we go by the actual words, the tragedy ends not so much with a judgment on the guilty person nor with his atonement for the evil deed he has perpetrated, but rather with the picture of the useless survivor, the ungodly fool.³² He is driven to his downfall not by a single offence, but by the nature of his being. His empty lament rings out in response to the last, and very different, lamentations of his victim.