

Sophocles and his Doubles: Chapter Two

Chapter Two: Tragedy's Totality of Effects

Introduction: Tragic versus Aristotelian Aporiai

The next phase of my argument is to demonstrate that tragedy defeats the project of philosophers such as Aristotle who would explain the causes of knowledge and the epistemic and theoretical grounds of its certainty. Aristotelian philosophy should be able to secure as the grounds of its inquiry, the intelligibility of the world and the practicability of experience by explaining the formal and material causes of these events along with the more general possibility of providing such explanations. For Aristotle the intelligibility of the world is secure on theoretical and epistemic grounds, although, in point of praxis, theory and episteme are not available as practical knowledge for the contingencies of the moment in which life must be lived. Thus, apart from the contingencies of the moment of contingent knowledge in which an agent must act, the failures or defaults of the formal cause in the various sorts of accident will present no problems for the project of philosophy. For Aristotle, even accidents are intelligible as such. For instance, in the case of chance, we can understand its manifestation as the accumulation of causal sequences in patterns that are meaningful only within the causal expectations of an ethos. In this sense, such incidents are explicable both in terms of the probability of character and its practical fears and desires and in terms of the random accumulation of causal sequences out of which an agent constructs them under the designation of the chance event. Thus accidents are easily explained as accidents, and the loss of individuation that they entail is readily understood in such terms.

The Aristotelian philosophy comprehends the community of event and essence or the lack of such a community. However, this philosophy would itself encounter a greater problem if presented with a consistency of events which it could not as a merely apparent consistency caught in some incidental or chance aggregation of effects. Thus contemplation could neither establish a logos as the ground of the existence and intelligibility of the events in question, nor could it dismiss the events as accidents. Consider the case of an effect that cannot be explained adequately in terms of the causal sequence leading to it, that is manifested merely as an appearance and might not be understood sufficiently through an Aristotelian application of the designation, “chance event.” I would like to present the plot of a certain type of tragedy as case in point.

In plays such as Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus, Antigone, Women of Trachis, Euripides' Hippolytus, and so on, accidents, errors and, especially, hamartiai of the sort described in the ethics, failures of praxis with regard to the perceived particulars, pile up, as if by design, beyond any credible probability of normal experience. If we consider the plot of these tragedies, we see that the uncanny Mity's scenario can, as in the case of Oedipus Tyrannus, expand to commandeer the entire scheme of imitated praxis and character right up to the reversal¹. The accretion of such errors and their working out is included in a plot that unfolds contrary to expectation and “as if by design.” Presumably this plot unfolds “most wonderfully” because there is no explanation where there most seems that there should be one. According to Aristotle, the incidents of tragedy should occur this way, even if they can be dismissed as chance.

Tragedy may present us with an aporetic situation in which we are confronted by a dispensation of appearances that have an autonomy defined at least by their recalcitrance to the projects of epistemic and philosophical knowledge. To the extent that philosophical knowledge is a human possibility, it is a cognitive state materially rooted in episteme, and an epistemic understanding of nature, in turn, begins with an enquiry into the appearances given through the temporal and

hence contingent state of perception. If the hierarchical ascendancy of theoria and episteme over the material of perception should succumb to the accidents of these material causes, this failure would demonstrate epistemic and theoretical knowledge to be no less contingent than the knowledge of practical reasoning. And this lack of intelligibility could not simply be dismissed as accident in any of the strict Aristotelian uses of the term ².

In this sense, the tragic imitation of praxis may present the strictly sensible or apparent grounds of a knowledge as a phenomenon or datum of experience that can never be more than practical. Consequently, the mimesis of the tragic drama establishes a dichotomy that is even more radical than that assumed in the Platonic theory of forms since here imitation removes itself completely from the domain of forms that may be referred back to any essence that we might understand ³. Thus, the imitation of praxis establishes praxis as a form, the perception of which demonstrates the ultimate incompatibility of practical knowledge with any dispensation of essential form. In this, the tragic aporia may involve the representation of an order of effects whose insuperable redundancy to rational explanation excludes it from the project of Aristotelian thought, if it does not merely defeat it on the material level of cognition. Such indeterminate ordinations of events are out of place in an ideally intelligible regime where thought and essence, theoria and to einai should be able to concur in episteme.

Philosophy and Tragedy--the formal cause, accident and chance

Philosophical reasoning

Here I must explain further the priority of form within Aristotelian thought. Everything that exists does so by virtue of its form. Existences may be eternal or subject to the round of birth, growth, alteration and decay. All forms whose existence is given through matter, such as artifacts and natural events including synthetic unities such as ethos and praxis⁴, are contingent upon the proper instantiation or “enmattering” of their form within the material of their substrate. In as much as we speak of the form as the cause of such existences we refer to it as their logos, or formal cause.

The word “nature” is applied to what is according to

nature and the natural in the same way “art” is applied to what is artistic or a work of art. We should not say in the latter case that there is anything artistic about a thing, if it is a bed only potentially, not yet having the form (eidōs) of a bed; nor should we call it a work of art. The same is true of natural compounds. What is potentially flesh and or bone has not yet its own “nature,” and does not exist “by nature,” until it receives the form specified in the definition (to eidōs kata logon), which we name in defining what flesh and bone is (Ph 2.1, 193 a-b).

Both artifacts and natural existences do not really exist until their forms, or “eide,” are specified according to their definitions, or “logoi.” ⁵ In this sense, a logos might be considered as the ontological structure of a being as such in its communication with its necessary instantiation in its material reality. To the extent that matter can be differentiated or assigned any properties within the objective existence of a particular thing, this is possible through a formal cause, or logos. In this sense, Aristotle’s nature and artifacts are transcendently real--things that exist in matter do so only because they have a form. Yet unlike the case of Kantian theory, these things do not exist in themselves apart from the conditions of their material existence. It is only in virtue of their “enmattering” that these forms can constitute things⁶. The reality of such things, their status as things, can only be given materially.

On the other hand, as a further inversion of our Kantian formula, we might say that events in Aristotle’s world are empirically ideal. The intelligible form of a thing’s ontological definition, its formal priority within matter as we have just described it, is also the form by which it is intelligible to us. And this form is the same when we take it as a cause of perception or as the cause of any higher species of knowledge. The formal cause or logos is, on the one hand, the ontological form or definition of its object. And, on the other hand, considered as the ideal ground of an intrinsically intelligible reality that provides

for us the forms of our perception and thought, this logos or formal cause is the highest form of the possibility of discourse. Considered in this way, the formal cause is a statement compatible with the discursive demands that we might make of its enmattered existence. Thus epistemology, our ability to know things in their form and generality, is fundamentally commensurate with the ontology of these things. We can know what anything is because it is, and because of this existence we can know it. Thus the logos is simultaneously the possibility of human knowledge and the possibility of all formal consistency whatsoever.

Considered according to the temporal, discursive limitations of its possibility and its cognitive process, the mind itself is such an instantiation of form within matter. In the circumstances of practical cognition, the mind is a form of the possibility of discourse that is limited by, among other considerations, the material condition of its practical circumstances and to the material of its own pathe. Again, I note that pathe are, in a sense, the material causes of praxis, and, as such, material considerations in a practical knowledge that proceeds according to the less than epistemic regimen of merely probable knowledge. But, beyond these restrictions, the practical and even epistemic mind is limited, ultimately, by dianoia. As noted in the first chapter, dianoia is itself a pathos. Even as such, in its contingent temporal, phenomenological and material registers, cognition is a process in which the material form of the mind (dianoia, thought, thinking) undergoes a structuring to the point at which, as the hexis of episteme, its knowledge is no longer merely probable but certain. Consequently, at this point, the mind is compatible with the logos of a thing's intelligible definition, or essence. When this epistemic grasp of an object in terms of its definition is actualized in philosophy, the mind, as "nous," or "intuition," assumes the intelligible form or essential definition of its object.

Mind (nous) is itself thinkable (noetos) in exactly the same way as its objects (ta noeta) are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks (to nooun) and what is thought (to nooumenon) are identical; for theoretical knowledge (he episteme theoretike) and its object (he episteton) are identical (DA 3.4, 430 a).

Thus, if this compatibility of mind and essence, as given through the logos, makes possible successively more correct cognitive states culminating in the certain knowledge proper to the sciences or epistemai, philosophy itself is

of a different order. In this fullest realization of the formal priority of knowledge, human thought participates directly in the intelligible nature of reality. Thus philosophy is the state in which anthropos can think being as such⁷.

The cognitive state of philosophy, theoria, is in its essence a realization of nous, the divine intellect that thinks being⁸. In this ultimate form of cognition, the mind of the philosopher, now actualized as nous, transcends the temporal and material conditions of its dianoetic process and assumes the intelligible and unconditioned form of the essence of its object. In this, the state of philosophical thinking is marked by a loss of the distinction between subject and object proper to the limited modes of both practical knowledge and the knowledge of the epistemai⁹. Consequently, all schemes of the essential existence and intelligibility of things converge in the mind of the philosopher.

The science of ethics and practical knowledge

Ethics is part of philosophy, and the mission of philosophy is to realize nous within an intelligible, epistemic account of the essential nature of things. The condition of the validity of the ethics' pronouncements upon the possibilities of coherent and rational practical experience resides in its theoretical grasp of the various formal and material possibilities of praxis. These are, again, the ethikai kai dianoetikai aretai of the soul, as explained in the Nicomachean Ethics, and their deployment in the character states of different types of ethe. When a given ethos, for example, that of a coward or of a reckless man, confronts a fearful situation, Aristotelian ethics would suppose that there are only so many possible outcomes. The possible responses to situations are limited by the states of character, that is, the states of disposition to act upon one's likes and dislikes. The coward will fear to undertake praxeis that he should carry out, and the reckless man will be loath to avoid what he should eschew. Generalities of this sort rest securely upon an

epistemic knowledge of the structure and composition of the ethos. When we know what the ethos of a particular agent is like, we know what its states and dispositions are likely to be in different situations. Thus this epistemic knowledge supplies the certain grounds for discussing what the probable praxis of a given agent will be in given circumstances. Consequently, the ethics can speak in theoretical and epistemic terms about specific sorts of ethe in given situations. In cases of this sort, we have a science that can discuss the characteristic praxeis of specific ethe in the face of whatever circumstances they might encounter¹⁰. Experience results from a practical encounter of a specific ethos with the material dispensation of the particular. Since both ethe and their particulars may be known, experience is, in itself, intelligible, historically, practically and psychologically. Thus experience comes within the definition of the limits of an episteme.

The universal knowledge of the nature of praxis possible through the science of ethics differs from the knowledge of particulars involved in the execution of praxis. A philosopher can explain the nature of praxis and its limits. But in his capacity as an agent, he cannot use his philosophical knowledge in any direct fashion to address the contingency of the actual particulars of praxis¹¹. Philosophical knowledge does not deal with particulars and practical knowledge cannot, as such, in the moment of choice when deliberation must give over to the practical regimen of necessity, grasp the essential or even epistemic nature of what it perceives. As demonstrated by the possibility of the hamartiai, the intelligibility of the circumstances of praxis is contingent upon perception, or “aisthesis.” Thus any execution of praxis is at least as contingent as its knowledge of the particulars of its circumstances. In this, the knowledge with which we undertake praxis can never be as secure as the knowledge of the general nature of praxis that we obtain from a study of the ethics. Praxis is pursued according to the contingent standard of merely probable knowledge. In the Rhetoric, Aristotle defines probability as the consistency of events that “usually” happen. “A probability is a thing that usually happens; not, however, as some definitions would suggest, anything whatever that usually happens, but only if it belongs to the class of the “contingent” or “variable.” It bears the same relation to that in respect of which it is probable as the universal bears to the particular” (Rh 1.2, 1157 a-b). If episteme can deal with universal truths, probability is the condition of the knowledge of practical reasoning which must deal with the particulars of perception. Thus, under the regimen of

practical reasoning, the probability of a given type of ethos acting in its characteristic manner stands to the particular instance of that sort of character as the universal stands to the particular. In this sense, probable knowledge is a weaker analog of epistemic reasoning.

I will make one further distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning with this quote from section three of the first book of De Anima.

If the circular movement is eternal, there must be something which mind is always thinking--what can this be? For all practical purposes of thinking (praktikon noeseon) have limits--they all go on for the sake of something outside the process, and all theoretical processes come to a close in same way as the phrases in speech which express processes and results of thinking. Every such linguistic phrase is either definatory or demonstrative. Demonstration (apodeixis) has both a starting point and may be said to end in a conclusion or inferred result; even if the process reaches final completion, at any rate it never returns upon itself again to its starting-point, it goes on assuming a fresh middle term or a fresh extreme and moves straight forward, but circular movement returns to its starting-point. Definitions, (horismoi) too, are closed groups of terms (DA 1.3, 407 a).

Practical reasoning is always getting and spending. It is instrumental, therefore it is for the sake of something other than itself. It need not reach a completion, or return upon itself as is the case in theoretical thought. It can plunge ever onward into the particularity of experience “assuming a fresh middle term or a fresh extreme” according to the necessities and desires of the moment¹². Presumably, for this reason, epistemic thought, rather than practical reasoning, does not content itself with probabilities, but proceeds along its circular path to build up large systematic structures that securely relate certain truths.

I) Accident

The intelligible structure of all that exists is stated in the logoi of what exists. In the Aristotelian universe, there are two kinds of existences¹³. On the one hand, there are eternal and unvarying objects whose existence is either purely intelligible, such as the forms of geometry, or objects, such as the planets, whose matter is not subject to decay. On the other hand, objects that are dependent upon matter for their existence exist, that is, retain their intelligible, ontological definition, only contingently. Thus, among such contingent existences, it is possible that the form and intelligibility of an object may lose its purchase on the material domain of its realization. To say that this latter variety of object exists only contingently is to say that it is not immutable but subject to accident.

For Aristotle, accident is a condition in which the formal quantities of meaning and essence give way to an unsubstantial state of effects that have been divested of their intelligible causes. Let's consider how such indeterminate and unsubstantial situations are possible for the empirical idealism and transcendental realism of Aristotelian thought. Every contingent existence is, for Aristotle, an enmattering of an essence through its logos. Thus we think the definition and ontological status of a particular event in terms of its form as stated in its logos. Without the logos, the matter does not have definition.

Since we must have the existence of the thing as something given, clearly the reason is why the matter is some definite thing; e.g. why are these materials a house? because that which has the essence of a house is present. And why is this individual thing, or this body having this [form], a man? Therefore what we seek is the cause, and this is the form (eidos) by reason of which the matter is some definite thing; and this is the substance¹⁴ of the thing (Mp 7.17, 1041 b) .

If form confers existence upon its object, the necessity of any such particular material or historical existence resides in the matter of an existence taken in its particularity. "The necessary in nature, then, is plainly what we call by the name of matter and the changes in it" (Ph 2.9, 200 a). In things whose existence is contingent, this contingency obtains through the particulars of their enmattering. Consequently the residence of form within matter is contingent upon a necessity that is, in itself, extrinsic to the transcendental or ideal state of the form. In this, the instantiation or enmattering of the definition or logos may lose its formal priority and devolve to the status of

the merely material conditions through which its particular existence is given.

Thus, in such an event, the necessity of the material causes of an object will no longer be governed by the logos that constituted that object's definition. When we can no longer consider an event in terms of the intelligible causes that gave it its definition, this event has devolved to the status of an accident. For example, in talking about the essential nature of animals, their souls¹⁵, Aristotle gives a metonymy by way of explanation.

Suppose that the eye were an animal--sight would have been its soul, for sight is the substance or essence of the eye which corresponds to the logos, the eye being mere matter of seeing; when seeing is removed the eye is no longer an eye, except in name--it is no more a real eye than the eye of a statue of painted figure (DA 2.1, 1412 a).

An eye is an eye only if it is capable of doing what eyes do, that is to see, for seeing is their essential being. Thus an eye that has been blinded partakes of this essential nature no more than does the eye of a statue. In simple terms, accident is the breakdown of the accord between matter and essence stated in the logos. And the cessation of this accord is, properly speaking, a cessation of existence of the object for which the logos provides definition.

We can also address the problems of agents and agency in these terms. Consider first an extreme case. A corpse is a human "in name only." We can no longer consider such an object, the body of a human, according to the definition of anthropos: noetikos dipous. Thus, for Aristotle, a human loses his or her ontological definition, as such, in death because a corpse cannot be thought according to the grounds of the intelligible definition of what anthropos is as living being, a "rational biped." Likewise, we can speak of the diminution of agency in terms less extreme than death. Life itself is a praxis and the best realization of this praxis is as eudaimonia. As in the Nicomachean Ethics, the destruction or vitiation of the status of an agent may come

through the contingencies or accidents of age, disease, vice or untoward events such as the death or maiming of the tragic reversal or in the ruination of one's personal or social circumstances. All such events imply the diminished realization of the logoi that constitute the formal possibilities of praxis within either the synthetic unity of the multiple cognitive powers in the ethos of the practical subject or in the physical, familial or social circumstances necessary to the successful execution of praxis. There is, in the first case, a loss of the formal priority of a character's power to deliberate and choose properly, and, in the second, a loss of the no less necessary physical, familial or social capacities of the agent.

In terms of the Poetics and its imitation of praxis, the techné of the dramatist presents the contingency of praxis through imitations of the failure of praxis. In as much as praxis is a preeminent and distinctively human mode of causation, and the conduct of life is itself a praxis, we cannot consider the formal status of a dramatic subject and its contingency except in terms of this subject's status and capacity as an agent. Thus tragedy, which is an imitation of praxeis, represents agents through their praxeis. And through its imitations of praxis, it is primarily interested in presenting the practical status and definition of its subjects as agents. For any such agent, the ultimate expression of the possibility of agency is the praxis of eudaimonia, or happiness, and, as Aristotle says in the Poetics, tragedy optimally presents the reversal of this praxis of happiness into its opposite: the pathos or "suffering" of tragedy. The "death, severe pain, wounding and such" (Po 11, 1452 b) that accompanies the reversal of tragedy is, in this case, the imitation of the destruction, reversal or reduction of the status of agent. Consequently this imitation of praxeis which backfire and undo the further possibilities of agency presents the cessation of the possibility of all praxeis including, preeminently, that of eudaimonia. Thus, in its prescription for the reversal of tragedy, the Poetics deals with the contingency of praxis by treating the consequences of praxis in terms of the contingency of its actors' status as agents.

ii) *Chance*

Aristotle says in section five of the second book of the Physics that events that appear to happen as if by a design where no such design can be properly understood must be dismissed as accidents. An incidental accumulation of effects affecting the practical situation of an agent in a pattern that suggests an intention or plan where, in fact,

there is none, is explained in the Physics as tyche or "chance." "Events that are for the sake of something include whatever may be done as a result of thought (apo dianoias prachtheie) or of nature. Things of this kind, then, when they come to pass incidentally are said to have occurred 'by chance'" (Ph 2.5, 196 b). For example:

A man is engaged in collecting subscriptions for a feast. He would have gone to such and such a place for the purpose of getting the money, if he had known. He actually went there for another purpose, and it was only incidentally that he got his money by going there; and this was not due to the fact that he went there as a rule or necessarily, nor is the end effected (getting the money) a cause present in himself--it belongs to the class of things that are intentional and the result of intelligent deliberation. It is when these conditions are satisfied that the man is said to have gone "by chance." If he had gone of deliberate purpose and for the sake of this--if he always or normally went there when he was collecting payments--he would not be said to have gone "by chance" (Ph 2.5, 196 b-197 a).

A chance event involves appearances that motivate the alteration of the causal sequence of an agent's design or plan of praxis. In such an event, an agent encounters an incidental aggregation of circumstances that are purposive for or against his or her needs, designs or desires. In this case, the purposes or aims that an agent might have are randomly elicited, abetted or interrupted by circumstance. Thus a chance event is one through which the causal scheme being put forth by an agent is promoted or thwarted in a manner that is unintended and unanticipated and therefore purely incidental or circumstantial. "It is clear then that chance is an incidental cause in the sphere of those actions for the sake of which some thing which involves purpose. Intelligent reflection, then, and chance are in the same sphere, for purpose implies intelligent reflection" (197 a).

If these events seem to have been motivated by some purpose ulterior to that of the agent, an examination of the provenance of events reveals the appearance of a design to be a misconception of the mind. Thus these events must be regarded as an accident of the cognitive process. A closer investigation of the circumstances of the unfolding of such incidents will reveal that the appearance of design is, in fact, due to our own construction of some incidental aggregation of the necessity of other causal schemes according to the mistaken supposition of a design or a purpose. For example, the man collecting subscriptions “may have wished to see somebody or been following somebody or avoiding somebody, or may have come to see a spectacle” (197 a).

Chance properly cannot be the cause of anything since, as a mere appearance, it does itself also lack causes. Yet chance is not just any accident. It is an accident which is peculiar to the knowledge and desires of a specifically practical reasoning. Chance is an accident specific to the situation of an agent as that agent attempts to promote the continuity of its life as praxis. An encounter with events under the circumstances of chance gives the impression that the character and agency of a particular individual has come upon similar quantities in the circumstances of its praxis. In this way, we may regard chance as a special class of Aristotelian accident appropriate to the discussion of the reversal of tragedy which should occur “as if by design” (“hosper epitedes”) (Po 9, 1452 a).

The phenomenology of chance

Here I will begin to move beyond the specifically Aristotelian argument and consider, initially, at least, the phenomenology of Aristotle’s formulation for the reversal of tragic drama in an extension of the Aristotelian argument that I have been making about the probability of character. I shall now relate the purposiveness of the chance event to the specific probabilities of an agent’s desire and consider the chance event as another specifically human consequence of the probability of character.

The adaptedness of the chance event for or against the subjective quantity of an agent’s desire may lead to a misapprehension of the event of an actual purpose at work in circumstance. In the chance event, the agent misconstrues the possibilities of its own desires or fears, its own advantage or disadvantage, as an actual design put in place by some agency ulterior to itself. Yet in objective terms, circumstance has no such definition since its aggregation involves neither design nor construction. The

form of this event, if we can properly speak of such an event having form, exists merely in the interrelations of the reality of perception and the desiderative and deliberative possibilities of the subject who encounters the chance event and this encounter *is* the chance event.

Since the desiderative and deliberative powers of practical reasoning are specific to the ethos and dianoia of a particular individual, we can say that chance involves a shift in the relation: of the probability of an ethos, its desires, and the dianoetic possibilities of its construction: to the necessity of the material particulars of objective circumstances. In this sense, the chance event is the subjective component of a certain kind of recognition: the consequence of an ethos finding itself uncannily reflected in circumstance. Thus chance involves the apprehension of events that suggest a design independent of an agent and that agent’s desires, although, in epistemic terms, there is no logos in which to ground any objective validity for this apprehension since this design is merely the reflection of the ethos and its needs and desires.

But it is improbable to encounter such probabilities in the circumstances that typify the chance event. Thus when the probability of an ethos in its characteristic aversions and desires is confronted by the specific improbability that circumstance should appear tailored for it or against it, observers of these circumstances are struck by the incongruous juxtaposition of this ethos and its needs, fears and desires with the fortuitous, but inexplicable (nothing to explain) seconding of these needs and desires by circumstance. Given the improbability of this encounter, the ethe of those who behold the chance event, agents or spectators, are, in their need for an explanation, thrown back upon the form of the ethos as such. That is, they are thrown back upon the formal structuring of their own desires, needs, propensities and aversions as properties of the practical intellect of a human agent. Hence, in such a situation, agents and spectators alike construe circumstances according to the basic form of their own practical subjectivity, but such a form duplicated in circumstance. And

in so far as this subjectivity of an agent is disposed to act, this form that is reflected in circumstance is the form of a purpose. Thus these subjects interpret as objectively purposive that which is merely accidental. Consequently, in order to explain such an occurrence, a subject is tempted to look for the actual existence of some design originating in some other ethos. In this sense, the recognition of a chance event is an apprehension or attribution of a certain character and agency in circumstance.

As in all things practical, the mind of practical cognition cannot participate directly in the intelligible community of object and essence. But this proposition is complicated in the event of chance since there is no possibility that any subsequent, epistemological consistency of events will be established. In its appearance, the chance event demonstrates the contingency of the merely probable practical reasoning. Thus, in the case of the chance event, probability fails as a standard of an immediately predictable experience. When the internal reality of character is discovered inexplicably in the exterior reality of circumstance, the practical intellect, that is, the reasoning proper to an ethos as such, is confronted improbably with the probability of its own form in the absence of the more epistemic possibilities of either self-examination or ethical reflection.

The chance event proves how easily the probable standard of practical reasoning fails as a standard of empirical knowledge. Ethos is startled when it finds itself so neatly anticipated by circumstance since its paradigm for the practicability of experience must rely upon a more routine order of probability to secure the universality of systemic epistemic reasoning. As Aristotle says, probability is to that of which it is probable as the universal is to the particular. But in the chance event, this ratio collapses momentarily and with it the consistency of experience for an immediate practical understanding¹⁶. Chance events demonstrate that the form of the universality invoked in practical reasoning has, as probability, something in common with the specific needs and expectations of anthropos beyond its affinity to the universal of philosophy. Thus the event of chance distinguishes probability upon which practical reasoning rests from any more epistemic ground of universality. The long range question is how, in the absence of secure epistemic grounds, could anthropos have a science that were any less anthropic than the probability that governs its perceptions in its practical engagement with the world.

Chance and the reversal of tragedy

Let's now relate this subjective effect to what Aristotle has to say about the optimal kind of reversal in the ninth book of the Poetics:

the imitation is not only of a complete action but also of fearsome and piteous incidents and incidents come to be most fearsome and piteous, or more so, when they arise because of one another and yet are contrary to expectation. For the wondrous(thaumaston) will be more wondrous if it arises in this way than if it comes to be through chance or spontaneity (tyche e automata), since even incidents which come to be through tyche seem to be most wondrous to the extent that they appear to arise purposely (hosper epitedes), e.g. as the statue of Mitys at Argos killed the man who caused Mitys' death by falling on him when he was contemplating it, for such incidents do not seem to arise without plan (Po 9, 1452 a).

Aristotle discourages presentations of chance¹⁷ in tragedy's reversal presumably because chance events are of an order of causation unworthy of tragedy. Tragedy is the genre that is "more philosophical" and, hence, more intelligible than history¹⁸. Thus there are difficulties in assigning the designation "chance," at least as Aristotle uses the term, to the amazing coincidences of tragedy. Yet the correlation is appealing. Nevertheless, the account of the reversal in the Poetics has affinities to our current discussion of chance in Aristotle. Let's compare the Poetics' prescription for reversal to the chance event. Here, in the case of Mitys' killer, there is an apparent match between the ethos and praxeis of an agent and the circumstances in which he finds himself. There is no reason for this ethos to find himself anticipated by circumstances that simultaneously indicate his guilt and mete out vengeance. The probability of this particular character has been matched by an apparently purposive (hosper epitedes: "as if by design") reflection or doubling in circumstance of what

is appropriate to it. Thus this doubling seems itself to have assumed a sort of “character,” if not, in proper Aristotelian terms, “ethos.” The improbability of this sort of occurrence makes its event remarkable or wondrous.

Remarkable or wonderful events that appear to have transpired in accordance with some design are such that we demand of them an explanation that lays out the specifics of their occurrence in terms of the formal provenance of the manifestation of that design. But, if such events come about by chance, there is no such possibility of explaining them in terms of a design. Thus, in Aristotelian terms, we should be able to explain away this appearance of a design as an accident.

But what if, beyond the optimism of the Aristotelian assumptions about the intrinsic rationality of existence, such aporiai presented indeterminacies beyond the possibility of a complete epistemic resolution? In such a case, perhaps, “the desire to understand” may become the somewhat less rational “need” or even “compulsion” to understand¹⁹. Given the presence of anomalous events in the experience of what should be a rationally epistemic universe, episteme and philosophy might have as one of their causes the need to contain that subjective form of probability that responds to the needs and desires of the ethos within the interior domain of the ethos. Thus, in addition to the purely objective, formal considerations that constitute the possibility of rational experience, there may be, additionally, a need to confine the specifically human forms of probability, in their manifestation, to the interiority of the subject’s cognitive life. Consequently, in such less than ideal epistemologies, when confronted with the form of its own probability improbably apparent in circumstance, the agent, or practical subject, must seek reassurance in a more objective or positively epistemic construction of the material of its cognitive process or dianoia. Given the mere apprehension within circumstances of an insubstantial consistency which implies the logos of some design against what is probable, then the desire for merely probable practical explanations will give way to a desire for certain knowledge or episteme. If the Aristotelian “epistemophilia” as Lear puts it²⁰, or desire for understanding, is to remain optimally rational and ideal, then all such doubts must be kept clear from ontological definition as needs.

In this sense, in an optimal Aristotelian epistemology, the apprehension of an occurrence covered by the rubric of chance involves a momentary perplexity, or aporia, which is relieved when the proper causes of the

coincidence are established through a more systematic and epistemic thinking through of the nature of the event. We can, as such, understand this as part of normal human epistemophilia. For Aristotle, the cognitive process moves away from the conditions of aporia. Proper systematic analysis of the event reveals as random what has been construed as a systemic structure. Thus, if we are struck by the prodigies of our cognitive process in its contingency, analysis according to the terms of a certain understanding, or episteme, allows a comprehension which is capable of dismissing the misapprehension.

Chapter Two, § Two: Tragic Aporia— The Aesthetic of the Quandary

The case of Oedipus

I will now explain in greater detail the manner in which the contingent practical knowledge of perception and its probabilities can undo the claims of the epistemic thought that should, in any case, be independent of the conditions of a merely practical knowledge. I will begin with an examination of the problems that tragedy creates for an interpretation of praxis and practical events—“incidents” or “pragmata” as the Poetics puts it—as objects of an Aristotelian episteme. Specifically, tragic plots, “arrangements of incidents” such as we find in Oedipus Tyrannus, present a tight integration of the necessity of circumstance and the probability of character in a manner that seems to undo the systemic grounds of such epistemology. I will explain how tragic plots, specifically the plot of Oedipus Tyrannus, generate presentations that we might, in rather Kantian terms, describe as counter-purposive for the project of epistemology²¹. More particularly, I shall elaborate the manner in which such plots synthesize the probability of character and the necessities of its circumstances so that these necessities are no longer available as grounds for the probable criteria by which an agent, in any course of practical reasoning, could address

the consistency of circumstance as a ground sufficient for a complete and successful execution of praxis.

Laius strikes Oedipus with his goad and Oedipus takes offense. This is easy enough to understand. The consistency of this event is apparent to any ethical analysis. One angry man offends another and is slain in retaliation. Angry men are quick to offend and take offense. If you put two of them together, there is a fair chance that they will offend each other. Thus the encounter of these two is credibly recounted in the tale of their praxeis. These praxeis integrate the probability of their characters with the necessary consequences of specific sorts of injuries they have inflicted upon each other. The result is a coherent and intelligible account of an event in which a man slays another man who has struck him. In and of itself, the integration of these terms of probability and necessity, the probability of particular characters and the necessary consequences of particular praxeis, should permit the consistency of experience to be fully intelligible. On the grounds of an ethical science, we can know the motivations and consequences of such praxeis. Thus, in such a case, the events that we perceive under such intelligible conditions do not raise more questions than they answer.

The Aristotelian ethics is concerned with intelligible explanations for why praxeis either do or do not succeed. Yet, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the paradigm for Aristotle's pronouncement on the structure of the preferred tragic plot, both the consistency of ethos and the continuity of events lose their value as standards of the intelligibility of experience when are overwhelmed by an inexplicable series of coincidences that occur contrary to expectation and "as if by design." Thus tragedy discovers circumstances in which the particulars lose their specification not only for praxis, but also for their scientific and theoretical contemplation by the ethics. The amassing of uncanny coincidences by the plot appears to preclude the efficacy of praxis on every level of the possibility of intelligible experience. By effective praxis, I mean the praxis conducive to eudaimonia which, itself, is the most successful praxis of life.

Consider how the probability of the plot is built up from the most intrinsic or universal level of ethos. A drunk has taunted Oedipus with the allegation that he is not the child of Polybus, king of Corinth, and his wife, Merope. Oedipus must be certain, so he takes the matter to the king who attempts to resolve the issue. But doubts

remain, so he seeks an oracle from Apollo. Oedipus is shocked to learn that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. In his desire to do right by his parents, Oedipus is moved by his feelings of fear and devotion to flee Corinth because he supposes it to be the home of his parents²². Yet this proper disposition, along with the affect of anger lead him, again without proper knowledge of the material and real biological particulars of his identity, to commit unwittingly the crime he seeks to avoid. Hamartiai, mistakes as to the particulars, pile up inexplicably and culminate in monstrous deeds. And when the murder does transpire, it occurs as a remarkably complicated coincidence or match between the probability of Oedipus' ethos and that of his father.

The encounter of father and son, the all too neat conjunction of the specifics of their ethe, their inclination to exchange insults and injuries, occurs within a larger coincidence of their circumstances. They are going to and coming away from Delphi on the same road at the same time. And both courses of travel are driven by oracles of the destiny they are about to consummate together. Thus the necessity of the material existence is given to praxis through particular circumstances that include time and place as well as the specific contribution that the interaction of specific types of ethe makes to these circumstances. The probability of ethos meets the necessary order of consequences under the necessary conditions of the particulars within which praxis occurs.

This is a rational observation that one might expect to find in the ethics. But the ethics is not concerned with the presentation of the sort of totality that amounts to an occurrence "as if by design" encouraged in the *Poetics*' layout of the tragic techné. Virtually every praxis in the play, every circumstance that has any bearing on praxis, that is every undertaking in the order of the material real, is involved in this scheme of coincidences. And this play of probability and necessity extends to all processes of thought from Oedipus' enquiry, to the very affects of pity, fear, anger, reverence

and so on, to the inclinations, desires and thoughts that lead to choice and praxis are also included. This sort of ethical over-determination is implicit in the language of the ethe of the drama. Just about every word is laden with the multiple significations of the play's famous irony²³.

Oedipus' desires, affects and choices issue in praxeis that misfire "as if by design" at every crucial occasion as is the case with his confusion of his real and adoptive parents in Corinth before the play, in his sending for Teiresias during the play, in his misguided coercion of the shepherd prior to the recognition and so on. These coincidences occur chiefly through the affects, desires and dispositions of character--through the very ethos, or empirical subject of the agent, the medium of probability. And they lead to consequences in the material world of necessity and praxis. Since such coincidences occur in the same way for every ethos in the drama and are coordinated like clockwork in the causal sequences of their interactions, there does not seem to be any order of praxis which is free of the inexplicable conditions of the plot's unfolding. Thus, in this drama, the entire regimen of praxis is set to misfire according to the appearance of some uncanny design whose mechanism we cannot know but can only describe as a great coincidence that has an analogous relation to a design. And we can describe this effect only through an analogy to what Aristotle claims that it is not: a design. The effect is describable only as the mere phenomenon of events that occur "as if by design" but, in terms of the Aristotelian real, for no other reason than the probabilities of ethe in their engagement with the incidental necessities of their shared circumstances.

Briefly stated, the tragic reversal achieves this effect through its presentation of the total collapse of the rational hopes of its agents' negotiation with circumstance at every level of engagement from the moral psychology of ethe, through the instrumental and ethical modes of their deliberation on what they construe as their relation to circumstance and finally, in their praxeis and the irretrievable consequences of these praxeis. Thus the moral and material realities of particular situations and incidents of the tragic plot contribute to a regimen of praxis that must unfold as a cognitive process that ends in hamartiai. Hamartiai are, again, praxeis that go wrong unintentionally through misunderstandings of the particulars of a situation, and do not, as such, merit blame. Yet this incredibly elaborate system of coincidences, of praxis without proper knowledge of the particulars, is distinguished by its persistence. It does not end until the reversal. Aristotle's injunction in the Poetics that the

reversal should occur as the result of "some hamartia," does not seem to indicate that this term should have any wider application than it does in the ethics.

An Epistemological Investigation of Tragic Aporetics

Let's consider the cognitive status of the events leading to the reversal in Oedipus Tyrannus. The over-determination of tragedy is an "effect" in that it is apparent as a phenomenon. But, since it is apparent merely as phenomenon, it is an effect whose cause cannot be understood. Yet, this effect, although incomprehensible, is apparent as such because it is manifest as a coherent pattern. The tragic destiny unfolds as a series of consequences which demand to be understood in terms of each other. In more specific terms, the aporetic phenomenon of destiny is apparent as a series of effects that aggregate or combine in their consistent interruption of the practical designs and intentions of the characters of the drama.

Thus destiny becomes apparent in that the events of its manifestation all belong to the same contra-purposive class of phenomena evident in the consistent failure of human agency. Furthermore, the consistency or repetition of the elements of this effect and their coherence as a class of phenomena demand to be understood in terms of a whole or a unity. These phenomena are interpreted as a unity because their manifestation is apparent in the unity of praxeis that follows from the plot's integration of the imitations of praxis according to Aristotle's criteria for the imitation of praxis, probability and necessity. The destiny of the protagonist assumes the appearance of an agency that works through the tragic plot's presentation of the consistent and apparently purposive reversal of the intention of all human agency and, preeminently, that of the protagonist²⁴.

Therefore, the uncanny agency of destiny is presented through the understandable, but terribly ineffective hopes, fears and intentions of the actors on the tragic stage. Consequently, the Aristotelian imitation of praxis might be

thought as a presentation of ethe “in action,” as it were, that is, in praxis which is the activity proper to noetikoi dipodes. The entire effect is presented in conformity with the Poetics’ dictum that character and thought, “ethos and dianoia” should be presented through the praxeis and logoi, or “deeds and words” of the actors. Thus what we are calling “destiny” occurs in complete conformity with the Poetics’ specifications for mimesis²⁵. As a consequence of the plot’s representation of complete praxeis as enjoined by the Poetics (Po 6, 1449 b 25), the unity that we attribute to this effect is defined by the praxeis that constitute the circumstances of its representation. Thus this imitation of praxis presents the interaction of character and destiny.

Agency and Destiny

The phenomenon of the tragic destiny is an effect which derives its special status as such from our inclination to apprehend it as a unity. And this unity is manifest in the consistent thwarting of the intentions and purposes of the human agents in the drama. Moreover, the consistent failure of the human causation itself suggests that we should understand the effect as analogous to the cognitive form of the human agency whose failure is represented. This tragic destiny is manifest as the direct contradiction of the intentions the actors have in their status as agents, i.e., in their desire to be causes in a regime of praxis. In the default of the successful consummation of praxis as an end in itself concordant with the hopes of the agent, the phenomenon of destiny still reflects the cognitive or causal form of a purpose. Since “purpose” is the designation that “cause” acquires in the practical regimen of agents and agency, a sustained contradiction of a given agent’s project would itself assume the purposive form of that project’s contradiction. Thus the contra-purposiveness of circumstance to the aims of Oedipus is itself the phenomenon of a purpose directly opposed to Oedipus’ purpose.

Thus, in addition to the human agency of the drama, there is, apparently, an ulterior order of agency manifest as an efficient causality that works through its victims’ praxeis. Such an effect is manifest in the failure of human praxis and assumes the form of the cause of the failure of that praxis. This phenomenon of a purpose has some peculiar consequences for the cognitive psychology of those who become aware of it. It constitutes an apprehension that there is something there, specifically an agency or purpose that we should be able to understand more fully in these terms. But, beyond this, we would specifically want to

understand whatever is behind this uncanny purpose as the cause of the failed the praxeis for the agents of the drama.

Here I would like to take this purposiveness in the direction of the Kantian aesthetic’s purposiveness without purpose. The purposiveness of the tragic aporia is strange in that the scheme of its deployment as purpose involves an unfolding of praxeis in such a way that it has the appearance of an agency without the determinate subjectivity or “character” of a discernible ethos. When we apprehend purpose, we are asked to think the category of the ethos behind the purpose. That is, we are asked to make a judgment in terms of what comprehensible human desires would motivate the enactment of such a purpose. Thus we think agency in terms of the ethos which originates, through praxis, its specific causal sequences. Yet this agency is elusive since it is apparent only in the presentations of the praxeis and ethe of its victims (those undergoing its pathos). We cannot understand this agency beyond its uncanny specification as purpose. Destiny is apparent as the mere form of a purpose. Or in similarly Kantian terms, it is apparent under the purposive form of an agency that has no further definition as a concept or purpose that could function determinately as a meaningful signifier within conceptual discourse²⁶. Consequently, there is a purposiveness that is manifest as the mere form of a purpose, but we cannot understand this purpose determinately according to the specific desires and characteristic temperament by which we could assign it to any given finite, human identity or ethos. Thus, In Aristotelian terms, this phenomenon of agency cannot be understood according to any of the grounds of praxis, moral or discursive, by which we could understand the character of a particular human agent.

Although we feel we must understand this event in terms of some unspecified order of causality, its cognitive form remains uncanny since this “cause” cannot be put into any regress sufficient to explain it. Such a regress would have to allow us to explain events in terms of some infinitely remote examination

of the probabilities and necessities at work on the human and natural levels of character and circumstance. But for regress to work for epistemology, it must be finite. That is, it must be able to rest upon principles and the universal extensions through the structures of discursive knowledge. Only in this way can the science of metaphysics secure its relation to the intelligible ends and aims of being. As in the Aristotelian epistemology, it would have to dismiss as mere chance the improbable and virtually impossible chain of unrelenting coincidences. We have an effect which behaves like a cause. But this cause is merely the appearance of a cause, since, the sheer weight of its improbability does not allow a satisfactory explanation through the necessity and probability of the empirical grounds of praxis. There is the mere form of something like a praxis, agency, ethos, or will, and this appears to be working through the ethos and dianoia of tragic subjects. We can understand the character, praxeis, intentions and so forth of the dramatis personae, but we cannot say much about destiny, except that we recognize it in terms of the agents' fear and anger and our own pity, fear and wonder. Thus, what we understand about destiny is the tragic knowledge that it is perplexing, piteous and fearful. In the tragic aesthetic, the random walk gains an uncanny purpose.

Tragic Intuition Against Metaphysics

The consistency and totality which the dramatic art produces in its regimen of effects has assumed the cognitive form of a purpose. And the presentation of destiny as phenomenon is, in fact, possible only through such a form. We can think the whole or totality as a unity only because we can think the apparent form of the purpose as cause. Thus the over-determination of the plot is a peculiar event in that it is a set of accidents that insistently and powerfully makes sense as purpose. This is the case even though the conditions of the discovery of this form and its validity within the empirical order of nature are similar to tyche. --They rest merely in apprehension²⁷ but have no further intelligible basis. The difference between the phenomena of the tragic aesthetic and tyche, is that in the tragic aesthetic there is no opportunity for the mind to establish the certain or epistemic grounds on which this order of effects could be comprehended and dismissed as an accident.

Thus the effect retains the form of a purpose²⁸. And this form of a purpose defeats the possibilities of any analysis by which it could be dismissed as accident. We

are left with the apprehension of the mere form of agency, and we construe this form as though it were over-determining the purposive form of the praxeis intended and undertaken by the characters of the drama. We have the mere phenomenon of something that appears to reflect some overwhelmingly powerful but incomprehensible, and in this sense, indeterminate, form of a cause. But this causal form does not submit to the regress that could connect its appearances with the certain comprehension of an epistemic knowledge. Therefore, this phenomenon is not adequate to the exhibition of any formal cause or determinate agency. Nor can this appearance be dismissed as tyche because the mind is given no respite from the continued unfolding of the phenomenon of this effect in which it could distribute the necessity and probability rationally within intelligible causal schemes. But even the sheer complexity of the plot's structural elaboration suggests that there is no such respite possible. If one goes along with the presentation of the tragic theater, one accepts the presentation of a weirdly counter-purposive form whose manifestation is unrelentingly set against the success of praxis. Thus if one accepts the assumption that such praxeis are credible and effective, one must also accept that the sustained complexity of the coincidences constitutes an order of apprehension that denies comprehension²⁹.

Tragedy's production generates appearances that go against the hopes and possibilities of epistemei such as ethics which should be able to give us certain knowledge about the natural possibilities of praxis. If praxis is a mode of causation in which conditional knowledge encounters and negotiates its perceived particulars, this encounter should itself be comprehensible in epistemic terms. But in tragedy, praxis itself and this contingent knowledge proper to the execution of praxis present the extraordinary possibilities of generating the appearance and perception of a unity that remains singular and, therefore, denies its own inclusion into the structures of systematic and epistemic thinking. Thus tragedy's representation of praxis becomes the

condition in which all forms of certain knowledge are lost to a contingency that will no longer allow praxis (or the life whose form praxis is) admission to the intelligible regime of Aristotelian philosophy. And, moreover, under these appearances the possibility of philosophical thinking is itself lost.

The cognition of the appearances of the tragic stage is limited by a practical regimen of time and material particulars. This becomes especially evident in tragedy's insistent contradiction of the order of cause and consequence. The counter-purposiveness of tragic appearances for systemic and epistemic thought present an effect that is evident only as phenomenon and cannot be understood beyond the data of its appearance. Such an effect would defeat the contemplation of the Aristotelian philosophy and episteme at the fundamental level of perception. Perceptions remain perceptions, as in Aristotelian accident. But they additionally thwart the possibility of any meaningful analysis, through regress, of their incidental causes. These contradictions deny (through the interruption of expectation by the form of a purpose or will) the construction of dianoia as certain knowledge or episteme. Episteme is the ultimate form of the temporal intellect, mind as cognitive process, or thinking in time. But even as such, it is the material cause that would be actualized in the contemplation of philosophy and its participation as nous in the regime of eternal and intelligible forms.

The very contingency of the probable standards of practical reason's consistency allows them to be applied against the systemic and epistemic coherence of thought. The counter-purposiveness of the coincidences with regard to the agents' praxeis is at the same time a counter-purposiveness for the epistemic hopes of our cognitive process which cannot submit this order of causes to regress. Such cognitive processes cannot, therefore, coordinate these perceived events with the concept of a cause. Such standards are applied against the consistency and certainty of knowledge so that knowledge cannot attain to the status of episteme, and certainly not to the philosophical theoria or contemplation. Thus the Poetics finds in the imitation of praxis a way of presenting the conditions in which the project of philosophy can succumb, through the perceptions of imitated praxis, to the contradictions that exist within time³⁰.

Thus, despite the affinities to chance events of tragedy's unfolding, the phenomena of the tragic plot appear to exceed the merely Aristotelian definitions of

chance in that they deny the cognitive process of the audience any recourse to knowledge beyond the mere contradictory, inexplicable and undismissible givens of perception. Without the superior recourse of secure episteme, an Aristotelian enquiry would be hard put to domesticate such phenomena as accidents. The coincidences of tragedy could not, under such conditions, be dismissed as misapprehensions as would be possible in the appearance of a merely Aristotelian chance event. Rather, under the conditions of tragedy's imitation of praxeis, the phenomena of the drama assume a subjective status of a sensible intuition governed by the discourse of objective cognitive processes. As such, these effects would constitute a "mere appearance" similar to that which Kant describes in section seven of the "Introduction" to the Critique of Judgment (Ak 189)³¹. Yet, so construed, these phenomena of the tragic stage would also be beyond the pale of a Kantian epistemology since in such an event the understanding, or power of concepts, would retain no hold upon the material of perception.

Tragedy of this sort is peculiar in that its insistent over-determination of sufficiently motivated sequences of cause and effect implies a larger consistency or coherence of events which cannot be understood. Yet, even as a consistency, the unfolding of the tragic plot suggests formal properties that do not, as required by the Aristotelian project, admit to explanation through a syllogistic, discursive application of the logos or formal cause as the principle of intelligibility. Nor can they be dismissed as an accident. Instead, there is an effect that presents itself under the priority of form--but inexplicably. Thus, uncannily, we find in the imitation of praxis, a situation in which the merely probable grounds of practical reasoning have construed themselves against the possibility of episteme and, consequently, against philosophical thought. But, beyond this, they are set even against the merely probable understanding of the possibility of a coherent experience within a rational nature.

*The Heuristics and Aesthetics of Accident: The
Invention of a Purely Practical Reason*

i) The tragic aesthetic and the probability of character

In the case of the tragic aporia, probability, the cognitive form of the possibility of praxis, collapses. Thus it no longer has any value in establishing consistency of experience for praxis. In this condition, an agent's relation to the contingent order of experience assumes the specification of a massive hamartia. In such a case, the cognitive form of perceived events has come to signify only the condition of praxis' impossibility. Thus the aporia of external experiences comes, finally, to define a state of subjective awareness rather than anything more objective or circumstantial. And probability, which no longer has any external value as the possibility of praxis, comes only to indicate the subjective self-awareness of the agent confronted by the real limitations of life as praxis. Thus epistemic and theoretical hexeis, and even the states of the discourse of practical possibilities, have given way to a state characterized by affects which relate to an awareness of the limitations and, increasingly, the extremely dire limitations, of agency.

Tragedy seems to create an aporia in which cognition is trapped in the condition of praxis and limited to the register of the particular and material forms of dianoia and the pathe. In the case of practical reasoning, the coherence of knowledge, even in the best cases, rests upon the consistency of circumstances. And this consistency can be known only on the empirical grounds of praxis. If for Aristotle, praxis must be an end in itself, one of the implications of this statement is that the coherence of experience is itself an ongoing possibility that flows from praxis as a successful function. Thus the consistency of experience refers to an experience that is being integrated through praxis, and praxis itself rests upon the continuity of cause and consequence in time. So in general terms, the intelligibility of experience rests upon the possibilities of praxis. But since the connection of cause and consequence no longer has any value for the systemic ordering of effects relative to any natural dispensation of intelligible causes, the sole consequence of experience is now the subjective state of an ethos that cannot act, an ethos confronted by the imponderable atrocities of circumstance³².

ii) The invention of a purely practical knowledge

The Poetics may be unique in the Aristotelian opus

in that it prescribes a representation in which the seeming circumstances of mere probability become the foundations of a very limited and ultimately impractical kind of knowledge of a destiny set within time and the limits of praxis. Thus this tragic mode of representation may replace the powers of epistemic and theoretical knowing entirely. In place of the philosophical and epistemic knowledge that defines objects, the tragic knowledge would present, as the greatest and most inevitable improbability, the ethos itself.

Thus the production of tragedy discovers a way of presenting the appearance and perception of a unity that remains singular and, therefore, denies its own inclusion into the structures of systematic and epistemic thinking. Consequently, tragedy's representation of praxis and the terms of practical knowing becomes the condition in which all forms of certain knowledge are lost to a contingency that will no longer allow praxis (or the life whose form praxis is) admission to the intelligible concerns of Aristotelian science and philosophy. But this knowledge, in turn, is replaced by the subjective, material and qualitative knowledge implicit in the affects of pity, fear and wonder and their catharsis. If we were to describe this awareness more in the subjective terms of a Kantian aesthetic, we could say that, as in beauty and sublimity, it is equivalent to a sensation or specific modulation of the feeling of life's process³³. In as much as this sensation is proper to the ethos or subject of praxis itself in its intimation of life's excess over praxis, techné and the cultural individuation implicit in these forms, we can see that this invocation of the Kantian aesthetic quickly draws in the Nietzschean aesthetic of the Birth of Tragedy and the fundamental excess of events over all powers of reason, practical and theoretical.

In this, the uncanny intuition of agency optimal in the tragedy preferred by the Poetics may redefine, even empirically, the relation between probability and necessity, and present these standards as having no value for the success of praxis. Happiness, like all else practical in such tragedies, is proved to be a mere appearance. If this argument

is sustainable, then the Poetics mandates a mode of representation that has little in common with the project of Aristotelian thought generally. As a consequence of presenting the aporetic circumstances of the tragic plot, the value of probability as a cognitive form of the possibility of ordinary praxis collapses entirely. Thus, in this case, probability can no longer secure the connection of the formal limitations and requirements of praxis and the exigent necessities of circumstance in which such praxis must occur.

After the reversal of the tragedy, Oedipus acknowledges himself as the perpetrator of titanic excess. He accepts that he has violated the fundamental canons of morality implicit in the taboos that protect parents and children from each other. He admits to the implication in these crimes of his own ethical subjectivity, his status as one whose consciousness of his own contingent being is given under the possibilities of an ethos and all that this entails in terms of the law. If the patricide and incest are not the consequences of his deliberated praxeis, his own life, as he has come to understand it must still be viewed as a consequence of these praxeis even apart from their deliberation. Apollo made him do these things, but the hand that blinded him was his own. Thus he will embrace the singularity of his crimes not as a statement of identity and, perhaps, not even as a moral judgment upon itself, but as a fundamental contradiction of the possibility of living his life within the practical limits of culture³⁴.

We might consider Oedipus' life in terms of a radical disfunction. If in Aristotelian terms, happiness is the best and most functional praxis of a life, tragedy demonstrates that such a function does not rest on any sound basis however we construe the form of this basis. Considered empirically or in terms of what should be its intelligible possibilities, happiness is but seeming. In this, what we have been describing as the affective state of tragedy may be equivalent to a sensation of life's ultimate abrogation as praxis--even as it constitutes the conditions under which the subject of tragedy gains this fundamental insight into the ultimate consequences and possibilities of praxis. Thus, to achieve a recognition of this ultimate contingency of human hope, tragedy must, as Nietzsche observes, traffic in monstrosity and titanic excess. If happiness, the consummate praxis of life, can transpire only within the limits of relationships structured fundamentally in familial terms, then the ultimate contingency of praxis

and happiness rests within these relationships. Thus tragedy may employ the situation of one such as of Oedipus to exhibit this contingency.

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Endnotes

1. If in the *Poetics*, Aristotle calls for a reversal that occurs as the result of “some hamartia,” the entire plot of such a reversal seems to become an extended hamartia.

2. From the perspective of the material and discursive processes of cognition, we might regard this aporia as a case of metaphysics succumbing to psychology.

3. Mimesis would then be the generation of an order of effects that were in no way the repetition of an archetypal form, but, rather, the presentation of an event that could only be understood by analogy to accident and, even then, only imperfectly.

4. Here I venture a comparison of Aristotelian ethics to Kantian phenomenology. The forms such as the Aristotelian ethos or contemplative state of the philosopher or the technical hexis of the artisan can be thought as unities only to the extent that they are engaged in activities proper to them. The unity of such activities is to be thought according to their function, or ergon. There is a similar notion of the power and priority of the functional unity in Kantian synthesis. The representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition that transpires in categorical judgments is itself a function or “Funktion”: “By ‘function’ I mean the unity of the act of bringing various representations under once common representation” (A 68 / B 93); “Accordingly all judgments are functions of unity among our representations” (A 69 / B 93).

5. The distinctions get very subtle. Ultimately “eidos,” “logos,” and “to einai,” or “essence” are mutually defining expressions of each other. For more on this, see Lear, p.29.

6. For a discussion of the enmattering of form, see DA 1.1, 303 a-b.

7. Note here the distinction between having episteme and actualizing it in philosophical contemplation (DA 2.1, 412 a).

8. For this we go to *Metaphysics* 12. 7 and 12.9:

And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and the object are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought. But it is *active* when it *possesses* this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain,

and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of God is life and God is that actuality; and God’s self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God (Mp 12.7, 1072 b).

The divine thought and its object will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought. A further question is left--whether the object of the divine thought is composite; for if it were, thought would change in passing from part to part of the whole. We answer that everything which has not matter is indivisible--as human thought, or rather the thought of composite beings is in a certain period of time (for it does not possess the good at this moment or at that, but its best, being something *different* from it, is attained only in a whole period of time), so throughout eternity is the thought which has *itself* for its object (Mp 12.9, 1075 a)

9. Change “eliminate” to “obliterate” and you get yet another affinity of ecstatic, Nietzschean tragic knowledge to Aristotelian rationality.

10. Thus it is easy to see how this understanding of ethe and praxeis could, in conjunction, say, with a reading of the *Rhetoric*, lead to a profitable study of the formal possibilities of narrative.

11. Cf. EN 6.7.

From what has been said, it is plain, then, that philosophical wisdom (sophia) is scientific knowledge (episteme) combined with intuitive reason (nous), of the things that are highest by nature. This why we say Anaxagoras, Thales, and men like them have philosophic but not practical wisdom (phronesis), when we see them ignorant of what is to their own advantage, and why we say that they know things that are remarkable, admirable, difficult

and divine, but useless, viz. because it is not human goods they seek (1141 b).

Philosophy in and of itself is wonderful but useless--apraktos. Intuition is utilized in episteme, but in tragedy its power does not extend beyond the particulars of perception.

12 . For Aristotle, this will amount to an eternal recurrence of the typical. Nussbaum's account of "risk" and novelty seems more proper to Nietzsche than to Aristotle. She quotes Aristotle: "Practical wisdom is not concerned with universals only; it must also recognize particulars, for it is practical and practice concerns particulars" (1141 b, translation hers). To her, this justifies the assertion:

Finally, Aristotle suggests that the concrete ethical case may simply contain some ultimately particular and non-repeatable elements. He says that they do not fall under a techné or precept, implying that in their very nature they are not, or not simply, repeatable...the occurrence of properties that are, taken singly, repeatable in an endless variety of combinations makes the complex whole situation a non-repeatable particular (304).

This seems like an argument for a regimen of singular occurrences, what one would expect to find in the plot of a tragedy rather than in Aristotelian thought which *is* concerned with the universals if "not with the universals only." My understanding of the regimen of particulars is that in it the probability of characters and characteristic situations ramifies beyond the temporality of techné which does not so much repeat a poiesis as instantiate its form apart from the contingencies of the temporality of deliberation and choice. Any techné that involves any skill is not going to mass produce, rather there will be something very like "character" in the poiesis.

13 . This is a simplification. For the full account, see Mp 12, 1069 a.

14 . For the purposes of this argument, there is no distinction between substance (ousia) and essence. In very rough terms, substances are the essences of living things. In De Anima, Aristotle says if "an axe were a natural body, its essential whatness (to einai) would have been its ousia" (DA 2.1, 1412 a). Similarly, in chapter one of book two of the Physics, Aristotle differentiates natural and technological existences. Of those things that exist by nature, "each of them has within itself a principle of motion and stationariness (in respect of place or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration). On the other hand, a bed and a coat and anything else of that

sort, qua receiving these designations--i.e. in so far as they are products of art--have no innate impulse to change" (192 b).

15 . Aristotle defines the soul or psyche as "ousia kata logon" (DA 2.1). We might translate this as the "ousia or essential nature according to its logos"

16 . It should be apparent that the tenor of this argument is not very Aristotelian. Here, we are heading in the direction of subjective form. This whole notion of risk and all the subjectivity that it carries with it seems better to characterize Nietzsche and Kant of the later writings than it does Aristotle.

17 . See Lear for a discussion of the distinction of chance and spontaneity (Lear 36 ff.). There are further distinctions to be made in the Aristotelian thought upon the apparent purposiveness of events in the experience of agents.

18 .Else has the following to say about tragedy being "more philosophical than history":

These notions of the "philosophical" content of poetry grow out of the concept that the work of art must be *beautiful*. Poetic truth is a corollary of poetic beauty. The structure of events "built" by the poet, in order to be beautiful, must be a unified and complete whole...A beautiful and unified whole cannot be made out of particulars (302-3).

This is probably true, but such a new critical assertion would mean a lot more if it would reclaim from its own residual Kantianism more rigorous definitions of truth, beauty and praxis. Halliwell, I think comes much closer to a serviceable definition. He argues that:

the principles of generality and typicality which Poetics 9 sketches means that the events of a dramatic poem should exhibit a higher level of intelligibility, particularly *causal* intelligibility, than is usually found in life. The plot of a dramatic poem, which is its essential structure of action, is not to be understood as simply corresponding to reality past or present...but as representing a heightened

notional pattern of possibility, and as therefore more accessible to rational apprehension than are the events of ordinary experience (Aristotle's Poetics 135).

This is a good application of a cognitive psychology. The limitations of Halliwell's approach is that it is covering Aristotelian territory without enough Aristotelian terminology.

19 . Compare this with Kant's assertion that the wonder of consistencies that occur as if by chance is marked by a pleasure that is the properly the subjective response to our sense that we have been relieved of a need (CJ § V, Ak 183). In § VI he asserts that this pleasure makes us pay attention to the unity in what would otherwise be the unlimited heterogeneity of experience (Ak 187).

20 . See Lear, p. 7.

21 . Counter-purposiveness enters the Kantian aesthetics in the discussion of sublimity. In the next chapter I will consider the application of this concept in the Kantian thought on monstrosity.

22 .Note the inconsistency in his thinking. He doubts Polybus' lie until he is given his oracle by the notoriously confusing "Loxias," "the oblique one."

23 . See Vernant on the name of Oedipus (Tragedy and Myth 96-7). There he discusses the play's elaborate punning which involves, conspicuously plays upon the name of Oedipus involving oida, "I know," as in "I know the foot." Presumably this recognition would lead to a different answer to the Sphinx's riddle about the creature that moves on tetrapous, dipous and tripous, in that order than the answer that he gives: "anthropos." Vernant goes on to provide a generous sampling of pous puns.

24 . This mere form or appearance of destiny would be termed a "mere appearance of mere appearance," in the Nietzschean aesthetic. "How rarely is the naive attained-that consummate immersion in mere appearance" (BT § 3, pp. 43-4); "we shall then have to look upon the dream as a *mere appearance of a mere appearance* (Schein des Scheins) hence as a still higher appeasement of the primordial desire for mere appearance. And that is why the innermost heart of nature feels that ineffable joy in the naive artist and the naive work of art, which is likewise only "mere appearance of mere appearance" (§ 4, p. 45).

Similarly, Kantian intuitions are mere appearances. What is left of an empirical intuition once it has been divested of everything sensational or conceptual is "pure intuition and the mere form of appearances: reine Anschauung und die blosse Form der Erscheinung" (CPR

A 22/B 36). Presumably, the formulation of Nietzsche's mere appearance of the mere appearance, der Schein des Scheins, is intended to circumvent the teleological applications of such appearances in Kantian thought. Nietzsche appears to be reformulating Plato's "imitation of an imitation" as a philosophical anathema.

25 . Professor Glanville tells us:

Aristotle's problem really is: how to reconcile the strict unity of action, implying a rigid sequence of probable or necessary incidents with his own demand for to thaumaston. In 1460 a 11, where he repeats that to thaumaston must be a feature of tragedy, he adds that it is mainly the product of to alogon, so that here epic has the advantage. In tragedy there may be no improbable incident, but the same effect can be gained by connexion of opposites ...In human action, any change to the opposite will have the power to amaze us, but Aristotle claims that this is enhanced and not diminished if the change, however paradoxical and improbable in itself, however little expected by the person concerned, is at the same time part of a causal series where the rule of probable and necessary sequence has eliminated improbability, mere fact, and chance (78).

26 . We have, in the case of the unfolding of the tragic aesthetic, a Kantian aesthetics by default--one that replaces the unthought with the unthinkable. More work must be done on describing anagnorisis, or "recognition" in these terms.

27 . In less than transcendent philosophies, apprehension is the fundamental term of consciousness. In the Kantian phenomenology, apprehension takes on the formal specifications of a purpose in that the form of an object of a natural intuition is its purposive form (CJ § VII, Ak 189; § 10, Ak 220). Thus, for Kant, only because phenomena can be construed according to purposiveness, the subjective form of a will. This purposiveness seems to provide both the impetus behind any question and the term according to which the answer will have to be posed if it is to be understood.

28 . Destiny appears as the mere form of a purpose. Compare with this notion of a tragic destiny the Kantian notions of the supersensible destiny and beauty as a symbol of morality.

29 . Epistemology again gives way before praxis. What if epistemic knowledge is theoretical hubris, an assault upon the consoling and conciliatory functions of the voice? Does Derridean philosophy keep the power of episteme in order to complete the alienation of the voice from the forms of thought? Does it elevate subjectivity to a very particular sort of self-consciousness which is always doubting and reflecting upon itself in terms of the forms it assumes for analysis? Perhaps analysis, scientific, or otherwise is its own specific hexis, yet one that does not, as Aristotle claims, rise above the pathe of practical reasoning. If it less than universal in the strong and ideal sense supposed by the metaphysician, then its exercise might, finally, have as one of its chief priorities, the assertion the value of the forms of knowing proper to it. Such assertions are inevitably partial. They attempt to either systematize everything or explain the possibility, or even impossibility, of a system in systematic terms. Urizen does not have to be an optimist.

Another way of framing this objection is to consider a character analysis episteme. In Aristotelian terms, episteme is purely cognitive discourse, temporal intelligence in its compatibility with the mind of God and philosophers. This shouldn't go unchallenged. In my analysis of deconstruction, deconstruction replaces an Aristotelian formulation of episteme with an Aristotelian formulation of techne, another other than ethike hexis from the point of view of Aristotelian thought. But this too is too formal to be ethical or practical and does, as such, merely perpetuate the tradition of rational, hyper-formal epistemic Aristotelianism if such is what is meant by the "history of metaphysics." One alternative may be to err on the side of Theophrastus and give an account of reason's character.

Here I would like to anticipate my Shelley chapter with a persona drawn from Blake, that of Urizen. We can find here something very like a personification of the Shelleyan reason as such--which Shelley, unlike Blake draws as a cognitive power, as in the "Defense." Urizen spreads the nets of science and religion. He is the demiurge who has created the space time and causality of the Enlightenment universe by limiting perception and desire, by introducing science, measure and morality against what should be the eternal and infinite play of the senses, emotions and

desires in the imagination. He his hypocritical, prude, excessively domineering and dedicated to all other forms of restriction such as organized scientific knowledge and religion and whatever else can degenerate into joyless, passionless habit.

We get some sense of the character from Nietzsche's description of those devoted to him. He is the Aristotelian of everyone's nightmares. For Nietzsche see "Schopenhauer as Educator" in Untimely Meditations, pp. 169-173, on "*the greed of the sciences* and the characteristic qualities of their servants, *the men of learning* (169)." After giving positive characteristics of scholars such as curiosity and the impulse to contradiction, he lays out the vices that distinguish scholars from "genuine thinkers": probity, a vision of the universal, sobriety and conventionality, poverty of feeling and aridity, low self-esteem amounting to modesty, loyalty toward teachers and leaders, unthinking subjection to acquired habits, flight from leisure (doesn't know what to do with it), bread winning, fear of lack of recognition by other scholars, desire to have a domain all to oneself. Finally this Pandora's box is said to contain being a scholar for fun and an impulse to justice.

30 . In the Aristotelian formal (or causal) scheme, cause, consequence and time (chronos) are very low in the formal hierarchy. Time doesn't exist without change (Ph 4.11, 218 b). Intelligible forms stand apart from time and contingency. But the presentation of the tragic aporia through the imitations of transient praxeis may upset the Aristotelian construction of the hierarchy.

31 . This is curious since nous, the absolutely intelligible cognitive state of the philosophical contemplation is the form of intuition preferred by Aristotle and we do not think sensible intuition as distinguished from it. See DA, 431 b.

32 . This is the condition of Dionysian Man's awareness of the radical impracticability of the world (BT § 7).

33 . CJ § 23, Ak 245.

34 .There is a certain admission of responsibility for these crimes if not exactly an owning of them and their consequences. Can anything be owned except by a subject of culture and the praxis of a life within culture?

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