

Week 8
Traditional Normativity as Immediate *Sittlichkeit*

0. Introduction:

Recap (on agency):

Prime issue is what it is to *be* responsible for something that happens (objectively), in the way(s) characteristic of agency.
Answer so far: understand that status as instituted by attitudes of:
agent claiming-acknowledging resp.,
Others (recognized by and recognizing agent) as adopting attitudes of *holding* agent resp.

Modern distinction between *Handlung/Tat*,

Introduction:

a) This is the start of the second half of *PG: Spirit*.

It is really a separate book, not envisaged as part of the *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*.

b) Late (after Spirit) Religion passage, on breaking at the “nodes” and rebundling considerations of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason-as-agency: bringing together all the separately discussed aspects or dimensions of *Geist*, and discussing the history of the whole thing.

The allegories here are not like those of force, or Lordship and Bondage.

Now he uses the explicit literary self-consciousness of each age to speak for it.

It is really only in the *Spirit* section that we get the analysis of the one biggest thing that ever happened in human history: the slow, but accelerating transition from traditional to modern forms of normativity.

c) The initial, traditional phases of each of the three aspects of *Geist* are:

- i. In **epistemology**, a restriction to sense universals, in that *theoretical entities* related by **subjunctively robust explanation-supporting laws** are **not** posited. H is identifying doing the latter with the rise of distinctively *modern* science, the Scientific Revolution.
- ii. In **normativity**, the **asymmetric structure** of authority and responsibility as **subordination and obedience** whose allegory is the Master and the Slave, but whose implementation is followed out from literal slavery through feudal Europe.

This is the Great Chain of Being, of superiors and subordinates (by objective nature or supernatural decree).

- iii. In agency, the *heroic-tragic* self-consciousness of Sophocles's *Oedipus* trilogy (in which sparks of modern self-consciousness become gradually more dominant as we go from *Oedipus* to *Oedipus the King* to *Oedipus at Colonna*).

This is the consciousness that does not yet make the essentially modern distinction of *Handlung* from *Tat*, does not accept and attribute responsibility essentially only for what was done *intentionally*, **does not recognize the "rights of knowledge and intention."**

I'll have more to say about *this* distinction and transition from the heroic-tragic to the modern forms of self-conscious practical agency when I discuss the transition to the third, *post-modern* stage.

- d) One way of appreciating the speculative sweep of Hegel's thought is to see that he formulates a *single* diagnosis for these three aspects and their transition from traditional to modern:
- the Scientific Revolution, with its method of postulating theoretical entities and explanation by laws,
 - the shift to *symmetric* egalitarian normative structures via the appreciation of the fundamental character of *reciprocal* recognitive relations, and
 - the shift to assigning (accepting and attributing) responsibility only for what is in the individual's *control*, what they intend and know will be the consequences of their doings.

All of these, Hegel claims, are aspects of *one single* transition: the advent of modernity.

This is bold and astonishing.

Hegel as theorist of modernity as a unified comprehensive phenomenon.

On the political side, people understood:

Wordsworth, from the *Prelude*, about French Revolution:

"Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive

But to be young was very heaven."

Hegel and Napoleon's "**carrières ouvert aux talents.**"

In his biography, Pinkard relates how Hegel was reported by the Prussian secret police for having uttered this phrase in a lecture. He was considered too eminent to harass directly, so they arrested his most prominent student in his place. Hegel had himself rowed out onto the Spree river to talk to the student through the bars of the prison. It was overheard and reported on to the secret police—but they talked only in Latin.

And though the details of his account have not, I think, been properly appreciated—and so, evaluated—his idea of the shift to modernity has been hugely valuable and important, bequeathing the problematic that defines the social sciences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly the new social science of sociology and modern political theory. Max **Weber**, Ferdinand **Tönnies** (*Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*), Émile **Durkheim**, Georg **Simmel**,

historians like Leopold von **Ranke**, as well as to economists—Karl **Marx** most obviously, but proleptically already **Adam Smith**, too.

e) **The sociological division within Anglophone philosophy between analytic and Continental wings** has as its *philosophical* core a divergence over whether one takes *this* idea, *this* problematic of modernity seriously as a *philosophical* problem, and not just a problem central to social science.

I have been articulating why this intellectual-disciplinary divide coincides extensionally with taking Hegel seriously as a philosopher.

Note that this issue was *not* central for the Absolute Idealists (for this point, paradigmatically Bradley and Royce) who were nontrivially motivated rather by the *reactionary* attempt to pursue or retain religion in the face of the modern onslaught of Darwinian evolutionary theory.

1. The historicity of *Geist*.

Fundamental structure of normativity itself changes with cultural development.

Hegel does think, contra Kant, that the categories change, in the sense that we come to appreciate the inadequacy of our semantic and pragmatic metaconcepts—a process whose guiding, never stably or fully achievable, norm is reflective equilibrium, which chases both developing practices and self-consciousness of them.

But all that is embedded in the context of the largest structure of normativity (= *Geist*).

Arthur (A.O.) Lovejoy, inaugurating the first generation of American intellectual historians, identified the “thin, leading edge of the wedge of Romanticism” (often thought to be, at least initially, a German and English phenomenon) in the sudden popularity on the Continent, beginning in France, of the riotous, anarchic “English garden,” over the geometric formality of the French garden.

Hegel has a similar view about the first stirrings of modernity in traditional society, which he dates to ancient Greece.

Three stages of Hegelian history.

Understanding the ancients better than they understood themselves—because we know where it is going.

1. Geist:

The history of Geist is its own act. Geist is only what it does, and its act is to make itself the object of its own consciousness. In history its act is to gain consciousness of itself as Geist, to apprehend itself in its interpretation of itself to itself. This apprehension is its being and its principle, and the completion of apprehension at one stage is at the same time the rejection of that stage and its transition to a higher. To use abstract phraseology, the Geist apprehending this apprehension anew, or in other words returning to itself again out of its rejection of this lower

stage of apprehension, is the Geist of the stage higher than that on which it stood in its earlier apprehension. [PR §343]

2. Three stages of Hegelian history.

- I. Three stages of Hegelian history.
- II. Traditional Society. Immediate *Sittlichkeit* has two principle aspects
 - a) A view of the relation of norms (statuses) to attitudes;
 - b) A view of agency, selves, and their relation to the community.
- III. Modern Society.
 - a) A view of the relation of norms (statuses) to attitudes;
 - b) A view of agency, selves, and their relation to the community.

Under this last head, I want not only the new subjective view of agency (rights of knowledge and intention) but also selves as players of roles, subject to conflicting norms, by contrast to ancient selves as characters, decisively identified with norms.

Three stages of Hegelian history:

- Stage One: *Sittlichkeit*, no modern subjectivity;
- Stage Two: Alienation, modern subjectivity;
- Stage Three: *Sittlichkeit* (in a new form, compatible with subjectivity),
modern subjectivity (in a new, *sittlich* form).

	No Subjectivity	Subjectivity
Sittlichkeit	Stage One	Stage Three
Alienation	X	Stage Two

Question One: What exactly is it that traditional forms of life got wrong about us that modern forms of life get right? What have we gained? What is it that we have learned and incorporated into our practices and institutions that makes us *modern* selves? What is the “rise of subjectivity”?

Question Two: What is pre-modern *Sittlichkeit*?

Question Three: What is modern alienation?

Question Four: Why did the advent of modern subjectivity bring with it alienation—that is, why did these two structures arise together?

Question Five: What is wrong with the idea of *pre-modern alienation*?

Question Six: How are we to understand Stage Three? Why does the insight into subjectivity not *entail* alienation? How can what was progressive about the transition to modernity be preserved, while re-achieving *Sittlichkeit*?

Question Seven: Can a version of the expansive, heroic conception of agency be reconciled with acknowledging the rights of intention and knowledge?

2. Traditional Society. Immediate Sittlichkeit

Characteristic premodern misunderstanding of normativity:

Plan for (2) on Immediate Sittlichkeit:

1. *Sittlichkeit*.
2. The *family* vs. the *polis*.
3. Gender essentialism
4. Women as the “eternal [ewige] irony of the community.” Hegel as feminist theorist.

Terminology:

Sitte = (ethos) customs, mores, social practices governing practical deliberation and normative assessment.

“What observation knew as a given object in which the self had no part, is here a given custom [Sitte].” [PG 461]

Sittlichkeit is a matter of the *bindingness* (‘Gültigkeit’, ‘Verbindlichkeit’) of norms.

Sittlichkeit is the authority of normative *statuses* over normative *attitudes*.

Sittlichkeit is identifying with the norms, *rather than* one’s own particular subjective attitudes—what one eternally risks and occasionally sacrifices *for* the norms.

What is wrong with traditional society is not that it is *sittlich*, but its *immediate Sittlichkeit*.

Substance/Essence [Substanz/Wesen]:

Essence is **normativity**: the norms implicit in the communities practices of deliberation and assessment, attribution of authority and responsibility.

Substance is the **community** and its implicitly normative practices.

Immediacy about norms:

Traditional society is distinguished by a one-sided objectivism about norms: taking it that natural distinctions immediately and intrinsically have normative significances.

The decisive move to modernity will be acknowledging the significance of normative *attitudes* and *practices* in instituting norms and normative statuses.

The *immediacy* that is the fatal structural flaw in pre-modern *Sittlichkeit* is a running together of the normative and the natural.

- a) On the one hand, this means that normative proprieties are treated as natural properties: as simply there, part of the furniture of the world, independently of the human practices they govern.
- b) On the other hand, it means that merely natural properties are treated as having intrinsic normative significance.

This **ruin of the ethical [sittlichen] Substance** and its passage into another form is thus determined by the fact that the ethical consciousness is directed on to the law in a way that is essentially immediate. **This determination of immediacy means that Nature as such enters into the ethical act**, the reality of which simply reveals the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in the beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium of the ethical Spirit itself. [PG 476]

“What observation knew as a given object in which the self had no part, is here a given custom [Sitte].” [PG 461]

Here we have a pairing, on the side of the objective pole and the subjective pole of the intentional nexus, or (empirical) consciousness and (normative) self-consciousness.

What the sensuous given is to consciousness, the givenness of “customs, uses, institutions” (LW in *PI*) is to *self*-consciousness.

In each case, what we must do to move forward in our (self-)understanding is to appreciate the **role of our discursive activity and attitudes** in constituting what shows up naively as just “there.”

Hegel says of **the laws that they appear to immediate *Sittlichkeit*** as:

...**unalienated spirits transparent to themselves**, stainless celestial figures that preserve in all their differences the undefiled innocence and harmony of their essential nature.

The relationship of self-consciousness to them is equally simple and clear. **They are, and nothing more; this is what constitutes the awareness of its relationship to them.** Thus, Sophocles' Antigone acknowledges them as the unwritten and infallible law of the gods.

**They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting,
Though where they came from, none of us can tell.**

They are. If I inquire after their origin and confine them to the point whence they arose, then I have transcended them; for now it is I who am the universal, and they are the conditioned and limited. If they are supposed to be validated by my insight, then I have already denied their unshakeable, intrinsic being, and regard them as something which, for me, is perhaps true, but also is perhaps not true.

Ethical [sittlich] disposition consists just in sticking steadfastly to what is right, and abstaining from all attempts to move or shake it, or derive it. [PG 437]

[Acknowledging their historicity would be acknowledging their dependence on attitudes.]

Immediacy of self-consciousness: **Character** (contrast: **persona**, role one chooses to play).

Sittlichkeit requires that practitioners **identify with the norms** that govern their practices. Hegelian identification with, we have said, is **risk and sacrifice** for. *Sittlich* identification is accordingly willingness to risk and sacrifice for the norms, for what is really fitting, appropriate, or correct, with what one is in fact obliged or committed to do.

Q: What is risked and sacrificed for the norms?

It is **the particular, contingent, subjective attitudes of practitioners.**

This sort of identification with the normative statuses at the sacrifice of one's own attitudes

Hegel calls "**character.**"

This subjection of subjective attitudes to objective norms is sacrifice of what is particular to what is universal, hence identification with that universal. This is

"...immediate...ethical [sittlich] consciousness which knows its duty and does it, and is bound up with it as its own nature."[PG 597]

Sittlich character consists in identifying with the norms, in the form of

"my station, and its duties," and seeing my identity as made by (a product of) those norms—not the other way around.

Individuals in traditional society understand themselves as **made by the norms they identify with** by practically acknowledging the authority of those norms over particular attitudes and inclinations. But they treat the norms as *found*, rather than *made*. They do not see themselves as having any corresponding authority over the norms, which are treated just as part of the objectively given furniture of the world.

They do not appreciate the contribution their own activity makes to instituting those norms.

That appreciation—seeing "**the trail of the human serpent over all**", in William James's phrase—is **distinctively modern.**

In fact we are both a) made by the norms and b) the makers of those norms.

Tradition appreciated the first, and modernity the second.

Hegel's challenge is to craft a conceptual scheme adequate to both insights.

One aspect of the identification of the normative with the natural characteristic of immediate *Sittlichkeit* is that on this conception of the normative **the idea of conflicting norms is unintelligible.** Someone can no more have incompatible obligations than any object can have incompatible natural properties.

Construing proprieties as objective properties entails that it is *impossible* for one and the same subject to have incompatible duties.

Compare: **modern persons**, playing many *roles*, which might well conflict.

In the allegory, this is part of why **Creon and Antigone cannot see** (thought the audience of the play can [and the chorus?]) that **their conflict involves the conflict of two rights, two duties.**

But **this immediacy makes invisible** precisely what Hegel sees as **most essential:**

Mistaking natural distinctions as normative ones.

In fact, we are *giving* natural distinctions normative significance.

But that is (constitutively) *not* how the practitioners understand what they are doing.

Fetishism.

One important element of the authority-structure that is *Sittlichkeit* is that *sittlich* norms are and are taken to be actually efficacious. Their normative bindingness or authority over attitudes is actually and practically acknowledged. What is appropriate according to a practice (a normative status or norm) makes a real difference in what is actually done (the attitudes and performances of practitioners). Participants in a *sittlich* practice *acknowledge* and *act on* their acknowledgements of proprieties, responsibilities, commitments, and authority.

But *Sittlichkeit* is not just a matter of actually doing what one ought to do—in fact conforming to the norms. It is a matter of *identifying with* those norms.

This ruin of the ethical [*sittlichen*] Substance and its passage into another form is thus determined by the fact that the ethical consciousness is directed on to the law in a way that is essentially immediate. This determination of immediacy means that **Nature as such enters into the ethical act**, the reality of which simply **reveals the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in** the beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium of the ethical Spirit itself. [PG 476]

Family:

Principal topics:

- Family as amphibiously natural/cognitive-normative unit, and
- The gender-essentialism that results from succumbing to the temptation it invites to read off the normative from the natural.
- For this reason, “women as the permanent *irony* in the heart of society,” and Hegel’s credentials as, *inter alia*, a feminist theorist.

Family as institution that is amphibious or transitional between Nature and Spirit. It is both a natural unit and the first cognitive-normative one.

However, although the Family is immediately determined as an ethical being, it is within itself an ethical entity only so far as it is not the natural relationship of its members...**this natural relationship is just as much a spiritual one, and it is only as a spiritual entity that it is ethical**...[T]he ethical principle must be placed in the relation of the individual member of the Family to the whole Family as the **Substance**...[PG 452]

One crucial internal *difference* that makes up the *identity* of a family is the difference between male and female. (Others are that between parent and child.) Just as the family is *both* a natural and a normative unit, so these internal differences are **both natural and normative**.

This, Hegel thinks, is the origin of the idea that normative distinctions *are* natural, objective ones: the reification and objectification, the fetishizing of normativity.

[T]he two sexes overcome their [merely] natural being and appear in their ethical significance, as diverse beings who share between them the two distinctions belonging to the ethical substance. These two universal beings of the ethical world have, therefore, their specific individuality in naturally distinct self-consciousnesses, because **the ethical Spirit is the immediate unity of the substance with self-consciousness**—an immediacy which appears, therefore, both from the side of reality and of difference, as the existence of a natural difference....It is now the specific antithesis of the **two sexes whose natural existence acquires at the same time the significance of their ethical determination.**

[459]

“Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law”. [PG 465]

It essentially has the subordination-obedience structure of parent-child (on which Lord and Servant are modeled).

The two Confucian dimensions: paternal-filial and fraternal.

Hegel sees the filial as more reciprocally recognitive, even though it, too, is asymmetrically recognitive in that older/younger recreates paternal/filial asymmetric relations.

Gendered difference between brothers/sisters is purer and more abstract image of father/mother, without (abstracting from) the sexual bond.

But normatively charged distinction of roles between male/female is reproduced.

Brothers destined for public role, sisters for familial.

This shapes the relations between, and peculiar obligations of Antigone to Polyneices.

Polis is purest, most modern recognitive community in the Greek situation.

Its members are *families*, not individuals. The *paterfamilias* is merely the “head” of the family, speaking for and responsible for that unit.

The **family**, as original, minimal, *natural* form of ethical [*sittlich*] community (substance).

The *polis*, the civil community, consists of mutually recognizing families (*not* individuals).

The male represents the family in the *polis*, so is amphibious between the two communities.

Family as original natural recognitive unit includes natural fraternal and filial relations (cf. Confucius). These are both sensuous images and paradigmatic cases of social-recognitive and historical-recognitive relations.

The primacy of the filial relations makes the asymmetric subordination-obedience form of normativity the one that grows out of familial shape of community.

The excuse is the incapacity and need for tutelage of the children, relative to the parents. Cf. Kant on Enlightenment being the coming to maturity of humanity, its outgrowing its dependence on tutelage.

Original sin of traditional societies: **treating natural properties as having normative significances**, apart from the attitudes of the community. This is *essentialism as fetishism* (Marx). Antigone is the symbol of the breakdown of this model, and so is the thin leading edge of the wedge of modernity. Feminism.

Modernity and selves as playing different roles—husband/wife, baker, merchant, councilor—rather than “my station and its duties.”

Family as at once a natural and a recognitive community, and as individual:

In the *polis* Hegel describes, the reciprocally recognizing particulars who institute the community are not individual humans, but *families*. The *polis* and the family are accordingly the two normative centers from which potentially conflicting demands can issue, addressed to the self-conscious individual agents who must actualize the norms by applying them in particular, contingent circumstances. The family is in one sense a natural, hence immediate, biological unit, held together by bonds of sexual desire and reproduction.

However, although the Family is immediately determined as an ethical being, it is within itself an ethical entity only so far as it is not the natural relationship of its members...this natural relationship is just as much a spiritual one, and it is only as a spiritual entity that it is ethical...[T]he ethical principle must be placed in the relation of the individual member of the Family to the whole Family as the Substance...[PG 452]

[T]he two sexes overcome their [merely] natural being and appear in their ethical significance, as diverse beings who share between them the two distinctions belonging to the ethical substance. [BB: namely particularity/universality, family/polis] These two universal beings of the ethical world have, therefore, their specific individuality in naturally distinct self-consciousnesses, because the ethical Spirit is the immediate unity of the substance with self-consciousness—an immediacy which appears, therefore, both from the side of reality and of difference, as the existence of a natural difference....It is now the specific antithesis of the two sexes whose natural existence acquires at the same time the significance of their ethical determination. [459]

The problem is not that natural distinctions are given or taken to have normative significances, but that they are understood as already having those significances

independently of the practices or attitudes of those for whom they are normatively significant.

“Nature, not the accident of circumstances or choice, assigns one sex to one law, the other to the other law”. [PG 465]

These defining normative roles are accordingly not practically conceived as roles individuals can play, but simply as facts about them. This is *fetishizing* the natural (in Marx’s technical sense): seeing normative phenomena as merely natural ones.

The feminine [Weiblichkeit]: “the eternal irony of the community [Gemeinwesen]

Thus, human law in its universal existence, that is, the community, in general is, in its setting itself into activity, the manliness of the community and, in its actual activity, *is* the government, *moving* itself and *sustaining* itself by absorbing into itself the particularization of the penates, that is, their self-sufficient individualization into different families over which women preside, and by preserving them as dissolved within its fluidity’s continuity. However, the family is in general at the same time its element and its universal activating ground is individual consciousness. Since the community gives itself enduring existence only by disrupting familial happiness and by dissolving self-consciousness into the universal, **it creates an internal enemy for itself in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it (femininity in general). Femininity — the community’s eternal irony —** [erzeugt es sich an dem, was es unterdrückt und was ihm zugleich wesentlich ist, an der Weiblichkeit überhaupt seinen inneren Feind. Diese - **die ewige Ironie des Gemeinwesens**] changes by intrigue the government’s universal purpose into a private end, transforms its universal activity into this determinate individual’s work, and turns the state’s universal property topsy-turvy into the family’s possession and ornament. In this way, **the feminine turns to ridicule the earnest wisdom of maturity**, which, being dead to individuality — to pleasure and consumption as well as to actual activity — only thinks of and is concerned for the universal; she turns this mature wisdom into an object of ridicule for immature, high-spirited youths, and into an object of contempt for their enthusiasm, and she elevates in general youth’s force into what count as valid — elevating the son, born to the mother as her master, the brother as one in whom the sister finds a man as an equal with herself, and the youth through whom the daughter, freed from her non-self-sufficiency, achieves **the enjoyment and the dignity of womanhood. — The community, however, can only sustain itself by suppressing this spirit of individuality**; and because that spirit is an essential moment, **the community equally creates it by its repressive stance towards it as a hostile principle.** [475]

My claim is that Hegel deserves a place in the pantheon of feminist theorists in virtue of:

- i. His diagnosis here of gender essentialism as paradigmatic of the deep *mistake* about itself that is characteristic of traditional normativity, by contrast to modern normativity.

- ii. His analysis of how this mistake is both natural and inevitable in virtue of the role of the family as the primordial normative social community, and the unit from which further such communities are built.
- iii. His prediction of the “stickiness” of this identification of women’s social roles with their familial roles as a source of permanent *irony*—in the sense *both* of “contradiction” and of “speaking out of turn *about* that contradiction” (parabasis).
(These are the two principal axes of Schegel’s notion of irony—see below.)

Irad Kimhi’s response to this claim of mine, in a graduate seminar that he attended as a student *many* years ago: “By these same principles and standards of interpretation, the Old Testament would count as a feminist work because it was Eve who ate the apple.”

3. Reading the allegory: Burial as Recognition

Note that this allegory is special—compared to say, Lordship and Bondage—in that he is looking at an allegory actually produced by and expressing the views of the stage of history he is talking about.

[Refer to handout diagrams. Discuss here the play, the “Marvel Universe” of the Theban royal family, the progression from Aeschylus to Sophocles to Euripides (and even within Sophocles’ Oedipus trilogy).]

The cognitive significance of burial (a function of ritual).

Significance of the concept of ancestor: the *animal* dies, *not* the community member.

Burial (and family hearth-shrines) are constitutive recognition of the individual as *still* a member of the community, just now in the special status of a no-longer-living member.

That there *is* that status constitutively affirms that the cognitively instituted normative community transcends the biological lives of its members, *makes* it an on-going, durable, institution. It is the source of the *continuity* of the community (universal) beyond the lives of the particular animals that become (self-conscious) *individuals* by standing in those cognitive relations.

Burial is an essentially *historical* social-cognitive form.

It has the temporal *asymmetry* that is made symmetric-reciprocal and so able to institute genuine communities by its historical structure. Compare: tradition of judges.

It is what we will see in its most explicit form as *recollection*.

And in its post-modern, fully adequately self-conscious form as *trust*: when recognition takes the form of confession and forgiveness.

Polyneices.

Burial as recognition:

In the allegory, the concrete, practical bearer of cognitive significance—the practical attitude constitutive of community membership—is the act of *burial*.

It is a paradigm of how the acts and attitudes of individuals *do* matter for normative statuses, which must go beyond what is merely found in nature.

For this sort of cognitive performance *gives* a **normative** significance to a **natural** occurrence. The normative status is *conferred*, not just *found*.

The significance of burial is to **turn** something that otherwise **merely happens** into **something done**.

Death... is a state which has been reached immediately, in the course of Nature, not the result of an action consciously done. The duty of the member of a Family

is on that account to add this aspect, in order that the individual's ultimate being, too, **shall not belong solely to Nature** and remain something irrational, but **shall be something done**, and the right of consciousness be asserted in it. [PG 452]

Burial constitutively recognizes someone as not merely a dead animal, but as a member of the community—a member with a particular status: a *dead* member of the community, an honored ancestor.

“Even the departed spirit is present in his blood-relationship, **in the self of the family.**” [PG 486]

The family “interrupts the work of Nature”, it

keeps away from the dead this dishonouring of him by unconscious appetites and abstract entities, and puts its own action in their place...The Family thereby **makes him a member of a community** which prevails over and holds under control the forces of particular material elements and the lower forms of life, which sought to unloose themselves against him and to destroy him. [PG 452]

Burial “makes him a member of a community”; it is recognition.

It is this cognitive deed that is at issue between Creon and Antigone. The laws of the *polis* demand that her brother not be acknowledged as anything more than a dead animal, and the laws of the family demand that acknowledgment, that recognition. The normative institutions actualizing the two cognitive moments of the community (universal and particular) clash over the propriety of adopting a cognitive attitude, of performing a cognitive deed. Because it is individuals who must act, these conflicting demands fall on individuals representing the two institutional cognitive moments. Because the norms in question are immediately *sittlich*, the two figures identify themselves with (sacrifice for) one set of those norms—one issuing in a demand not to recognize by burial, the other in a demand for such normative constitution. The immediacy of the *sittlich* norms means that this conflict cannot be avoided, adjudicated, or resolved.

Because, on the one hand, the ethical order essentially consists in this immediate firmness of decision, and for that reason there is for consciousness essentially only one law, while, on the other hand, the ethical powers are real and effective in the self of consciousness, these powers acquire the significance of excluding and opposing one another....

The ethical consciousness, because it is decisively for one of the two powers, is essentially **character**; it does not accept that both have the same essential nature. For this reason, the opposition between them appears as an unfortunate collision of duty merely with a reality which possesses no rights of its own....

Since it sees right only on one side and wrong on the other, that consciousness which belongs to the divine law sees in the other side only the violence of human caprice, while that which holds to human law sees in the other only the self-will

and disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority. [PG 466]

Neither of the *sittlich characters*—avatars decisively identifying with and acting for one institutional aspect of the normative community

“[C]haracter...that ethical consciousness...which, on account of its immediacy, is a specifically determined Spirit, belongs only to one of the ethical essentialities...” [PG 597].

—is subject to conflicting demands.

But **the audience sees the structural conflict of incompatible laws**. And we see that the contradiction or collision between the family and the polis stands for a collision between the authority of the recognizing parties (particulars) and the recognitive community (universal), respectively. These are not merely contingent normative institutions, but necessary and essential structural dimensions of the recognitive context in which any norms can be discerned.

The most basic structural conflict that Hegel’s allegorical reading of *Antigone* uncovers, however, is not that between its protagonists, or what they represent—not between two laws, between *polis* and family, nor between men and women. That is a real conflict. But **the more fundamental clash is at a higher level: between the immediacy of the construal of norms and the constitutive character of the recognition that is at issue between the two sides**. It is between the implicit understanding of normativity as immediate—as wholly natural and objective, independent of human practices and attitudes—on the one hand, and an equally implicit grasp of the significance of actual recognitive attitudes, performances, and practices for the institution of normative statuses, on the other. In the allegory, what Creon and Antigone are fighting about is officially understood by both to be *a matter of objective fact*, of how it is right and proper to treat the dead Polyneices, something that it is up to the various parties simply to *acknowledge*. But the stakes are so high—identification with the recognitive law of the family up to the point of sacrificing biological life, for Antigone—because both sides implicitly acknowledge that recognition-by-burial *confers* the normative status in question. If Polyneices remains unburied, he will *be* nothing but a dead animal, whereas burying him, even in secret, “*makes* him a member of the community,” as Hegel says in the passage quoted above.

The wrong which can be inflicted on an individual in the ethical realm is simply this, that something merely happens to him...the consciousness of [those who share] the blood of the individual repair this wrong in such a way that what has simply happened becomes rather **a work deliberately done...**[PG 462]

In recognition through burial, the family substitutes its action for the merely natural occurrence, *gives* it a normative significance, *takes* responsibility for it, *exercises* its recognitive authority. It thereby gives contingency the form of necessity—that is, a normative form. That constitutive recognitive act is not intelligible as the immediate acknowledgment of how things already objectively are.

The *polis* and the family *are* recognitive communities, even though they do not explicitly understand themselves as such.

Sittlich substance (Spirit) *is* synthesized by reciprocal recognition.

Making explicit the commitments that are implicit in *sittlich* practices requires giving up the practical understanding of *Sittlichkeit* as **immediate**.

One cannot properly understand normative statuses such as commitment, responsibility, authority, and correctness apart from their relation to normative attitudes: recognizing others by *taking* or *treating* them *as* committed, responsible, authoritative, as acting correctly or incorrectly. That practical realization is the motor of modernity.

[S]elf-consciousness...learns through its own act **the contradiction of those powers into which the substance divided itself** and their mutual downfall, as well as the contradiction between its knowledge of the ethical character of its action, and what is in its own proper nature ethical, and thus finds its own downfall. In point of fact, however, **the ethical substance has developed through this process into actual self-consciousness**; in other words, this particular self has become the actuality of what it is in essence; but precisely in this development the ethical order has been destroyed. [PG 445]

Hegel is here talking about an expressively progressive transformation of Spirit: one that reveals something that was all along implicitly true.

4. Irony and the advent of modernity:

The fundamental clash is between the *immediacy* of the construal of norms (and identification of self with them in being *sittlich character*) and the *constitutive* character of the recognition that is at issue between the two sides. It is between the implicit understanding of normativity as immediate—as wholly natural and objective, independent of human practices and attitudes—on the one hand, and an equally implicit grasp of the significance of actual cognitive attitudes, performances, and practices for the institution of normative statuses, on the other.

The Advent of Modernity:

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Guilt is not an indifferent, ambiguous affair, as if the deed as actually seen in the light of day could, or perhaps could not, be the action of the self, as if with the doing of it there could be linked something external and accidental that did not belong to it, from which aspect, therefore, the action would be innocent. [PG 468]

Ethical self-consciousness now learns from its deed the developed nature of what it *actually* did...The resolve [Entschluß], however, is *in itself* the negative aspect which confronts the resolve with an 'other', something alien to the resolve which knows what it does. Actuality therefore holds concealed within it the other aspect which is alien to this knowledge, and does not reveal the whole truth about itself to consciousness: the son does not recognize his father in the man who has wronged him and whom he slays, nor his mother in the queen whom he makes his wife. **In this way, a power which shuns the light of day ensnares the ethical consciousness, a power which breaks forth only after the deed is done, and seizes the doer in the act.** For the accomplished deed is the removal of the antithesis between the knowing self and the actuality confronting it.... [PG 469]

The first stirrings of modernity in the ironic situation that Antigone and Creon face is “the little rift within the lute/ that bye and bye shall make the music mute/ and, ever widening, slowly silence all.” (Tennyson)

Irony:

Irony arises from the juxtaposition of (2), the immediacy, objectification, and fetishism of norms and (3), that what is actually at issue in burial is the *constitutive attitudes of recognition* in burial. But (2) is the background against which the first sparks of modernity become visible.

Hegel thinks *Antigone* is a great play because of its *irony*.

Antigone and Creon agree the law and what is right, normative statuses, are independent of our attitudes. They just have a substantive disagreement about what is required. It is a disagreement that reflects their different statuses, also understood as given them by nature.

But in fact, what makes the issue of burying Polyneices urgent is that both of them in practice understand that the recognitive attitudes they express practically by burying or not burying him are constitutive of his status as being or not being a citizen of Thebes. That is, they both agree that those practical recognitive attitudes will determine his normative status.

This is the outbreak of modernity within their traditional community.

Compare: Lovejoy on the spread of English gardens, replacing formal European (French) ones, as a fad beginning in the 1700s on the Continent is the thin leading edge of the wedge of Romanticism, displacing Enlightenment.

The irony consists in the fact that Antigone and Creon do not realize, are not aware of, the agreement in attitude that underlies their conflict. They are oblivious to the way their conduct contradicts their avowed beliefs.

Hegel realizes this. It is the essence of his reading of the play.

Q: Does Sophocles realize it?

I think Hegel thinks the answer is “No.”

The irony suffuses Sophocles work.

It is absent in Aeschylus, who is not modern at all.

But the change that is (will be) modernity becomes self-conscious in Euripedes.

Note that I think that Hegel thinks there is a corresponding progression within Sophocles’ *Oedipus* trilogy.

Double layer of *irony*:

- a) Antigone and Creon both misunderstand what they are doing, and are committed to that misunderstanding unto death, in that sense *identifying with* the misunderstanding.
- b) Sophocles himself is only incipiently aware of what he is doing.

For H, his predecessor Aeschylus was not at all aware, and his successor Euripedes was something like fully aware of the irony, (and hence, recognizably modern).

Irony as Romantic trope and attitude (the Schlegels. Friedrich Schlegel as theorist of irony).

Irony, modernity, and post-modernity.

Irony as modern distancing of attitudes from constitutive norms via recognition of our instituting them by our attitudes. Vs. literary (Schlegelian) irony.

In reading Sophocles this way, as only dimly aware of what he was nonetheless centrally doing, Hegel is streets ahead of the literary criticism of his time. He sees the sea-change in *Geist* from its traditional to its modern form as *speaking through*, coming to a *kind* of self-consciousness in Sophocles—a kind of self-consciousness that *we* can see, but (a) his *audiences* and (b) even *Sophocles* himself could *not*.

This is what has come to be a recognizably *postmodern* (pomo) sort of reading—not in the sense of “post-modern” I attribute to Hegel, but in the popular literary “Theory” lit-critters sense.

Irony in Schlegel:

The challenge for us is to see how Hegel combines (or even how Schlegel thought he combines) two of the principal axes of Schlegel’s notion of irony:

- i. Embracing *contradictions*, and
- ii. Parabasis

From Georgia Albert “Understanding irony: three essays on Friedrich Schlegel,” [1993]

- a) In a note written around 1800 Schlegel recorded his dissatisfaction with Kant's conclusion that the question about the infinity of the world is a meaningless and empty one for human reason: "**The Antinomies should not have moved Kant to give up the infinite |das Unendliche~, but the principle of non-contradiction--.**"

for example in the note from 1797 which states: "Every sentence, every book that does not contradict itself is incomplete--" (KFSa 18:83), or in the Athenaeum Fragment 39:

Most often, the name Schlegel gives to the situation in which the principle of non-contradiction is defied is "irony." In contrast to the view adopted by rhetorical treatises at least since Aristotle, irony is not understood here as the rhetorical convention that allows the speaker to express something by saying its opposite, and the interpretation of the ironic discourse does not consist simply in turning the "literal" statement upside down to obtain the "intended" meaning: irony is the simultaneous presence of two meanings between which it is not possible to decide. Such, for example, is the view put forth in **the definition of irony as "analysis of thesis and antithesis"** (KFSa 16:154), where "analysis" is presumably to be understood not in Kant's but in Fichte's sense as "the procedure by which one looks for the characteristic in which the compared entities are opposed |entgegengesetzt~."(2) A better known and more extensively

argued condemnation of the traditional, one-sided view of irony is found in the Lyceum Fragment 108:

- b) In the much quoted posthumous fragment that defines: "**Irony is a permanent parabasis** [eine permanente Parebase~--" (KFSA 18:85). As is well known, **the parabasis is the part in Old Attic comedy in which the chorus temporarily steps out of the linear development of the plot of the play and, turning around to face the audience, addresses it directly, making reference to contemporary public figures and events.** In Schlegel's own definition, it is a speech addressed to the people that the chorus delivered in the middle of the play in the name of the poet. It was really a complete interruption and breaking off of the play, in which, as in the play itself, reigned the greatest lack of restraint, and the chorus, stepping out all the way to the edge of the proscenium [das bis an die Grenze des Proszeniums heraustretende Chor~, would say the rudest things to the audience (Geschichte der europäischen Literatur, KFSA 11:88).