

Sophocles and his Doubles: Chapter Three

This was the first half of the original second chapter of my dissertation. For the sake of a more timely completion, I removed the chapter from the final draft and broke the original first chapter in two. Unfortunately, I've lost the original version of this chapter, so I've had to recomposite it out of the wordperfect essay segments remaining on my hard drive. On the basis of this work completed in 1992, I was named as an alternate for the Chancellor's Fellowship in 1993. Close, but no cigar.

10/21/92 (Wed) 10:02pm/// c j p o 5 a 1 u . t h s

THE POETICS: AESTHETICS OF THE QUANDARY

This chapter will correlate Aristotle's Poetics with Kant's Critique of Judgment. An attempt will be made to situate tragedy, specifically Aristotle's Sophoclean paradigm, as an aesthetic which has affinities to properly Kantian definitions of the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful—especially with regard to the manner in which these Kantian aesthetics must as species of purposiveness be thought as forms of a will. Since tragedy in Aristotelian terms is preeminently an imitation of actions, or praxeis, this synthesis of Kantian and Aristotelian thought must consider praxis in properly interested, ethical terms as a form of will, while still retaining the disinterested property of the pure unlimited purposiveness of the Kantian aesthetic.

PART ONE: PRAXIS (PRAXIS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CONTINGENCY)

This requires some thought on the relation of the Kantian and Aristotelian ethics and the Kantian aesthetics to nature as the condition of the possibility of praxis and

of the purposiveness of aesthetic representations; and the peculiar fashion in which tragedy seems to suspend the ability of nature to provide the conditions of the possibility of praxis. Thus I shall seek to find a manner in which these two works on aesthetics, the Critique of Judgment and the Poetics, can be combined into a larger vision: one that is drawn from the relation of these aesthetics to the philosophical systems in which they originate. And this larger aesthetic vision will therefore have to consider synthesis in terms of both these larger Aristotelian and Kantian perspectives which understand an aesthetic in relation to philosophy. The fundamental terms of this relationship reside in a demonstration that Critique of Judgment's description of the contingent manner in which the empirical judgment, through which the mind secures nature as venue of "technical praxis", adheres to the plot specified in the Poetics for tragedy: an imitation or representation of praxeis which leads to recognition, and, concomitantly, the pathos of wonder. This demonstration will be completed with a provisional consideration of the possibility of reversal which is implicit in every empirical judgment. In this way I shall demonstrate the fundamentally literary nature of the assumptions of the Third Critique.

09/18/92 (Fri) 9:42 pm/// c j p o 5 a 1 v . t h s

PART ONE: PRAXIS AND THE REPRESENTATION OF CONTINGENCY

In the preceding chapter, we considered the Poetics as a special case of the ethics in which, strictly according to Aristotelian assumptions on the nature of praxis, the contingency of praxis's engagement with the particulars of material existence is emphasized as a contrast to the usual emphasis of the ethics on the cognitive possibilities of the successful praxis, or the moral failure of praxis in the vices which are irrational and inappropriate modes of desiring. We found tragedy to be an extended meditation in an aesthetic medium upon the terms of engagement of mind (and its dozen or so cognitive powers) with its contingent material circumstances through choice, but with special regard to the failure of praxis in hamartiai, or misapprehensions of the particular. The Poetics

prescribes the manner in which praxeis and their causes are optimally represented so as to suggest their failure under the subjective or aesthetic conditions of pity, fear and wonder. But more specifically, this failure presents a kind of aesthetic exemplum of the contingency of the conditions in which praxeis are executed. In this way, the representations prescribed by the Poetics assume the function of a negative ethics. Such an ethics disposes with the rational, syllogistic, optimally cognitive functions and suppositions of ethics as a positive episteme and relates to character through its pathe, rather than through the optimal possibilities of praxis.

In this chapter we shall demonstrate how the Poetics' prescription for tragedy represents a radical extension of hamartia to all possibilities of knowledge and praxis. Tragedy, especially Aristotle's chief paradigm, Oedipus Tyrannus, represents a situation in which the contingent knowledge under which praxis is conducted—knowledge which anticipates the consistency of experience under the criteria of probability and necessity—loses its value for praxis, and in doing so, also precludes the possibility of episteme, or certain knowledge, upon which rests the project of philosophy and its contemplation of essences.

SECTION ONE: PRAXIS AND CONTINGENCY—ETHICS AND THE POETICS

Anything which requires matter for its existence exists as a particular instantiation of an essence. An essence is a universal form which provides a thing's definition as a member of a species. The universal or essential value of form as species is prior to the contingent material existence of the instantiation of that form in particular things. Yet this universal form cannot exist except in the real circumstances of the material and the particular. Such existence is contingent, that is any particular instance of such a form is limited by the conditions of its material existence and may or may not be. Thus in Aristotelian thought, this state of contingency applies specifically to things whose existence is given through matter which is the susceptibility of things to accident, alteration and decay as well as the ground of their necessity and possibility of their existence. The form and thus the natural existence of an object is dependent for its expression upon the matter of its substrate, and through this material ground of its existence, it is subject to destruction, alteration and decay.

This [contingency of the material existence] through which the form's reality is given is a problem for human existence and thus a concern of the ethics. Humans are sentient beings whose existence is given in a material dispensation of contingent particulars. The conduct of life encounters its own contingency in the particulars of experience. The problem is that the contingency and variety of the particular circumstances of experience encountered in nature as exigencies exceeds the much more narrowly defined requirements of a conduct of life within nature. To a significant extent, this gap between the contingencies of the manifold particulars of experience and the more limited requirements of human existence can be mediated [or acculturated] by the arts or technai.

I) TECHNAI

A techne is a plan or design, a formal [specification] for the abstraction of specific properties of the material of nature or experience. The techne finds in matter material particulars whose properties it can elicit and organize. The techne finds in these particulars properties through which the matter can become a material: matter construed according to the properties which are of use to the techne; and through these properties the matter is subordinated, governed and formed by the techne. Techne is a unique mode of causation in that it is a human production which approximates the causality of nature (physis) in the growth of organisms. The form or plan (eidos) of a techne is a universal that can address matter as that which submits directly to the priority of form invested in the techne, despite the matter's contingency¹ and particularity. Such abstract or general designs are necessary to the organization of life; but the more immediate experience of life often does not submit its particulars to such ready, predetermined specification.

According to the Aristotelian understanding of cause, techne is a form whose applicability is largely independent of time as a vector

of contingency; the unfolding of time in the process of production is more the medium for the propagation of the form of the techné—but otherwise, time is less important than the process itself—which is coincident with the form and aim (formal and final causes) of the techné. Yet the particulars of life do not unfold according to any such plan [except in the uncanny over-determinations of tragedy]. Life unfolds in time as a series of unanticipated particulars and cannot, as such, be predicted. Its events must be encountered as exigencies, that is as particulars of a higher order of contingency than the particulars encountered in the properties of matter construed as a material cause of the technai. Such events have a much greater tendency than the productions of the technai to exceed the boundaries and limits of what is amenable to the conduct of life.

II) PRAXIS

Technai are abstractions that to a greater or lesser extent stand apart from the immediacy of experience and its contingencies and exigencies. The problem for ethos (character, the integrated personality) is to situate itself in an experience in which most of the particulars are not naturally incorporated into a causal scheme which permits the conduct of life. The various arts, economics, statesmanship, (which also belongs to praxis) etc., impose their forms (eide) upon the particulars of experience, but leave too many particulars undetermined for the conduct of life. Thus, in terms of the human interest, the particular constitutes a givenness of experience that exceeds the limited range of the technai, the universal forms of which are defined for only very specific situations². We encounter life as an more recalcitrantly particular and contingent order of causes and exigent consequences which demand a less universal, less mediated response. To address the manifold instances of the particulars of experience left undetermined by the technai, a mode of causation is required which is capable on the one hand of grasping particulars that elude the projects (“productions,” actually—poiesis) of the arts, but, on the other hand, relate such unlimited diversity to the limited forms and requirements—affects and dispositions integrated in the desires and aversions—of a stable identity, or “ethos,” or “character”. Thus, in addition to the technai, there is the requirement of a formal agenda, addressed specifically to the causes and consequences through which the experience of the particular may become more regular and predictable.

This manner of addressing the contingent particulars unspecified by the arts is praxis—action. The term covers all doings that are deliberated and involve choice. Praxis includes the conduct of life itself and its consummate expression, happiness (eudaimonia).

Ethics is the science, or episteme, which explains the cognitive mechanisms and moral psychology by which agents, people engaged in praxis, respond to the contingent and the particular circumstances of their environment through praxis. Since the general trend of Aristotelian thought is that of an empirical idealism which supposes the possibility of the rational function of everything, including nature and psychology, the ethics conceives the possibilities of praxis according to optimal standards. The cognitive psychology of praxis assumes a model of mind in which choice (prohairesis) is possible as a rational desiring according to which an agent can govern the particulars of the material reality through praxis. The ethics’ concern is the integration, regulation and expression through choice of the causes which lead to the successful execution of praxeis. As described in the Nicomachean Ethics, these causes are legion. But they can be summarized by their two genera, moral and intellectual (ethikai, dianoetikai). Types of desiring, or special forms of character (ethos) are articulated through the instrumental cognitive or deliberative modalities of thought (dianoia) with respect to a material cause, i.e. the body in its engagement with the manifold particulars of the material circumstances encountered through perception. These desiderative, deliberative and material regimens of praxis converge and are integrated through choice. As in the Poetics, where the plot should be such that its representation of praxis makes choice evident, choice is the chief moment, the integration and culmination in praxis of the cognitive mechanisms and moral psychology which constitute the possibilities of praxis in which the contingency of life, the particular existence of the body, is committed to the contingencies of circumstance. Ethics considers the terms by which the praxis or conduct of life can, within the limits of the

proper desire (which is structured by the ethos) assume a unity and consistency closer to the condition of universality enjoyed by forms such as essences or technai. The optimal life would follow from a more universal unity and consistency of character. This optimal integration of character is a disposition to be moved to the proper degree by the affects arising from encounters with specific types of situations (those inciting fear, anger etc.) and to respond appropriately through choices that follow a proper course of deliberation and a proper assessment of the particulars. Such a construction of character and its affects, dispositions, desires and cognitive abilities, would permit an organization of life into a synthetic unity closest the unity given through the rational forms of the arts or natural existences. Such a construction of ethos which must be achieved through praxis is itself a praxis and way of life—eudaimonia, “good fortune” or “happiness.”

Character is an integration of its moral and intellectual causes, and is, itself, the possibility of praxis. Praxis is, in turn, the culmination of character in agency in that character assumes its reality through its engagement with matter—that is through praxis. The construction of character can only occur through its engagement with the material real of experience. The success of this engagement, its degree of good or bad fortune, is a matter of praxis. Praxis can fail through internal causes—those of character—that is, through the improper or irrational desiring characteristic of the vices. And it can fail through more properly cognitive mechanisms, such as through a misapprehension of the particulars of experience. Since the Aristotelian ethics considers ethos in terms of its being in the world through its successful expression in praxis, that is, in terms of the successful engagement of ethos with the particulars of its environment; the “ought” is always thought in terms of the status of its engagement with the “is”³. Thus the moral and cognitive failures are of equal consequence to the ethics—although the latter do not merit blame.

III) THE POETICS

The Poetics is a treatise on how to produce credible imitations of praxis, especially in the media of the tragic drama. Along with its representation of praxis as such, the tragic drama must represent the causes of praxis: ethos and dianoia and their integration in prohairesis—yet according to a prescription for the failure or hamartia, of praxis and its causes with respect to what must always remain contingent:

the particulars encountered in experience. But here the contingency of the particulars is considered in terms of the knowledge of the particulars. If sciences (epistemai) can know the universal forms of the essences as such, and technai impose similarly intelligible forms upon matter, praxis is not a form in any such sense—but rather a synthetic unity of the powers of cognition converged in a choice to engage the body in a practical relation with the circumstances of the environment. Nor can the conditions of execution of praxis be known with the same degree of certainty with which praxis in the abstract can be known. No matter how proper the desires or the course of deliberation leading to choice and praxis, the synthetic unity of the manifold cognitive powers integrated in choice will always depend for its integrity upon the correct apprehension of the particulars which must always remain contingent for the practical knowledge.

In the Poetics, as in Aristotelian ethics proper, the emphasis is on the difference between the particular forms of experience and the universal forms of thought. And especially, in the case of the Poetics, on the possible misapprehension and misconstruction of the particulars by the cognitive process. The Poetics engineers reversals which demonstrate in exemplary fashion the contingent nature of the compatibility within thought of the particular objects given in experience. The Poetics has a singular place within the Aristotelian opus in that it maximizes and radicalizes the contingency of an agent’s knowledge of the particular circumstances of its praxis. Thus it presents situations that demonstrate the incapacity of the forms of thought to address the particulars of experience. And an experience of the particulars which cannot be addressed by thought cannot be an experience which is consistent enough to permit praxis.

[[But beyond this representation of situations within which praxis is not possible, the Poetics discovers in the hamartiai the conditions under which the representation praxis can imply a loss of that unity and universality of thought which is the possibility of a philosophy.]]

NECESSITY, PROBABILITY, AND THE COHERENCE OF
EXPERIENCE IN TRAGEDY

The universal knowledge of the nature of praxis as possible through the science of ethics is not the same as the particular knowledge that is involved in the execution of praxis. As demonstrated by the possibility of the hamartiai, the intelligibility of the circumstances of praxis is contingent upon perception. Thus any execution of praxis is at least as contingent as its knowledge of the particulars. Yet, ethics does not depart from the project of philosophy—which is to give an intelligible account of the nature of things. Ethics undertakes this project by describing in certain or absolute terms the conditions under which the formal agenda of praxis is pursued according to the contingent standard of probability: the consistency of events that happen “for the most part” (Rh 1,2). As an object of the philosophical contemplation, the investigation of the conditions of the applicability of this standard does not exceed the project of philosophy, since the conditions of the validity of this criterion of the consistency of experience, as elaborated in the philosophy, are in themselves intelligible and thus come within the definition of the limits of an episteme. Philosophy can explain the nature of praxis and its limits even if a philosopher in his capacity as an agent cannot use his philosophical knowledge in any direct fashion to address the contingency of the actual particulars of praxis⁴.

The project of the Aristotelian philosophy is to provide explanations and to explain the possibility of explanation generally. Yet in Oedipus Tyrannus virtually the entire sequence of the plot up to the reversal cannot be explained. The plot construes its praxeis strictly according to the injunction of the Poetics that the production should deploy its representations of praxis according to a unity and continuity of cause and consequence which meets the specifications of necessity and probability—terms which, in and of themselves, that is, without the benefit of philosophy, should allow the consistency of experience and therefore its intelligibility for praxis. But in addition to these criteria of the consistency of experience, Aristotle says that the praxeis leading to the reversal should fall out contrary to expectation but optimally should also occur “hosper epitedes,” “as if by design.” That is, in the first case, against the possibility of expectation assumed by the sort of deliberation that leads to successful praxis; and additionally, as if they were determined by some mode of

causation in accordance with a plan or purpose beyond whatever we might be able to explain from necessity or probability. In the case of necessity one event should follow another necessarily, that is as a consequence follows its cause. In the case of probability, to the extent that these representations involve an ethos, or type of character, the character should always be represented credibly according to the manner in which that sort of character would act or respond in a given situation. Necessity relates consistency in the particular, that is connections of events specified as cause and consequence, while probability addresses consistency in the more universal moral, psychological and emotional determinations of what character is likely to contribute to causality through praxis. Thus praxis integrates these terms of probability and necessity; and in and of themselves, their integration in praxis should permit the consistency of experience. Yet, as in Oedipus Tyrannus, the consistency of character and the continuity of events lose their value as standards of the intelligibility of experience when they 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 for praxis.

Let us consider Aristotle’s observation with regard to Oedipus Tyrannus. The amassing of uncanny coincidences seemingly precludes the efficacy of praxis [on every level.] On the most intrinsic or universal level of character under the consummately ethical desire to do right by his parents, Oedipus hears the oracle and is moved by his feelings of fear and devotion to flee Corinth, which he supposes to be his home. Yet this disposition, along with the affect of anger lead him, again without proper knowledge of the particulars, to commit unwittingly the crime he seeks to avoid. The crime itself occurs as a remarkably complicated coincidence or match between the probability of Oedipus’ character and that of his father. This coincidence of character, their inclination to exchange insults and injuries, occurs within a larger coincidence of the circumstances—

they are going to and from Delphi on the same road at the same time. The necessity of the material existence is given to praxis through particulars which include time and place. The probability of character meets the necessary order of consequences under the necessary conditions of particulars within which praxis occurs. Yet virtually every praxis in the play, that is every undertaking in the order of the material real, is involved in this scheme coincidences. And all processes of thought from zetesis, or enquiry, to the very affects of pity and fear, to the inclinations, desires and thoughts that lead to choice and praxis are also included.

Oedipus' desires, affects and choices issue in praxeis that misfire "as if by design" at every crucial occasion: with his parents; sending for Teiresias, and the shepherd, etc., etc. 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 character 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, if according to the Poetics' definition of tragedy, the function of tragedy's chief part, or plot, is the representation of praxeis; in Oedipus Tyrannus, the paradigm of the Poetics, we find that the entire regimen of praxis is set to misfire according to some uncanny design whose mechanism we cannot know and can only describe as a coincidence. We can describe this design only through its effect which, briefly stated, is the total collapse of the coordination of character with circumstance at every level of engagement from the moral psychology of character, through the instrumental modes of deliberation, to the particular situations in which the regimen of praxis must unfold as a cognitive process that ends in hamartiai—praxeis that go wrong through misunderstandings of the particular of the situation. Yet this incredibly elaborate system of coincidences is a peculiar order of determination in that every point in the phenomenology of its execution depends upon the character's ignorance of the particulars. This is significant, especially for Oedipus Tyrannus, since this sort of cognitive deficit does not, in and of itself, imply the tragic delusion or madness of hubris and ate. In terms of their specification in the ethics, such coincidences might be described as a sort of persistent hamartia extended across the entire regimen of praxis and its causes—an accident that originates in

the limitations intrinsic to the contingency of knowledge under praxis and expands to engulf every form and possibility of practical reason. Thus probability and necessity fail as criteria by which praxis can address the contingency of experience according to any consistency. The drama unfolds its series of inexplicable coincidences on every level of inner and outer experience, probability and necessity—moral, emotional and instrumental cognitive states and external circumstance⁵—and in such a fashion destroys the value of these criteria by which the consistency can be established.

PHILOSOPHY AND TRAGEDY—THE FORMAL CAUSE, ACCIDENT AND CHANCE

To the extent that necessity and probability can be discussed as criteria of the consistency of experience for the possibilities of praxis and its representation, Aristotelian philosophy assumes that they owe their value to the universal and essential disposition of form whose consistency they approximate. All forms whose existence given through matter, (including synthetic unities such as ethos and praxis⁶) depend upon the logos, or formal cause⁷. This logos is simultaneously the possibility of human knowledge and the possibility of all formal consistency whatsoever. By virtue of the logos, forms exist in matter; the logos communicates the metaphysical form of an essence to its particular material instantiation, or physical form. And the mind itself is such an instantiation. In its temporal, phenomenological, material or contingent registers, cognition is a process in which the matter of the mind (dianoia, thought, thinking) undergoes a certain structuring to the point at which it is compatible with the logos of a thing. This compatibility of mind and essence, as given through the logos, is episteme which is at once a certain science and the certain knowledge or understanding proper to such a science. Philosophy itself is a state in which this compatibility of mind with the form of an object frees itself from all contingent or material conditions. The cognitive state of philosophy is nous, (intuition, divine intellect), and the

activity proper to this state is the theoria of philosophy or philosophical contemplation. In this ultimate form of cognition, the mind assumes the eternal or unconditioned form of the essence of its object—mind and essence are in a community and the accord is the logos.

Thus in philosophy, the process of cognition borrows intuition from god, removes itself from mere probability, and strives toward a state in which the mind assumes the form by virtue of which a thing's existence is given in matter. But all inferior states of knowledge are also dependent upon some relation to the community of thing and essence even if the mind does not participate directly in the community, as it does in philosophy. In terms of the cognitive processes of praxis, the logos is the event and requirement of the psychic integration of all material powers of mind: epistemic, deliberative and affective⁸. Thus the logos is the principle, both of systems within nature and the psyche and of the systematic thought by which the mind comprehends such systems and their elements in terms that are either universal or contingent and particular. Thus everything that exists does so by virtue of its logos; and by virtue of its logos a thing can be understood. The terms of this intelligibility extend to praxis and character. The logos is a principle of the unity, continuity, integration and intelligibility of nature and the objects of nature in episteme and philosophy—but also of the various projects, objects and concerns of the arts and praxeis (where it defines the accord of the ethical and intellectual cognitive powers). Similarly, the projects of formal agendas inferior to philosophy, those of praxis and techne are compatible with the aims of philosophy in that they permit the life within which philosophy can be undertaken. The assumption of the Aristotelian philosophy is that all forms of thought finally seek to permit the ultimate actualization of thought in philosophy.

I) ACCIDENT

If the logos is the accord of essences and material forms, the preeminence of intelligible form over the contingent circumstances of the material particulars, whether in the life of organisms, techne, praxis, or the philosophical theoria; accident is an indeterminate condition opposite to what the logos achieves in the world and in thought. In simple terms, an accident is the cessation of the logos, or agreement of essence and matter, within the contingent circumstances of its realization—the loss of that formal status which obtains through the logos⁹. Every material

existence is the particular instantiation of an essence through its logos. Thus it is by virtue of that logos that a particular existence has its ontological status—its definition. But since any particular existence is the form of an essence instantiated in matter, and the fact of such instantiation is contingent upon matter; the existence may lose its formal priorities and devolve to the status of accident. For example, a corpse is a human “in name only”—it no longer has its psyche which is its ousia kata logon: its essence (“substance” or “being”, actually) according to its logos. Similarly, the destruction or vitiating of the status an agent with regard to praxis may come through the contingencies or accidents of age, disease or vice, all of which imply the loss or diminution of the realization of logos within the synthetic unity of the manifold cognitive powers in praxis.

In terms of the Poetics, whose concern is representation of praxis, the contingency of praxis can be represented by representing 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 must also think the formal status and its contingency in terms of the capacity of a person as an agent. Tragedy represents agents through their praxeis. For the agent, the ultimate expression of the possibility of agency would be the praxis of eudaimonia, or happiness. In the Poetics, tragedy is concerned with the reversal of happiness into its opposite—the pathos or “suffering” of tragedy. The “death or wounding” such as accompanies the reversal of tragedy is a destruction or reduction of the status of agent—and thus the possibility of all praxeis including, preeminently, 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

The loss of formal status or reversal described in the above terms is both piteous and fearful. Yet these affects appropriate to tragedy apply to an even greater degree in those uncanny circumstances that tragedy optimally represents—in reversals which happen contrary to expectation, and, especially, as if by design. Events which appear to happen as if by a design where no such design in fact applies can be dismissed as accidents if an examination of their provenance reveals the appearance of design or cause to be a misconstruction of the mind. In point of fact, a closer examination of the circumstances should lead to the certain knowledge (*episteme*) that such an appearance of design has occurred through the incidental aggregation of the necessity of other causal schemes within a pattern that is the mind's own fabrication. Mere appearances of this sort are effects that have no causal connection through a *logos*¹⁰. In this regard, there is a special class of Aristotelian accident appropriate to the discussion of the reversal.

Such incidental accumulation of effects in a pattern that suggests an intention or plan is similar to *tyche*, or “chance¹¹.” Chance involves the alteration of the causal sequence of an agent's design or plan of *praxis* by an incidental aggregation of circumstances that are purposive for the needs, designs or desires of that agent. Thus a chance event is one through which the causal scheme being put forth by an agent is promoted or thwarted, but in a manner which is unintended and unanticipated and therefore purely incidental or circumstantial (*kata symbebekota*)¹²—but in the sense of adventitious. For example, a man may go to a market to buy a chicken and there encounter a debtor; or one may dig a hole to plant a tree and discover treasure. In these cases, the purposes or aims one might have as an agent are randomly elicited and abetted by circumstance. Chance is the apprehension of a design, although there is no *logos* in which to ground this apprehension—but despite this fact, the apprehension has implications for *praxis*. Thus chance involves a reorientation of *praxis* with regard to contingent particulars which have assumed, but only accidentally, an interest for the agent who has encountered them. Thus chance involves a shift in the relation of the probability of character to the necessity of the material particulars in which character is realizing itself through *praxis*. Chance is an accident, or non-application of *logos*, which can only occur in the context of the contingent validity of the knowledge through which *praxis* is possible. In this respect chance is similar to the *hamartiai* which involve misapprehensions of the particular through the contingent time-bound knowledge

of *praxis*. Chance is the hitting of the mark under the phenomenology of a design, where *hamartiai*, generically at least, miss the mark in less improbable circumstances.

Chance itself is remarkable enough to merit treatment as a special kind of accident. To the extent that chance demands to be regarded as something unusual, it appears to involve a certain paralogism, or misreasoning. We respond to chance as though the change in options possible through the incidental discovery of unanticipated circumstances had causes beyond the probability of character: that is, beyond the specifics needs, dispositions and desires that reside in a particular character. When the probability of character is confronted by the specific improbability that circumstance should agree with it, the contradiction between character and its purposes and their fortuitous, but inexplicable (nothing to explain) seconding by circumstance, is striking. There is no reason that character and its needs should be confirmed by necessity. Yet the match or coincidence seems remarkable. Remarkable or wonderful events are events whose circumstances demand an explanation but in which an explanation is not readily apparent. To the extent that chance events are remarkable, this might be because one is inclined to construe their random agreement with the probability and purposes of character, that is, with the purposive form of the practical intellect of an agent, as a form of purpose existing externally in circumstance—that is, as a purposiveness whose purpose we cannot immediately identify. If, in the moment in which the chance event is apprehended, one interprets this random event as an organization or consistency that exists by design, one is left with the momentary difficulty, or *aporia* of explaining it. The quandary is most striking when the improbability of the chance event is greatest. But the problem is easily enough resolved through regress—examination of circumstances reveals that the event has occurred merely by chance, and chance is the fortuitous collusion of the interest of character and its probability with other causal sequences.

Chance may be the designation proper to a momentary misapprehension of logos in circumstances that seem to have the consistency of some design; although this consistency does not exist in events, but only in the mind. Thus there is no possibility of the mind participating in the community of event and essence through a logos. There is a paralognism, or a mere apprehension within circumstances of an insubstantial consistency which implied logos and essence. In this sense, the apprehension of chance is a momentary perplexity, or aporia, which is relieved when the proper causes of the coincidence are established through reflection upon the nature of the event. Proper systematic analysis of the event reveals the systematic, or epistemic nature of the causal sequences which have been combined by the mind in such a way that the mind can improperly infer the existence the practical design of the purpose. Analysis according to the terms of a certain understanding, or episteme, allows a comprehension which is capable of dismissing the misapprehension. But, as we shall argue, tragedy appears to deny the cognitive process any such appeal to comprehension by episteme; and in such a case the coincidences of tragedy cannot be dismissed as misapprehensions—rather they seem to assume the function of a sensible intuition. And this is curious, since the intellectual intuition is the preferred by Aristotle. The intellectual intuition, or nous, is the cognitive state of the philosophical contemplation or theoria, in which the mind participates directly in essence through logos.

In the Poetics, Aristotle discourages the introduction of chance as sufficient motivation for the reversal, presumably since chance has a low order of causation unworthy of tragedy. Yet account of the reversal he gives in the Poetics has many affinities to his other discussions of chance. 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. Chance suggests the reversal of tragedy in that it may involve near misses with calamity or good fortune, and elicits the affects of pity, fear and wonder. Perhaps chance is dismissed because it is explicable. The unfolding of events contrary to expectation and as if by design, but not by chance, may generate the most pity, fear and wonder precisely because they can neither be incorporated into epistemic structures nor dismissed through the application of such structures. The defeat of praxis represented in tragedy would then be the defeat of the possibility of philosophy as conceived by Aristotle.

Aristotelian philosophy can address things quite

familiarly in terms of their essences, that is, in terms of the intrinsic intelligibility that things have by virtue of their forms. But in the case of praxis, the state in which life is conducted, the unity of this knowledge has undergone a division into subjective and objective registers. The aim of Aristotelian philosophy generally is to subsume such divisions under the universal forms—and indeed the synthetic unity of ethos comes closest to such a form when its praxis attains to the condition of eudaimonia. In such a case dianoia is most readily actualized as the theoria, or contemplation of philosophy. The ultimate unity of knower and known which transcends the contingencies of time and praxis is finally possible only in a certain kind of praxis of life. Given the contingency of the mind of the circumstances of life and its praxis, tragedy presents a situation which radicalizes the division of cognition into the separate registers of thinking and being, cognitive and phenomenal forms, under which praxis pursues its agenda. The Poetics is a singular in that the conditions it prescribes for the representation of praxis do not allow that division between subject and object in the contingent knowledge of praxis any remedy in either eudaimonia or the theoria of philosophy. Thus if the principle of the intelligibility of philosophy gives way to the standards of the consistency of experience for praxis, tragedy represents a situation in which intelligibility and consistency of phenomena is radically abridged.

Necessity and probability are, in the Poetics, the requisites of a plausible representation of praxis. And this is because they are the terms by which we experience the consistency of nature in our status as agents. Ideally, praxis originates in the probability of a character's disposition and culminates in a successful negotiation with necessity. The consistency of praxis in tragedy can be explained in these terms, but this explanation is not sufficient. Since there is no sufficient explanation for probability and necessity in these terms, we

are left with either wild surmise or with speculation more proper to mythology than the Aristotelian philosophy in which necessity, (*Ananke*) fate or the like is supposed to enact itself according to just the sort of determinism we see in Oedipus Tyrannus.

[[despite the [incoherence of experience] probability is consistent; necessity, to the extent that it can be tied to the suffering of the character assumes the ontological privilege that *praxis* once had, but as the ground of the *pathos* of the subject. The necessity of Fate or whatever is finally subsumed by the *pathos*—especially when we regard it as a totality of conditions which ceases to manifest itself as such after the reversal. Probability crumbles at the very edge of cognition, (and in the madness of the reversal?)]]

The *Poetics* is a *techne* which provides an analysis of structure of tragic drama and a prescription for the production of such dramas. But the production (if not the *techne*) stands apart from the rest of the Aristotelian opus in that its end, the production of the tragic drama, is at odds with the project of philosophy—which is to provide explanations and explain the possibility of explanations. Yet in the *Poetics*, Aristotle does not seek to explain tragedy in terms of the nature of these coincidences—he merely says that the most pity and fear is generated through specific kinds of circumstances leading to a reversal in which over-determination is apparent. This may be because the production of tragedy is an event which is inassimilable to the project of the Aristotelian philosophy. Tragedy does not simply demonstrate how *praxeis* can be defeated on that level of the particular at which level, as understood by the ethics, they are most contingent and therefor most subject to defeat anyway. Tragedy extends this favor to the very intelligibility of phenomena¹³. Within the domain of its representations, at least, tragedy denies the prerogative of the possibility of knowledge and philosophy.

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SECTION TWO: THE TRAGIC *APORIA*—THE AESTHETIC OF THE QUANDARY

If tragedy defeats the project of philosophy which is to provide explanations and explain the possibility of giving explanations, the failures or defaults of the formal cause in the various sorts of accident are no problems for the project of philosophy. They are easily explained as accidents and their loss of individuation is readily understood in such terms. Philosophy comprehends the community of event and essence, or the lack there of. However, philosophy would encounter a greater problem in a consistency of events in which it could neither establish a *logos* as the ground of the existence and intelligibility of an event, nor dismiss that event as the mere phenomenon of cause in an incidental or chance aggregation of effects. If an effect were to be presented according to a consistency that had no intelligible causes whatsoever, that was manifested merely as effect, and was thus evident as phenomenon, but could not be understood beyond the data of its appearance; such an effect would defeat the philosophical contemplation even at the level of *episteme*, the “science” or discourse which provides certain knowledge in temporal and hence contingent states of mind. Nor could this lack of intelligibility simply be dismissed as accident in any of the strict Aristotelian uses of the term. [Metaphysics cancelled by psychology?] The presentation of this sort of effect would constitute a recalcitrant *aporia* and violate the project of philosophy, which, as described in the *Metaphysics*, must proceed from *aporia*, or perplexity, or confusion about the particulars to resolution in the *theoria*—of philosophy—the contemplation or cognitive state which is the end of philosophy (its *telos*).

The absolute or total determination of *praxeis* within tragedy against the choices, or (occasionally, at least) rational desiring, of its agents (rational desire is the culmination of practical reason in choices of the sort conducive to happiness) is perhaps the representation of an order of effects that is not possible in the lexicon of Aristotelian philosophy and its application to ethics. Such determination is out of place in a regime where thought

and essence, theoria and to einai concur, and in which concurrence the community of thinking and being extends to the integration of all the grounds of the possibility of praxis (its aitia and dynameis) in the proper choice. The proper choice is simultaneous with the execution of that praxis—and praxis is, in such a case, an end in itself (as explained in our first chapter.) Praxis can fail to be an end in itself for reasons that are internal or external: internally through character, as in the case of the vices; or externally, through hamartiai, which are the result of misjudgments and misapprehensions. The tragic paradigm of Oedipus Tyrannus consistently thwarts the possibility of praxis, but not strictly in either sense. coincidences of tragedy seem to present a condition of unrelenting hamartiai under the species of tyche.

As part of the Aristotelian opus which is concerned with the pitiful, fearsome and unexpected failure of praxeis at the level of the particular, the Poetics no doubt accommodates the over-determination among the impossibilities (adynata) and paralogsms allowed to the persuasion of the poietike techne and its rhetorical project, if not to philosophy proper. Like the enthymeme of rhetoric, tragedy does not involve the proper philosophical application of syllogisms, and appears to be an argument from probabilities rather than from the epistemic certainties that could be actualized in contemplation. (Indeed, in §16 of the Poetics recognitions that arise out of the probability and necessity of the plot are superior to those that come by syllogism). For Aristotle, this over-determination (which he does not dismiss as a chance event) is an effect that he does not explain except to state that it contributes to the optimal production of a tragic drama in that it adds to the pity and fear of tragedy and hence to the possibility of the catharsis—which he also does not explain. Given the low priority of accident and also the low priority of probability in Aristotle’s causal scheme, this effect is dismissed from the fuller philosophical examination (along with catharsis, we assume) under its affinity to chance. As in the ethics and in De Anima, Aristotle is generally more interested in the rational rather than the empirical psychology which may misreason and be mistaken in perception. Yet these coincidences of tragedy have profound epistemological consequences when we try to assign them the cognitive form that their uncanniness at once demands and resists.—Such an attempt, to the extent that it succeeds, is at the basis of the Kantian philosophy as elaborated in the CJ.

Let us consider the cognitive status of the events leading to the reversal in Oedipus Tyrannus. The over-determination of tragedy is an “effect” in that its

phenomenon is apparent—but since it is apparent merely as phenomenon, it is an effect whose cause cannot be understood. This effect is apparent in its consistency. It is a series of consequences whose consistency demands that they be understood in terms of each other. An aggregation of effects presented in the consistent interruption of the practical designs of human agency all belong to the same contra-purposive class of phenomena registered in the consistent failure of agency. Furthermore, the consistency or repetition of the elements of this effect and their coherence as a class of phenomena demands to be understood in terms of a whole or a unity. They are a unity because their manifestation is apparent in the unity of praxeis that follows from the plot’s integration of the representation of praxis according to probability and necessity. That is, as a consequence of the plot’s representation of complete praxeis as enjoined by the Poetics. Thus the unity that we attribute to this effect is defined by the circumstances of its representation.

This effect is a unity 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 according to the cognitive form of the human agency whose failure is represented since the effect is manifest as the direct contradiction of the intentions the actors have in their status as agents, i.e., their desire to be causes in a regime of praxis. In the default of the successful execution of the human agency, the effect 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. Further, we should understand the effect which has assumed the form of a purpose as the actual instance of a purpose or cause, and specifically the cause of the failure of the praxeis of the agents of the drama. 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 the possibilities of its victims’ praxis.

This effect manifest in the failure of human praxis assumes the form of the cause of the failure of that praxis.

Thus these effects which demand to be understood as causes through their consistent (and we, are forced to think, insistent) contradiction of purposes, themselves assume the form of a purpose and cause, and this consistent contradiction implies an ulterior order of purpose that works through the praxeis of the actors¹⁴. This purposiveness is strange in that the scheme of its deployment as purpose involves an unfolding of actions in such a way that has the form of an agency without any ethos—this agency is apparent only in the representations of the praxeis and ethe of its victims (those undergoing its pathos). We cannot understand of this agency beyond its uncanny specification as purpose—that is according to any of the grounds (aitia) of praxis, ethikai and dianoetikai, by which we could understand the character of a human agent. Although we must understand this event in terms of cause, its cognitive form remains uncanny since this “cause” cannot be put into any regress sufficient to explain it. The regress that would allow us to explain events in terms of the probabilities and necessities at work on the human level could not account for the unrelenting coincidences. Thus we have an effect which behaves like a cause, but the mere the form of a cause, since we cannot adequately explain this cause merely in terms of the necessity or probability of the empirical grounds of praxis.

The consistency and totality which the dramatic art produces in its regimen of effects has assumed the cognitive form of a purpose, and is, in fact, possible through such a form. We can think the whole only because we can think purpose as cause. The over-determination of the plot is a peculiar event in that it is a set of accidents that makes absolute sense as purpose—although the conditions of the discovery of this form and its validity within the empirical order of nature are similar to tyche in that they rest merely in apprehension¹⁵ but have no further intelligible basis. The difference is that, unlike tyche, there is no opportunity for the mind to establish the certain terms, or episteme, by which this order of effects could be comprehended and dismissed as an accident. Thus the effect retains the form of a purpose. The form of the purpose defeats the possibilities of analysis by which it could be dismissed as accident, and we are left with the mere form of agency which we construe as though it were over-determining the purposive form of the praxeis of the drama. We have the appearance of something that appears to be a cause, but exhibits a causal form which does not submit to regress, and is, therefore, not adequate to the

concept of a cause. Nor can this appearance be dismissed as tyche, because the mind is not given respite from the continued unfolding of the phenomenon of this effect in which it could distribute the necessity and probability rationally among merely phenomenal causal schemes. But even the sheer complexity suggests that there is no such respite possible—if one accepts the assumption that such praxeis are at all possible one must also accept that the sustained complexity of the coincidences constitutes an order of apprehension that denies comprehension. Before the mystery and mind-dwarfing complexity of this enigma, we might be left with the intimation that our own cognitive powers are an accident in some larger scheme of things, and in light of such a revelation find our own self-consciousness and awareness of our position in the universe describable only by the Kantian term, “blosser Schein,” or “mere appearance”—the status of an intuition or form of an object of intuition apart from its conceptualization by cognitive powers capable of giving objective definition to thought. What can we know? What can we even think? Not that we are mortal, but that we are not immortal. But a more appropriate designation would be “Schein des Scheins,” as in Section Four of The Birth of Tragedy—an “appearance of an appearance,” or the “semblance of a semblance,” as Speirs translates it. The causes of Oedipus’ crisis go back to the beginning of the world, present an infinitely vast totality, defy comprehension, and even apprehension, and explain nothing—other than the constitutional deficiency and susceptibility of episteme to such a pathos.

Tragedy is peculiar in that its insistent over-determination of sufficiently motivated sequences of cause and effect implies a consistency or coherence of events which cannot be understood—yet, which, even as a consistency, suggests formal properties which should, in the Aristotelian project, either admit explanation through the application to cognition of the logos or formal cause as the principle of individuation and intelligibility or be dismissed as an accident. Yet we have

the peculiarity of an effect which presents itself under the priority of form—but inexplicably. In terms of the cognitive process of Aristotle’s philosophy, (that is, the process by which the forms of the data of the perceptions which can be misapprehended attain to the status of *episteme* and philosophy), form asks the question of being. The being or essence of a thing that we perceive is itself hermeneutic. As Jonathan Lear notes, A thing is a “what,” a “ti.” Its essence is its *to ti en einai*—directly translated, “the what it is to be” of that thing. But the indefinite pronoun of the essence, “what,” directly suggests the terms through which essence is intelligible; the indefinite “what” (ti) responds directly to the interrogative “what?” (ti);¹⁶ So in this sense, thought is a *dialogue* between the phenomenal, discursive dianoetic condition of temporal cognition which asks the question “what?” (ti) and “what” (ti) as that immanent possibility of essence which anticipates the philosophical *theoria* in which mind and essence will be equivalent through the community of the ti (“what”) and the *einai*, or essence, (through the *logos*). But Oedipus Tyrannus¹⁷ and the prescription for tragedy derived from it present only a ti—an indefinite “what” or “something” which presents itself to our desire to understand merely as a “what.” Thus we are left with the mere form of a “what” of which we must persistently address the mere form of the interrogative, the mere question “what?.” We have a primordial encounter between the rudiments of phenomena and the rudiments of our own inquisitive nature, the fundamental intelligible forms of mind and phenomena, in what amounts to their free accord undetermined by any specific concept or by the concept of any specific purpose. This subjective accord of the cognitive powers and the form of phenomena constitutes in a rather Kantian manner an aesthetic of the question. It is worth noting that the Sphinx’s confusion of genera would admit her into such an aesthetic. A similar case can be made for the genealogy of Oedipus’ family¹⁸.

This consistency of events contradicts the possibility of the application of a *logos* and therefore denies access of mind to essence, and thus denies the occasion of understanding. Since this form cannot be understood, it cannot be distinguished by philosophy. It must be regarded as a triumph of the particular over the universal, that is, from the perspective of philosophy which connects phenomenal with essence, a diminution of the formal prerogative to the status of accident. The form of agency and the agent’s ability to act have, in these circumstances, declined to the ultimate consequence of their contingency. But if we are to call such an event contingent, its contingency is too insistently coherent and too insistent

upon presenting itself as a ti of which we continue to find ourselves asking the question ti; to be dismissed merely as an accident. The form of the question remains despite its inaccessibility to the form of the *logos*. This persistence of the form of the question is itself the phenomenal form of the impossibility of regress.

Thus this contingency devolves to a cognitive state that cannot surmount the perplexity or *aporia* of its own representation. Peculiarly, tragedy seems to separate the two moments according to which we considered the function of the *logos*: *logos* as the modality of the essence through which the material existence of a thing is possible; and *logos* as the intelligibility of the thing. Tragedy splits the form construed as the consistency of events, the form of a thing considered according to its essence, its self-definition; from form construed in terms of its intelligibility to the thought through which we ask the question “what?”¹⁹ In such a case, the coherence of these two separate ways of regarding the function of the formal cause disintegrates within the cognitive process which continues to invoke them and their potential unity under an event whose apparent consistency continually poses the question “what?” Yet in the absence of the applicability of the *logos*, the cognitive function remains active as a psychology characterized by the affects of pity, fear, wonder, amazement, awe, etc. Thus we have a representation of the decomposition of the ideal continuity of existence with our ability to understand it into a condition that suggests “ideal” as in Shelly’s skeptical reading of Plato—a transcendent order of causality at work in the world, apparent as such, but which cannot be understood through the effects in which its causality is said to be apparent²⁰. In Oedipus Tyrannus, there is simply the unrelenting contradiction of every form of consciousness that can assert itself as will—that is to say every practical form of cognition through which *ethos* could effect itself as *praxis*. Even the practical forms of self-consciousness, the *pathe*, or affects, are drawn into this scheme of ulterior effects.

In some sense, in the representation of praxis, as specified in the Poetics, the status of knowledge has declined from metaphysical certainty as guaranteed by the logos to the conditions of probability and necessity under which the Poetics says praxis should be represented—but in such a fashion that these criteria are no longer the functional complement of any logos. In as much as the ethics treats hamartiai as mistakes in which characters misjudge the particulars, characters respond to the particulars but in terms of a misconstruction of the consistency of events according to misunderstandings of the criteria of probability and necessity. The ethics seems to explain such hamartiai as a failure of cognition to attain the status of logos—as in our first chapter, there seem to be degrees in the application of logoi to the various faculties of practical reason. The Poetics may be unique in the Aristotelian opus in that it prescribes a representation in which probability and necessity replace the logos entirely. But as occasions in which the cognitive form collapses, rather than as criteria of the consistency of the conditional knowledge—as the conditions through which the cognitive form of events assumes within the probability of the cognitive process the specification of a massive hamartia. The coherence of knowledge now rests upon the consistency of experience, and must be integrated through praxis, and praxis itself rests upon the continuity of cause and consequence in time. In the Aristotelian formal (or causal) scheme, cause and consequence and time (chronos) are very low in the hierarchy of causes and intelligible forms. In the Aristotelian view, practical knowledge is proper to the psyche which itself is material—even though under the attainment of the contemplation of philosophy, this material can be actualized by the form of nous. 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 pathos. Cognition is trapped in a regimen of time and material particulars by insistent contradictions in the order of cause and consequence which 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. Thus the Poetics finds in the representation of praxis a way of representing the conditions in which the project of philosophy can succumb to the contradictions that exist within time.

Yet in the Poetics. The very contingency of these

standards 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 our cognitive process which cannot submit this order of causes to regress, and cannot, therefore, coordinate them with the concept of a cause. These standards are applied against the consistency and certainty of knowledge so that knowledge cannot attain to the status of episteme or “certain science or understanding,” and certainly not the philosophical theoria or contemplation. So, unlike the ethics proper, which considers praxis as a mode of causation in which conditional knowledge encounters particulars which cannot be addressed adequately by the universal forms of the contemplation of philosophy or of the technai, but yet submit to the mediation of praxeis; tragedy's representation of praxis becomes the condition in which all certain forms of knowledge are lost to a contingency which will no longer allow praxis (or the life whose form

praxis is) admission to the intelligibility of Aristotelian philosophy.

WONDERS—MYTH AND PRAXIS

Tragedy is an examination of character in the context of the praxeis which are the form, aim, and possibility of human life (cf. Po §6); and praxis is the moment in which the probability of character meets the necessity and contingency of experience. As the plot of Oedipus Tyrannus unfolds, the necessity and probability which provide a consistency and intelligibility of ordinary experience lose their value as such. All that remains is the probability of character: the probable responses of an ethos moved by circumstances that are frightening and uncanny. In the representation of the drama, necessity, which is sufficient in terms of its explanation of what happens merely in the material order of cause and consequence is so overwhelmed by coincidence that the connection of experience within the material order of cause and consequence becomes

redundant as an explanation of the consistency of events. Aristotle does not provide much analysis of tragedy's cognitive status—he says it is more philosophical than history, but this is because tragedy represents characters through praxeis that reflect the universal or generic terms of the probability that constitutes characters as types, whereas the accidental or particular expressions of character that obtain in the praxeis of agents in the more random dispensation of history demonstrate little about types of character as such. But this is a strange philosophy which uses the fantastic disintegration of the empirical order of life and its praxis to reveal fear, anger and apprehension as the universality of a character under siege by militant particulars which render praxis impossible. Since fear is an ethical response that relates the distress of others to one's own self-interest, and since the function of the production of tragedy is to generate such fear and its catharsis, there is at least the suggestion, if only a psychological one, that the impossibilities and paralogsms represented in the tragic production may have some reality beyond the stage—that is beyond the limits which philosophy specifies for reality. In this sense, tragedy might as well present to history the peril of philosophy.

To pursue this line of argument, we need a reference to modes of thought that have points in common with tragedy but are not properly philosophical. The Metaphysics might be helpful—there philosophy is said to be like myth in that it begins in wonder. Wonder, like myth is an affective state, a material condition of a thinking that has not been fully integrated by the logos, and has not, therefore, attained to certainty or to the contemplative state of philosophy. Yet wonder (thauma) and contemplation (theoria) of philosophy have a root in common (thea—a viewing) which they share with “theater.” Presumably what is represented in the theater is a thauma, an order of contemplation which clings to that rudimentary form of the question and its aesthetic which philosophy would construe as the beginning of philosophy and transcend. But in the default of the possibility of philosophy, tragedy remains a wonder: an aesthetic of the question. If wonder is an affect whose pleasure is associated with the desire to learn (this desire is addressed under the topic of mimesis in the Poetics), we might regard it as a cognitive state in which the “what” of aisthesis, or perception, is countered by the “what?” of the empirical cognition. But in tragedy the progress of this encounter toward philosophy is interrupted by an event which cannot be understood but can neither be dismissed as accident as the Aristotelian philosophy understands the term. Perhaps tragedy is also

more philosophical than history because its accidents are not random. Its symbebekota, (accidents) or massive hamartia have in fact assumed the form of a purpose, and thus the form of a will and ethos. But in any event we have the aporia which will not submit to the project of philosophy and a wonder which does not cease²¹.

Wonder, or thauma, is the term for events, which, in the case of philosophy, require explanation, or in literature or mythology are worthy of retelling. These two applications are addressed in the Metaphysics where Aristotle notes that the beginning of philosophy is wonder, and these beginnings share this affect with myth. The peculiar nature of the drama of Oedipus Tyrannus is the manner in which both registers are addressed. Prior to the events of the drama, Oedipus encounters the Sphinx at the entrance to Thebes—a wonder in the sense of a fantastic, mythic epiphany. Yet the Sphinx is herself an enigma posing a riddle. She is a conspicuously incongruous nature whose heterogeneity seems to be an allegorical representation of the paradoxical status that Oedipus will assume after he “solves” her riddle and marries his mother. If she is an allegorical representation of what Oedipus is about to become, she is herself an over-determination of the riddle which she asks Oedipus to answer. She poses her riddle “tetrapous, DIPOUS, tripous.” But as much might be said of OiDIPOUS. All such over-determination is neatly ignored by Oedipus who addresses only the universal and not the particulars. His answer is “anthropos” rather than Oedipus. The answer is canny where uncanny would be better. But as in psychoanalysis where uncanny is the singular status of the unassimilated particular, uncanny is not so easily thought as the universal assertion “anthropos.” Riddles, enigmas, questions demanding answers—it seems that we have in the encounter between the Sphinx and Oedipus the wonder of myth presenting itself as the possibility or beginning

of discursive reason, if not of philosophy itself²². Oedipus answers the riddle according to the universal, “anthropos,” rather than according to the particular “Oedipus.” This repeats the agenda of philosophy which subordinates the particular under the generic or universal and under the specifics of essence. In some sense, Oedipus Tyrannus, the drama of enquiry, the drama of the manifold theoretical and practical powers of reason, is set in motion through the consequences of an encounter with an epiphany whose wonder is too quickly disposed by an assertion of the power of generalization. Oedipus does not understand the nature of the event because nature in tragedy resides in the particular.

PRAXIS V. EPIPHANY

The drama itself avoids this sort of epiphany for the more routine dispensation of probability and necessity. The divinity of the drama, like the divinity of Exodus works through history. In the drama proper, the terms of experience retain their token allegiance to the empirical, in that the dramatic forms of probability and necessity are retained as the mere possibilities of individuation—although the failure of their normative individuating function contradicts expectations, as Aristotle says the good tragedy should. The divine machinery is retained, but it is represented through the praxeis of human agents rather than by the machinery of the stage²³. The Sophoclean account of Oedipus in Thebes differs from myth in that the conditions it represents have probability and necessity in common with the fundamental aesthetic or empirical grounds of the rational consistency of the experience which it is determined to violate. The condition of experience suggests the possibility of the preeminence of the sort of discursive reason that the Aristotelian philosophy takes for granted. The probability and necessity of praxis should approximate and anticipate the certainty of philosophy—and should culminate in the praxis of life as eudaimonia which is the proper state in which the philosophical contemplation should occur. But the possibilities of philosophy and happiness are ruthlessly eliminated through the alteration of the terms of probability and necessity which is leading up to the Poetics’ “reversal of happiness into its opposite.” In some sense this has to be due to the drama’s fundamentally ethical concern with praxis as the mode of human life through which the registers of probability and necessity are integrated. Praxis is the privileged ontological moment

in which all of the powers and possibilities of ethos and dianoia integrated in choice contact the necessity of the outer experience within which life as a praxis must be conducted. Tragedy does not suspend the ordinary registers of the consistency of experience with the supervention of mythological phenomena. Tragedy must preserve the grounds of the possibility of praxis in order to deny their availability to praxis which is the reality or real condition of agency and, therefore, of character—of ethos, the ethical individuation of desire through praxis. Praxis must be maintained as the consummately human form of being in the world. Tragedy must preserve reality, and, along with it, the reality principle. It is through praxis, the engagement with the material real and the necessary order of consequence, that the material necessity assumes its subsequent ethical dimension of obligation. And in praxis, the daimonized necessity of fate meets the material necessity and in the recognition of the terms of this meeting a subjectivity emerges which is the possibility of the discovery and affirmation of “ought” as the necessity of a practical reason unconditioned by either order of necessity considered as “is.”

AN ARISTOTELIAN AESTHETIC

We can also consider this preference of praxis over the epiphany of mythology as part of the anthropic bias of tragedy. In §7 of the Poetics, Aristotle describes a state of cognitive default similar to the one that obtains in the case of magnitudes too great to enter the range of the Kantian mathematical sublime. In discussing the appropriate length of the plot of tragedy, Aristotle postulates, by way of analogy, an organism (hence a unity) 10,000 stadia in length. This organism is not beautiful because its unity cannot be addressed by (the merely aesthetic) contemplation which must address unity within the subjective terms of the human perception. The unity of such an immense whole cannot be apprehended within the time-scheme by which the cognitive process

must construe the unity of an aisthesis (perception). Thus the aisthesis of the object cannot be construed as beautiful, because beauty applies only to unities which can be perceived as such. The organism is not beautiful (but merely gross²⁴). Presumably such an organism could be construed within the episteme of zoology or natural history, and thus be the appropriate object of the philosophical contemplation. It is interesting to consider the subjective nature of this aesthetic as opposed to the objective nature of the philosophy. In the philosophy, anthropos is not the preminent form of reality nor the measure or the limit of anything except in the ethics, and then only of its own contingent status as an agent. Objectivity is the accord of mind and essence which is beyond all contingency. Yet when it comes to the beautiful, the size of the object must be neither too large or too small, but occur within a middle range that is determined by the capacities of sense-perception which is one of the more contingent registers of the cognitive process. Similarly, as Aristotle tells us in the same section, the contemplation proper to tragedy is contingent upon the same conditions of space and time as the aesthetic contemplation. Such aesthetic conditions govern both the beauty of the plot and the plot's capacity to generate those affects of pity, fear, and wonder that permit that the catharsis which is the function of tragedy. The beauty of the plot must occur within the limits of time that allow the plot to generate these affects and execute its function. Thus the sensory and the affective conditions of thought become the measure of time²⁵ in tragedy. But these measures are common to the conditions in which knowledge in its contingency relates to the particulars of praxis. And thus this measure is as anthropic as the conditions of praxis, which must be represented within the limits of probability and necessity which determine the capacity of anthropos as agent. The tragic plot does not exceed any of these limits—and its strict adherence to probability and necessity demand the conditions of its representation to remain within the possibilities of praxis.

Peculiarly, however, the construction of the plot seems to involve a certain sort of sublimity in the way the aisthesis delivers a unity which defies comprehension and thus the certain or epistemic ground of the philosophical contemplation. Through its plot, tragedy is an aesthetics of praxis. [[This unity might be considered a perpetual or unremitting becoming whose apprehension is always one step ahead of comprehension.]] The over-determination presents itself as a specific form of will, again, a specific anthropic form, that, as long as it lasts,

creates a subjective (or aesthetic) situation that contributes nothing to cognition. It presents an unresolvable quandary which is unusual in that this aesthetic, subjective and inexplicable consistency of events, despite our inclination to construe it as cause, is in strict compliance with probability and necessity considered according to their specification in terms of the possibilities of praxis and the material order of its consequences. In the default of the logos, necessity and probability, even under these conditions, are maintained as standards of a credible experience—which makes the representation itself credible and therefore the more to be feared. The consistency of events keeps suggesting “will,” “purpose,” “telos” through a whatness that cannot be dismissed as mere accident—if only because the continuing manifestation of its marvel denies the reflective opportunity in which cognition could construe these events as plausible according to some remoter order of cause. Apprehension denies the possibility of comprehension. The very persistence of the phenomenon itself creates a subjective cognitive state which resists the incorporation of the phenomenon into a causal scheme by which it could be understood and dismissed as an accident. Thus, like the Kantian sublime, the tragic aesthetic involves a counter-purposiveness of the form of phenomena for finite cognition, and this counter-purposiveness, which contradicts the concept of nature (which construes nature as practicable), is itself, like the Kantian sublime, encountered in the conditions of nature—probability and necessity. As in the Kantian sublime, the categorical form of the object fails (but here through the category of relation, rather than quantity.)

The subjective condition of the cognitive power is left to construe effects as cause and cause as purpose. And this unusual suspension of the normal operation of the criteria of probability and necessity which have been retained, finally, as conditions for the representation of the ethical subject and its construction as ethos, has significant points in common with the regimen of mythology which projects an order of ulterior purposes

(and their wills) into its representations experience. In the next section, we shall demonstrate how tragedy pits the practical reason of the ethical subject against the imaginary forms of mythology. We may note here that both tragedy and mythology require the empirical situation of praxis for their representation of wonder. There are also affinities to the possibility of the Kantian philosophy in which (as we shall demonstrate in the next part) the subjective consciousness must, according to the criteria of probability and necessity, construct its world of objects through its various applications of the forms of the will as the fundamental terms of consciousness.

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October 17, 1992/// c j p o 5 a 1 y . t h s

This wonder which returns in the inexplicable coincidences of the drama is a presentation in wonder's aesthetic register—according to wonder's status as an affect that is, as Kant might put it, in itself subjective and contributes nothing to cognition. In the case of philosophy, this aesthetic register would address wonder's status as an affect proper to the rudiments of the cognition of particulars not yet organized by the syllogisms according to the universals of epistemic consciousness. In as much as wonder is a cognitive affect, the condition of a dianoia in an engagement with particulars that has not risen to the logical form of syllogistic, epistemic discourse²⁶; the presentation of wonder by the plot of the tragic drama should similarly address the status of the particulars and circumstances of praxis which it is the project of the drama and its plot to arrange according to certain possibilities of organization if not the epistemic organization of the logos. **Thus the plot or mythos is a form (the form of a techne, actually) for the representation of phenomena whose cause cannot be accommodated to systemic or epistemic discourses such as that of philosophy. The wonder is again the disarticulation of the causes of cognition in anticipation of a form. The most obvious specification of this form is the recognition and reversal with their attendant affects and catharsis.**

[[Minimal praxis has be more systemic and epistemic for recognition and reversal to constitute "ought" as form of cogito embracing horrible continuity with past—humanizing terrible deeds, or desires, perhaps. The owning of the terrible truths, the divine knowledge leads to a cessation of over-determination.]]

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[[[[Yet the reversal of tragedy presents a radical subjectivity whic rem

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Endnotes

1 2 The more I think about it, the more Kant's entire philosophy beginning with CPR seems to be a take off on this Aristotelian conception of ethics. We see the same problems of relating the universal forms to the contingent particulars of experience in the Deduction of the Categories and in the introduction to CJ.

3 not very elegiac.

4 cf. E.N. philosophy in and of itself is wonderful but useless—apraktos. Intuition applies on to the universal—but in tragedy to the particular.

5 We can understand this with regard to the Poetics' status as a techne which gives the rules for representing praxeis. The techne enjoins the representation of praxeis according to criteria which make such representations credible as such; but these criteria no longer have the same meaning for the intelligibility and consistency of experience, given the over-determination.

Techne itself is a means of imposing conditions—turning the properties of things into specifications or differentia within the form of the techne. The totality of the conditions of the techne's production is the status of the matter undergoing, suffering, the form the techne—form, function, and process are equivalent in a techne. In the case of the tragedy, we might suppose that the over-determination of all praxeis in the drama is a similar totalization—the subsumption of all the particular occasions of praxis and their causes as material under the form of the determination. The catharsis would be the release of these conditions upon the cessation of the over-determination.

6 A comparison of Aristotelian ethics to Kantian phenomenology: the forms such as the Aristotelian ethos are for Kant forms of thought—synthetic unities.

7 APPENDIX ON THE FORMAL CAUSE

In Aristotelian philosophy, the logos is the functional or organizational priority of form (eidōs) over the contingent conditions of the material of mind and world. The ultimate form of a thing is an essence which is beyond the contingency of the conditions in which it is realized. Its realization, its contingent existence within matter, is given through this form, or essence, considered as its logos. In a similar sense, the psyche (roughly, the possibility of the mind and body) of a person is the essence or substance of anthropos expressed according to the logos. Again, minds

are capable of knowing things because the mind can participate in that community of things with their logoi to which those things owe their existence. The capacity to act must be governed by as many logoi as there are affects with regard to the ethics. Action should proceed from a rational desiring, which is the proper integration of the affective and rational natures—being moved to the right degrees, by the right object, at the appropriate time etc., and this can only occur with the appropriate response to the affects. An orthos logos determines the degree of to which the specific affect which it regulates should be felt. This varies relative to circumstance. Proper praxeis will be executed in accordance with the manifold logoi that regulate desire in terms of the affects or pathe (pity, fear, anger, philia, etc.) through which, with regard to the particulars of circumstance, we are moved to like or dislike, pursuit or avoidance. By these orthoi logoi, or “proper degrees,” the praxis will be proceed from a choice that is the function and expression of a rational desiring, relative to circumstances; in conjunction with the realization of the logos according to the real of perception and the cognition of things; and the deliberative process culminating in choice which unites cognitive [Vs] and practical [Vn] dimensions of the logos. Thus these pathe, or affects, are the contingent psychic materia, inner contingencies, or contingencies of the soul, by which we respond to the contingencies of outer experience.

8APPENDIX ON CONTEMPLATION

9 (For the sake of brevity we shall address cause in terms of its possibility—I realize that I'm trivializing the Metaphysics something fierce, but my comprehension of the subtlety does not extend any farther than logos .

10 [but only through hypothetical necessity—through matter, rather than through form.] Cf. the CJ's restoration of the function of the logos a posteriori by deducing it through the forms of necessity (empirical laws) discovered in experience.

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When events appear as if by a plan, where in fact there is none, their appearance has at least this much in common with chance; chance is a mere appearance and thus has no real existence. More work must be done to get the distinction straight between “chance” and “as if by design.” The consistent misapprehensions and misfirings of praxis with regard to its particulars may refer to a species of contingency under the phenomenon of a purpose which misses the mark too consistency to be considered tyche in Aristotle’s use of the term. I shall have to investigate the event more carefully. It may be worth noting that elsewhere tyche is not considered a problem for philosophy. The special circumstances of the representation of contingency under the appearance of design leading to the reversal of tragedy may offer grounds for a distinction.

Chance for Aristotle works through the forms of praxis, presumably the desire—needs or fears—of the agent, and the conformity of circumstances to these. Chance, as in Kant’s CJ may involve a lucky find. In Aristotle such finds refer to a hitting the mark that isn’t made probable by any intention of the character. It may also refer to good fortune that comes without any contribution of the moral state of the character. Thus good fortune (as distinguished from happiness) unmotivated by well integrated character defies character as standard of probability. This seems a likely way to approach chance, since the reversal of tragedy should involve a suffering which is undeserved by the moral merit of the metaxy, or person of average merit. Perhaps we could tentatively define chance as probability out of step with the causal schemes of Aristotelian philosophy and ethics. Or perhaps probability which turns necessity against the logos—such is the nature of the possibility of reversal discussed in the introduction to the CJ.

The empirical judgment employs the terms of probability to render the material order of necessity intelligible; as a standard of intelligibility, probability is wholly contingent. It may be that when the connection of probability and necessity is put into question, the contingency of the relationship assumes a form that has the purposive specifications of these two principles of the consistency of events. After all, chance is the contingent under the species of the consistent.

12 [[To what extent can chance enter into deliberation proper?]]

13 cf. CJPO 1

14 (and every other form of consciousness—memory, anticipation, etc.—the dramatic irony)

15 [—which in less than transcendent philosophies is the fundamental term of consciousness—purpose, telos construed as a form of the will, is 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.]

16 This explanation from Jonathan Lear.

17 (0 ti?—”ought?” O ti);

18 It is also worth noting that this rudimentary form of cognition seems to be shared by very young children. Not only do they have different ideas (Freud tells us) about mom and dad, but they are also unclear about nature’s specification of genera within differentiated taxonomies.

19 A lot can be done in Hamlet with such a line of Argument. Also in skeptical writers like Shelley or Melville.

20 This, of course, denies a rather passionless idealism: idealism is of little use without an intelligible ideal—phenomena which demand answers in terms of ideal forms or essences, but are denied access to the form, and thus to the answers. A question for the interpretation of Shelley. Does Shelley cling to a phenomenology that is more properly Sophoclean than Platonist? The dichotomy Platonism-Skepticism is a good one; but the distinction might be more finely articulated according the anti-idealism of Oedipus Tyrannus in which the representation of ideals is not possible and a Kantian regimen of praxis in which practical concerns are not in themselves representable. The pursuit after essences in “Alastor,” “Mont Blanc,” H.I.B, etc., assumes the dimensions of a mind daimonized by the impossibilities that arise when one attempts to resolve the matter of einai through the dialectic of a mythology. In “Masque of Anarchy,” on the other hand, there is a triumph of praxis, and praxis itself, in its representation, accrues all sorts of sublimity and mythological apparatus of personification

and allegory. In the regimen of praxis the “ought” of skepticism vanishes before the “ought.”

21 wonder etc.—continuing disorientation, suspension of project of logos—something like madness?

22 Something that has intrigued me for a while. This confusion of the particular and the universal in Oedipus’ answer, and the elision of genera into a single species seems proper to the consciousness of a very young child—less than two. Anything that goes on legs—sparrows, squirrels, dogs, may be addressed under the same species: “dog,” for instance. All men may be referred to as “dad,” all though exception is made for the real one. But on the other hand, mom is the only woman worthy of the title. Thus, I think you’ll agree, the Sphinx is really quite oedipal.

23 In a paper I wrote for Prof. Rosenmeyer, “Catastrophe Revived,” I discuss the absurdism of Euripides in terms of his imposition of the machinery of the stage upon the divine machinery.

24 (this is getting really subjective for Aristotle—but perhaps out and out sublimity is asking too much)

25 Must do more with time—both in Sophocles (panth’horon Chronos) and Aristotle.

26 [divine intuition doesn’t need this?]