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**Hegel on Intention, Action and Tragedy: Reflections on a Recent  
Debate**

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**Abstract** In recent years, much attention has been devoted to Hegel's philosophy of action. Authors have dealt with it in diverse ways, adopting differing perspectives and goals. Despite these variations, Hegel's views on the status and role that ought to be assigned to intentions with respect to action have received a particular attention and have generated heated debates. The following paper is devoted to this debate between interpreters who hold that Hegel's philosophy of action defends a so-called 'retrospective' conception of intention and those who rather claim that, in spite of its ambiguities, it remains in line with the dominant conception of the connection between intention and action. The second section explores the following hypothesis: important elements of Hegel's philosophy of action find their model in his interpretation of ancient Greek tragedy.

In recent years, much attention has been devoted to Hegel's philosophy of action.<sup>i</sup> Authors have dealt with it in diverse ways, adopting differing perspectives and goals. Despite these variations, Hegel's views on the status and role that ought to be assigned to

intentions with respect to action have received a particular attention and have generated heated debates.

Admittedly, one of the motives leading to such debates is that Hegel's understanding of intention is profoundly unclear, ambiguous, and, in many ways, seems directly to oppose the view of intention conveyed by dominant modern and contemporary conceptions of action. Thus, recording these ambiguities, Charles Taylor, Robert Pippin and Allen Speight undertook to define Hegel's understanding in terms of a "retrospective" conception of intention. According to them, this view ought to be so qualified, for Hegel defends a conception according to which the content, the meaning as well as the ethical character of acting agents can only be known after their deeds. By contrast, Michael Quante, Dudley Knowles and Arto Laitinen rather hold that despite its numerous ambiguities and oddities, Hegel's philosophy of action conceives of intention in the exact same way as prevailing theories of action. Beyond its peculiarities, Hegel's philosophy of action, they claim, views action as the realization, by a given agent, of an intention which "belongs" to him and which he undertakes to actualize or externalize. In sum, Hegel, as Quante, Knowles and Laitinen believe, nevertheless maintains a conception of intention as what lies "within" the mind of an agent, "before" he acts, and which is to be considered as the "cause" of his actions (which, in turn, are seen as the "effect").

The following paper is devoted to Hegel's views on the connection between intention and action. The first section examines some of the key issues at stake in this debate opposing interpreters who hold that Hegel philosophy of action defends a so-called "retrospective" conception of intention and those who rather claim that in spite of its inherent tensions and ambivalences, it remains in line with the dominant conception of the connection between intention and action. The second section explores the hypothesis

that important elements of Hegel's theory of action which Robert Pippin does not hesitate to consider as "unusual", "counterintuitive" and "paradoxical" are, in fact, to be traced back to ancient Greek tragedy or, more precisely, to Hegel's interpretation of ancient Greek tragedy.

### A "retrospective" view of intention?

In an influential article entitled *Hegel and the Philosophy of Action*,<sup>ii</sup> Charles Taylor argues that Hegel's conception of action ought to be assessed on the backdrop of a debate that can be traced back as far as what is usually considered as the beginning of modern philosophy — in Cartesian and empiricist philosophies — and which extends up till recent, twentieth-century and contemporary theories of action. This debate, Taylor claims, opposes two different theories and is essentially about the nature and specificity of human action. The first theory, which Taylor labels the causal theory or the causal view, holds that what distinguishes human actions from any other events occurring in the world is that they are the result of a specific set of causes — desires, beliefs, intentions — and that such causes are "psychological" or "mental" in their nature. Consequently, if to know something amounts to knowing its causes, then to be able to know human action requires the examination of the mind, the "psychology" or the interiority of an agent. In other words, human actions certainly "transform" or modify external reality — and as such they are similar to any other types of events. However, they differ precisely in that their causes are to be sought in the mind of the acting agent. Such a view, Taylor indicates, ultimately rests on a ontological distinction between, on the one side, the "external" and "objective" action as such, and its cause, which rather lies within the agent or the subject, on the other.<sup>iii</sup>

To this causal theory Taylor opposes another theory, which he designates as “qualitative”. To be sure, this latter “qualitative” theory also holds that human actions ought to be distinguished from all other types of events in the world. However, the qualitative theory understands this distinction differently: human actions are not “causal events”, whether the cause is viewed subjectively or objectively, but they differ qualitatively from all other types of events in that they are purposive activities. More specifically, a given human action is not to be viewed as an effect or as a result of a cause lying within the agent’s mind, but it is rather a specific type of activity, which is oriented towards a goal or an end. Furthermore, this goal or end cannot be separated from the action itself, for it is “immanent” in it, while it informs its sense, meaning and signification. As a consequence, such a view, Taylor holds, necessarily rejects the ontological dualism between cause (as subjective and mental or internal) and action (as objective and external). The qualitative theory of action rather claims that those two aspects or dimensions of action are inseparable and are to be considered in their unity, a conception, which, Taylor believes, ultimately finds its model in Aristotle’s “hylomorphism”.<sup>iv</sup>

It is clear to Taylor that Hegel defends such a qualitative understanding action. In his view, indeed, the theory of action Hegel put forward in his later works, namely in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, consisted in nothing but to spell out and, above all, to draw the conclusions of this conception he designates as “qualitative” and, he believes, had already begun to take shape in the aftermath of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and in the early developments of post-Kantian idealism, in Fichte and Schelling. Thus, one such consequence, Taylor claims, has precisely to do with the “causes” which, according to the causal theory, trigger human actions. As just mentioned, those causes are, for this latter theory, essentially to be thought of in terms of desires, beliefs and intentions, which are said to be located in the agent’s mind, and which are considered as

being relatively easily and immediately accessible data. But for the proponents of the qualitative view this can hardly be the case. Insofar as actions are to be understood as purposive activities, and insofar as, according to this model, ends are inseparable from actions, it then follows that ends, *pace* the causal theory, cannot be so easily identified and distinguished from actions as such.

From this consequence, Taylor proposes, another consequence ensues, which has rather to do with the “epistemological” status of causes and actions. Thus, if it is exact to hold that the causes or the mental states of the agent can hardly be separated from his action, it follows that such mental states are not to be considered as data immediately accessible to the agent himself or to any observer. Quite the contrary, the mental states, desires, believes, and intentions need to be “identified” and analyzed, and such analysis is only possible *post facto*, i.e. only after the action has been accomplished. But if this is right, then it means that the agent’s mental states which orient his actions and which determine their sense and signification are not, so to speak, “first” and “immediate”, but they are rather “second” and “derived” or “mediated”.<sup>v</sup> This then implies that in order to know or to cognize the sense and meaning of a given action, one does not need to go back to its causes *ex ante* — causes that would directly be available as a “given” in the agent’s mind —, but one must instead perform a rather complex analysis which at the same time has to take into account the agent’s own understanding of his motive and intentions, the understanding others have of such motives and intentions, as well as the situation and context in which the action took place.

Obviously, this view has a direct impact on the notion of intention itself. In this regard, Robert Pippin has precisely dealt

with this impact and undertook to clarify its implications. In Chapter 6 of his recent book *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life*,<sup>vi</sup> he comes back on this distinction between the modern causal theory of action (which Pippin also qualifies as voluntarist) and the theory Taylor labels as “qualitative” and which Pippin also attributes to Hegel. Hegel, Pippin claims, clearly defends the view according to which a genuine human action is to be understood as what an agent or a subject has realized willingly and intentionally. Besides, Pippin argues that the famous opposition drawn by Hegel in the paragraph § 117 of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* between deed (*Tat*) and action (*Handlung*) is essentially meant to pinpoint this distinction.<sup>vii</sup> But of course, the whole issue here boils down to what exactly does it mean to act intentionally.

For Pippin, Hegel’s answer to this question relies on the link or connection which is to be drawn between “interiority” and “exteriority” or, more specifically, on how this connection between “interiority” — which, according to the causal and voluntarist theory is to be seen as the agent’s mental states and which constitutes the “cause” or the intention — and the action itself which, also according to the causal and voluntarist model, is nothing but the externalized effect of the agent’s intentions by his will. In line with Taylor’s interpretation, Pippin holds that Hegel rejects this clear-cut distinction between interiority (cause-intention) and externality (effect-action), and rather advocates for a conception of agency in which both are thought of in their togetherness, in their unity, a unity which Pippin, using the state-of-the-art Hegelian term, qualifies as “speculative”.<sup>viii</sup>

This conception, he specifies, requires that “temporal framework” of an action has to be broadened and expanded. Indeed, a given action is never isolated or alone; it is always part of a larger network or series of actions, which defines its context and

determines — at least, partly — its sense and meaning. This then implies that one can never determine the sense and meaning of a given action exclusively from itself, but one must rather also take into account the series or network of past and future actions in which it is intertwined. In sum, a given action is always preceded by other actions and generates in turn consequences that are more often than not unforeseeable and which may extend far beyond its immediate effects.

In addition, Pippin, also in accordance with Taylor, maintains that Hegel upholds a view of action that can be characterized as “expressive”. According to this view, a given action is not to be seen as the sole externalization of an agent’s mental states or intentions, but it must rather be thought of as a deed by means of which an agent “expresses” who he is or who he believes he is, what he wants or believes he wants to mean by acting the way he actually does. Such a view, Pippin holds, entails that the meaning of an action is not necessarily the one the agent first intended or thought to express as he began to act, but rather frequently reveals itself only after the deed, *post facto*. Furthermore, this view also entails that to understand the meaning of an action not only requires to examine what the agent has actually or wanted to express, but must also take into account how the others have understood and interpreted the meaning of his deed.

Now, regarding the agent himself, he is not as well an isolated individual, but he lives and acts within a social and historical world, within the framework of a set of institutions which, each in their own specific fashion, inform his identity and determine his conduct. Moreover, as Taylor already pointed out, the agent does not have immediate, direct and privileged access to his desires and beliefs, but his self-understanding is often partial, provisional, and even misled. Hence, this is the reason why the agent more often than not is only able to comprehend the actual

meaning of his intention and action retrospectively, after his deed. In sum, the agent certainly freely and willingly defines his own intentions, but this process does not exclusively occur within his consciousness or mind, and nothing legitimately entitles him to be considered as the best and privileged interpreter of the accurate meaning of his intention and action. This process is rather to be understood as a complex self-reflective and deliberative procedure, which includes the agent himself, the other agents that are involved in one way or the other in the action as well as the social and institutional framework within which his action takes place. In other words, for Pippin, this whole process in virtue of which an agent defines and formulates his intention is not to be thought of in subjective, individualist, or as he puts it, in “solipsistic” terms (Pippin 2008, 169), but it is rather a process that unifies and engages both the interiority and the exteriority, the subjectivity and the objectivity, and this process is eminently social by nature. In his view, it is precisely from such (speculative) unity between interiority and exteriority that follows Hegel’s thesis in § 124 of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* according to which the moral worth of the agent lies nowhere but in his actions.<sup>ix</sup>

It is this understanding of intention that Pippin attributes to Hegel and which he qualifies as “retrospective”. Yet, this qualification does not entail, Pippin insists, that intentions are actually defined or determined after the deed. Such a view would suggest that Hegel defends a conception according to which it is, for example, possible and even legitimate for an individual to reformulate his intentions *a posteriori* in such a way to exonerate himself from what he would have clearly come to see as the disastrous consequences stemming from his act. But this suggestion matches neither the letter nor the spirit of Hegel’s views on intention and action. By contrast, Hegel’s view, asserts Pippin, can indeed be justly qualified as “retrospective” if by such a qualification it is meant, on the one hand, that intentions are to be understood as the product of a complex social process and that intentions are to be



considered as very often revealing their meaning only as the deed is realized and as its consequences unfold, on the other.

Pippin admits that this conception of intention is rather unusual, and goes against the grain of the view of intention defended by the dominant causal theories of action. Without hesitation, he also concedes that it appears to be contradictory, counterintuitive, or at least, paradoxical to understand intentions as retrospective. But, beyond the paradox and unusualness, this view is nothing but the accurate view of intention conveyed by Hegel's theory of action, a view, which, in Pippin's mind, contributes to the richness and depth of this theory and hence provides it with a decisive advantage over causal theories of action.

However, according to Quante, Knowles and Laitinen, both Taylor's and Pippin's interpretations are certainly not without merits. But they don't go without any difficulty, and, in their view, these difficulties are to be drawn back to the thesis of the unity or inseparability of intention and action defended by Taylor as well as by Pippin. Thus, in his article *Hegel on Actions, Reasons and Causes*,<sup>x</sup> Knowles admits that in light of certain passages of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* it does appear plausible to hold that Hegel defends this view. For example, in paragraph § 118, Hegel, while underlying what he believes are the limits of both deontologist and consequentialist conceptions of action, specifies the terms of his own view by asserting that action is to be defined as what is driven by an end, that this end is, so to speak, immanent in action itself, and that it is realized or translated in what he calls "external existence (*Dasein*)".<sup>xi</sup> This description of action, Knowles concedes, does appear to contain all the elements Taylor needs in order to make his case for the thesis according to which Hegel defends a unitarian conception of intention and action.<sup>xii</sup> However, in order to do so, Taylor, Knowles notices, must disregard many other passages in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, but also

in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, in which Hegel explicitly asserts what he designates as “the right of intention”, i.e., the view according to which an agent is legitimately entitled to acknowledge as his own deeds only the ones he has voluntarily and intentionally committed.<sup>xiii</sup>

In fact, according to Knowles, Taylor confuses the intention and the end (or the goal) of action. Insofar as the goal is, so to speak, the motor of action it is indeed inseparable from action. However, to concede this does not necessarily commit one to the view that the same thing holds for the intention. To borrow Knowles’ example, an agent may have the intention to take up painting when he retires, but does not implement any means to realize such intention.<sup>xiv</sup> According to Knowles, such example clearly shows that the intention precedes the action and ought thus to be distinguished from it. Yet if Taylor is led to hold the opposite view it is precisely because he has mistaken the intention for the end.

Furthermore, Knowles also holds that there is no need to advocate, as Taylor and Pippin do, for an alternative view of causality with respect to action. Once again, such a plea, Knowles believes, is nowhere to be found in Hegel. Of course, Hegel, he admits, is fully aware that the notion of causality does not apply the same way to human action as it does to any other types of events. With regards to action, the notions of cause and effect are not to be taken literally, but they are rather to be understood “in a loose and figurative way (*in uneigentlichem Sinne*) which implies that the effect is nothing more than the manifestation of the cause”.<sup>xv</sup> But, whatever is the exact understanding of causation here, it still remains, Knowles argues, that it is entirely accurate to view human action according to the causal model.

Contrary to what Taylor and Pippin suggest, this model, Knowles replies, does not override the complexity and equivocality inherent in human action. To maintain that action is to be understood as the effect of a subjective cause does not, *pace* Taylor and Pippin, commit one to the view that such a subjective cause is an immediate and unambiguous mental state to which an agent has direct and privileged access. According to Knowles, the causal theory is also fully aware that the meaning of human action is a highly complex matter, that the agent can be mistaken about the real and genuine motives of his intentions and that therefore these intentions must be deciphered and interpreted. But according to Knowles, once again, none of this binds one to the view that intentions ought to be considered as “provisional” and “retrospective”.<sup>xvi</sup>

Yet, Laitinen, who agrees with those objections, does nevertheless believe that Pippin is right to maintain that Hegel defends a retrospective conception of intention. However, for this interpretation to be defensible, one must draw a distinction between an ontological and a specifically epistemological interpretation of the determination or definition of intentions. For Laitinen, the ontological understanding according to which the intentions “are” defined or determined *ex post*, after the deed, is not only unusual or counter-intuitive, as Pippin notices, but it also (and more importantly) conveys highly implausible consequences. For example, such a view not only suggests that an agent is entitled to “determine” his intentions only after the deed, and that this may provide him a way to draw back from the potentially disastrous consequences of his deed, but it also entails that it becomes merely impossible to evaluate a given deed, for such an evaluation can only be carried out on the backdrop of an intention that is determined before the deed and which functions as its benchmark. This view, Laitinen argues, is nowhere to be found in Hegel and thus must be rejected. But, if by the terms “determination of intentions” it is meant that the intentions can only be fully and truly known after

they have been “externalized” in an action, or that it is only afterwards that the agent can have a clearer understanding of what actually were his intentions, then this interpretation is not only plausible but it is also accurate and desirable. In Laitinen’s view, this is the conception that is defended by Hegel. It is precisely this same conception that provides the basis for the above-mentioned distinction Hegel draws in paragraph § 117 of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* between a deed (*Tun*) which is simply committed by an agent and an action (*Handlung*) which an agent voluntarily and intentionally realizes and for which he assumes full responsibility.<sup>xviii</sup>

But whatever is Pippin’s exact take on this view, it remains that it fully squares, Laitinen believes, with common sense view on intention, and that it is nowhere near from being unusual or counterintuitive. Moreover, this view is by no means incompatible with the understanding of intentions conveyed by the causal theory. To be sure, the causal theory tends to solely focus on the “prospective” aspect of the determination of intentions. But what is needed here is not another theory, rather simply to expand the focus in order to include this retrospective dimension of the determination of intentions, which, as Laitinen, argues is also part of the complex and sinuous “logic” of human action.

Admittedly, Knowles, Laitinen and others are entirely justified to insist on the importance intentions and, more generally, the “subjective” aspects have in Hegel’s theory of action. However, one cannot but notice that Knowles and Laitinen’s objections are much more suited to Taylor’s interpretation rather than Pippin’s, for the latter constantly underscore the role and functions which, in his view, these aspect play in Hegel’s theory of action. More than once, Pippin shows how and in what sense the retrospective conception of intention that he attributes to Hegel does indeed

include these aspects Hegel designates under the heading of “the right of intention”.

Yet, what this retrospective conception of intention is meant to capture is certainly the role and function of intentions, but also, and most importantly perhaps, their content. More specifically, nowhere does Pippin challenge the view that an agent first determines his intentions and then undertakes to realize them by means of his action. However, what the retrospective conception of intention he attributes to Hegel does aim at is to give what he believes are comprehensive and accurate answers to the following questions: How does an agent determine and define his intentions? What orients or guides his reflection and deliberation in this task? What does it mean and what does it imply for an agent to justify his actions? What role do the other agents play in, and what is the impact of the circumstances and of the social context on this process? And finally, in what sense is this whole process linked to the agent exercising his freedom?

Evidently, for Pippin as for Hegel, the model on the basis of which the causal theory answers these questions is far too narrow and limited. Like Hegel, Pippin believes that the view according to which an act is the effect of an intention which is seen as its cause and which originates in the mental states of an agent is very far from being able to account for the complexity of human action. Consequently, he considers it necessary to go beyond the strictly “subjectivist” and “individualistic” framework of the causal theory and to broaden the scope in order to account for the social, institutional and collective dimensions, which are also inherent in human action.<sup>xviii</sup> However, such broadening does not require to merely “include” this social and collective dimension, which is disregarded within the causal framework. Rather, it also implies a modification or a transformation which significantly affects both the meaning and content of all the notions by which one accounts

for human action. This includes, of course, the notion of intention as well as the notions of subject, individual, agent, responsibility and of action as such. These are the modifications which Pippin, in line with Hegel's philosophy, undertakes to phrase in terms of a social (and speculative) theory of action supported by a retrospective view of intention.

Pippin is certainly right in insisting that this theory of action is particularly unusual and to some extent paradoxical and counterintuitive. But, of course, this is indeed the case on the backdrop of the dominant causal theory. Yet, the view Pippin defends and which he believes is also Hegel's is, I would like to suggest, much less unusual if examined in light of another model of action. And as I mentioned above, this model is the one of Greek tragedy, or more specifically, of Hegel's interpretation of Greek tragedy.

To be sure, my goal here is not to argue that Hegel has advocated for something like a rejuvenation of the tragic worldview, whatever that would mean. As a worldview, tragedy, he believes, irremediably belongs to ancient polytheism, and simply is incompatible with modern, enlightened and post-revolutionary Europe.<sup>xix</sup> However, what will consistently drive Hegel's attention toward Greek tragedy from his early theological writings to his late philosophical works, is rather the ethical and political content that lies at the heart of tragedy. Certainly, this ethical and political content once expressed in ancient Greek tragedies has been considered unsuitable as a result of the historical and cultural development. Nevertheless, this ethical and political content as such, Hegel has suggested, does not irremediably belong to the Greek *polis* and ancient polytheism. Consequently, what I would like to suggest here is that key elements of Hegel's theory of ethical and political action — elements which precisely lead Pippin to

insists on the unusualness and distinctiveness of this theory — find their model in the tragic view of action.<sup>xx</sup>

### **Hegel and the tragic view of action: causality and liberty**

The first aspect of this suggestion that I would like to pursue here has to do with the issue of causality which, as we saw, constitutes one of the key issues around which revolves this recent debate on Hegel's theory of action. Certainly, Hegel addressed this issue on several occasions, but in his early essay entitled *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, he deals with it for the first time in relatively detailed fashion and does so with reference to the ancient and tragic conception of action.<sup>xxi</sup> Although rarely cited in the context of this debate, this essay contains a very instructive discussion in the course of which several conceptions of action are examined under various aspects, including the conception of action represented in the Greek tragedies.<sup>xxii</sup>

Thus, the broader context of this discussion is one in which Hegel is busy defining the specifics of the moral teaching of Jesus. He undertakes to do so by examining some key features of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and by comparing it, on the one hand, with the Judaic or Mosaic Law, and with moral duty, broadly understood in Kantian terms, on the other. Unsurprisingly, this line of thought leads Hegel to examine the understanding of justice underlying these different conceptions, and it is in the course of this analysis that he comes to focus on tragedy and more specifically on the notion of tragic fate.<sup>xxiii</sup> More specifically, Hegel undertakes to confront different conceptions of action by means of examining how they conceive "justice", that is the way they understand the connection (or the cause) that links the "law" or the "principle" to the act itself as well as its consequences.

According to the properly juridical conception of justice — a conception Hegel assigns both to Old Testament and to Kant’s moral philosophy —, a crime is essentially understood as a particular deed that has broken a universal law. In his view, this conception is ultimately grounded in a distinction between the form and the content of the law, and on the basis of this distinction one can, he believes, specify the matter by stating that a criminal deed is one that substitutes the universal content of the law with another content, which is no longer universal, but rather the expression of a particular interest. In order, for example, to satisfy her own interest, a criminal replaces the universal maxim requiring the respect of the rights of her fellow humans by the opposite maxim, which affirms the non-respect of the rights of others. While the content of the law has been cancelled, its form remains intact. Moreover, according to this understanding, not only does the law keep the form of universality, but it also will, in the end, withdraw the content that the criminal’s deed has “posited” — the non-respect of universality — and turn it against her. This withdrawal is the effect of punishment, and on this account punishment is thus understood as realizing justice by forcing the criminal back to the universal content of the law.

Yet, in Hegel’s view, such a conception of the relationship between law, crime, and punishment is undermined by insolvable difficulties. One of these difficulties is that this model of justice appears to be unable to generate the terms of what would be a possible reconciliation between the punished criminal and the violated law. By conceiving the law as a completely separated entity opposed to the particular deed, this model, by definition, precludes any possibility of forgiveness. To be sure, the imposed punishment fulfills the requirements of law, which consist mostly in imposing a punishment on the criminal that is proportionate to the harm her deed has done to her victim. However, even when this requirement



is met, law still maintains its hostility towards the criminal. As for the criminal herself, the punishment she suffers has no positive transformative effect regarding her consciousness or her will. For, as Hegel states: “in the bad consciousness (the consciousness of a bad action, of one’s self as a bad man) punishment, once suffered, alters nothing. For the trespasser always sees himself as a trespasser”.<sup>xxiv</sup> Consequently, punishment here is not a sanction that would open up the possibility of overcoming the hostility between the one who broke the law and the one who suffered harm from this violation, but it rather appears as a pure principle of equality and of vengeance, or in other words, of the *lex talionis*.

By contrast, the tragic understanding of justice, i.e., justice understood as fate, seems to escape such difficulty and thus reveals a decisive advantage.<sup>xxv</sup> Admittedly, though, punishment through fate, Hegel concedes, is also a highly negative experience. But fate, he points out, is a power in which the “universal and particular are united”.<sup>xxvi</sup> This means, in other terms, that fate is not an “abstract”, “higher” or “transcendent” entity, but rather a power, which is immanent and remains at the same level as the agent or the hero confronting it.

According to this conception, it then follows that crime is neither to be understood as the uprising of a particular individual against a universal law subjecting him, nor as a deed whereby an individual undertakes to free herself from an authority to which she is subjected. Before her deed, an agent or a hero is immersed in the totality of her world, in her community. In fact, it is the deed itself that creates the opposition; it is only at the moment when she acts that the agent produces the division and thus destroys or nullifies the unity of life. And in Hegel’s view, it is this very same life, which has been injured by the criminal deed, and which will come to turn against the hero, transforming itself into an enemy.

Yet, at first glance, at least, it seems as if reconciliation here is even more highly improbable than in the context of right and law. But, in fact, what triggers fate is not so much the “being” of the destroyed life, but the destruction or negation of life itself. Punishment as fate is the consequence of the process by which the hero, by acting, has “absolutized” one moment of the whole of life and thus has broken its unity. But insofar as life is the truth of its moments, or given that the totality of life is the truth of its parts, it then follows that the possibility is opened up for the criminal to acknowledge and to recognize the other parts of life. According to Hegel, it is precisely this recognition that renders reconciliation possible and therefore, gives to tragic fate its decisive advantage over law and juridical justice. Hegel writes: “But fate, so far as reconcilability is concerned, has the advantage of the penal law that it occurs within the orbit of life, while a crime falling under law and punishment occurs on the contrary in the orbit of insurmountable oppositions and absolutely real events”.<sup>xxvii</sup>

In other words, in the framework of the tragic experience of fate, law is, so to speak, second in relation to the primacy of life. It only appears at the moment when an agent, by his deed, breaks the wholeness of life in which he was immersed until then. In fate, law is not a reality *sub specie æternitatis* that precedes action, and on the basis of which the morality and/or legality of a given deed is judged. With fate, law rather appears afterwards, in the specific context of the deed that has been committed. In sum, the experience of tragic fate reveals the terms for conceptualizing a causal relationship between law and action that is the exact opposite of the one prevailing in right and morality. This then implies that it is only possible to judge whether a deed has broken the law or not after the deed has occurred and deployed its full consequences.

In his later works, namely in the essay on *Natural Law* (1802-1803), in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel will further examine the terms of this reversed relationship between law and action as exposed in ancient Greek tragedies. Thus, in the chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled *The True Spirit. The Ethical Order* — devoted to the examination of the different conflicts which, for Hegel, were inherent in the Greek *polis* and which will lead to its break-up — Hegel comes to focus on Antigone’s decision to go against the “law of the city”, and to rather obey the “law of the family”, commanding her to offer burial to her brother Polynices. Relying on the verses in which Antigone declares that she will acknowledge, by her suffering, the righteousness of her fate, Hegel points out that Antigone certainly admits that she is guilty, for she has consciously and voluntarily transgressed the law of the city.<sup>xxviii</sup> However, by the same token, she also asserts that she will only recognize her fault or wrongdoing if she comes to suffer from the consequences of her deed. In other words, what Antigone suggests here, argues Hegel, is that it is not the law as such that constitutes the norm and expression of justice, but also, and more importantly, the suffering that may result as a consequence of action.<sup>xxix</sup>

In his *Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel claims that within the “world-situation” as exhibited in tragic poetry, “the universal ethical powers [are not] explicitly fixed as either the law of the land or as moral precepts and duties [...], but are rather the substantive foundation and general background out of which the actions of individuals grow and develop”. This then implies, Hegel continues, that in such a world, individuals are not moral subjectivities living and acting within a preexisting legal framework imposing itself as something foreign and external. In such a world, individuals are rather “ethical” (*sittlichen*) *personae* and their actions are what Hegel describes as their “own work”, and not the mere application of pre-given or external rules.<sup>xxx</sup>

In Pippin's terms, it is only retrospectively that one can judge whether an action is in conformity with its driving principle, norm or law. By contrast, according to juridical and moral model of causality — similar in all respects to the one Pippin, in line with Taylor, criticizes under the heading “causal theory” — the law or the principle can be considered as prospective; it does not need, so to speak, to “wait” for a given action to actualize or realize itself fully, for the “causal theory” claims to being able, right from the outset, to identify the “intention” (the rule or the norm) that led to this action, and to determine whether it is in conformity with the universal and objective moral or legal law.

In my view, it is precisely this model of the “causality of fate” or “tragic causality” that Hegel undertakes to reformulate within the context of his ethical and political philosophy, and which he opposes to the dominant modern theories of action (deontologist and consequentialist).<sup>xxxii</sup> Of course, it is this same model, I also believe, that Pippin, on his side, interprets in terms of a social theory of action which conveys a retrospective conception of intention and which, he believes, is ultimately grounded in the “speculative” unity of interiority and exteriority.

As for the second and last aspect of my suggestion, it is specifically concerned with the social dimension Pippin attributes to Hegel's understanding of action and freedom. Here as well, I would like to suggest that the model on the basis of which Hegel conceives the link between action and freedom — a model Pippin qualifies as “social” — finds some of its key insights in Greek tragedy.

Thus, in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* as well as in the later works we just referred to, Hegel's argument with respect to "tragic causality" largely rests, as we just saw, on the idea that, in the experience of tragic fate, what functions as the "law" comes after the deed, i.e. only once the agent or the hero, by his deed, has broken the unity of life. In fact, for Hegel, to act necessarily and unavoidably implies such a break, such a destruction or what he describes as a "negation" of the unity of life. Consequently, all action is necessarily guilty (*schuldig*), even the one that, according to the criteria of law and/or morality, has been realized without any criminal intent. In sum, in tragedy, every deed is straightaway guilty (*schuldig*), even the one that is innocent. Such understanding of guilt is pure scandal as law and morality are concerned, and, of course, the question arises as to why does Hegel believe he should value this tragic conception of "guilt of innocence" (*Die Schuld der Unschuld*) over juridical and moral views of justice.

Obviously, Hegel's argument here partly relies on the meaning and scope of the term guilt (*Schuld*). In German, the word *Schuld* does not refer exclusively to moral or legal guilt; it has a much wider scope, and refers to a type of responsibility, an accountability of one's deed and actions that goes far beyond the moral or legal sense of the term. But, if this is exact, it then means that the causality of fate presupposes or contains the possibility of a "transgression" that is more encompassing than the one underlying penal justice and morality. Indeed, given that in tragedy every action is guilty (*schuldig*) — guilty of having broken the unity of life — and given that judgment and punishment can only be applied "afterwards", i.e. in the particular context of the deed having deployed the full set of its consequence, it then follows that transgression is not necessarily from the outset criminal (in the sense that the deed is not necessarily and willingly done in order to break or to violate someone's right). If this is true, one might then say that tragic fate contains the possibility of a transgression that is not merely negative, but also positive, i.e., a transgression that not

only breaks a preexisting law, but also “asserts”, “posits”, “creates” a new law, a new rule or a new norm. In different terms, the tragic conception of causality provides for the possibility of a type of agency that is law-creating or norm-asserting, and that can thus be literally qualified as free, legislative and autonomous.<sup>xxxii</sup>

According to this view, Antigone, as seen above, is fully aware of having broken the law that forbids the burial of the corpse of anyone who has betrayed his city. Consequently, she recognizes her guilt and assumes full responsibility for her deed. Yet, at the same time, she does not believe that her deed was ethically wrong, for, in burying her brother, she has done nothing but fulfill her ethical duty as a sister. Therefore, her transgressing of the law of the city was not only and purely a transgression, but rather a transgression for the sake of another law —namely, the unwritten, implicit, and somehow “subterranean” law of blood and family ties — which she claims is as important as the law of the city on which her uncle, Creon, the ruler of the city, is relying to forbid Polynices’ burial.

For Hegel, Antigone’s deed is certainly criminal, transgressive, but it should not, in any case, be equated with ethical or moral wrongdoing, understood as a deed stemming from bad, immoral motives or intentions. In other words, Antigone disobeys the law of the city, thus she is guilty — *schuldig*;<sup>xxxiii</sup> however, her disobedience is not the expression of (more or less) conscious and voluntary opposition to an already-existing, universal, “a priori” legal and/or ethical law, but rather the result of a thorough, comprehensive and fully conscious reflection leading her to believe firmly that, in this particular situation, her moral and ethical duty requires her to favor the law of the family instead of the law of the city. Yet she will, of course, come to discover, *by way of her suffering*, that she was wrong.

In Hegel's view, Antigone's transgression, her disobedience — a disobedience we may want to call "civil disobedience"<sup>xxxiv</sup> — goes against the grain of the juridical and Kantian understanding of crime. As also seen above, law and morality exclusively conceive crime or transgression as a particular act opposing an abstract and wholly independent rule or injunction. This conception implies, first, that the wrongness of a deed involves a failure of correspondence between the particular deed (or its motives) and the external rule or norm. Secondly, it suggests that act and law, particular deed and universal rule, insofar as they are logically distinct from each other, must remain permanently and "eternally" separated. By contrast, Antigone's transgression may rather be seen as a "positive" or even as a "self-asserting" and "creative" transgression, in the sense that her transgressive deed is at the same time the result of a conscious "reappropriation", "re-formation" and actualization of existing rules and practices in the context of a particular situation. For Hegel, Antigone's action accomplishes what appears to be forever precluded in the juridical and Kantian model, namely to bridge the gulf between act and law, between the particularity of the action and the universality of the rule. In addition, given that Antigone's deed is the result of her capacity to consciously decide and act against and beyond already established rules, one might then want to say that her transgression, her crime, is the expression of some of the essential conditions for ethical or moral autonomy and freedom. Indeed, how can one be said to be really autonomous and free, if one is not recognized as having the capacity and possibility to act transgressively in a way that one's transgression is not irremediably negative, criminal and evil, but ethically necessary, positive and good as well? What is autonomy and freedom without positive transgression?

Admittedly, Antigone's transgression is not, for Hegel, the full realization of autonomy and freedom. Especially in his late

writings, he will make abundantly clear that ancient tragedy and ancient world were missing what will increasingly be seen as crucial ingredients of freedom, namely individuality and subjectivity.<sup>xxxv</sup> After all, Antigone's transgression is essentially realized in the name of an old, religious, and traditional law, and not for the sake of her own individual ethical consciousness. Nonetheless, Antigone's positive transgression contains this very possibility that is blocked in the legal and moral conception of action, but which, for Hegel, is essential to any theory of agency that is to be grounded on autonomy and freedom.

Furthermore, Antigone's consciousness, her ethical deliberation as well as her freedom, are not those of an "isolated" individual that implausibly undertakes to act in opposition to empirical necessity. She is not a transcendental subject that seeks to rise above the set of family, social and political determinations within which she lives in order to exercise her autonomy and freedom. In Kantian terms, Antigone's consciousness is not a pure or *a priori* "I", a "transcendental unity of apperception" which, on the one hand, asserts to be free, but which, on the other, concedes not to be able to gain further knowledge beyond the assertion that the law of its own freedom ought to be considered as a mere "fact of reason" (*Faktum der Vernunft*). Rather, Antigone necessarily deliberates, decides and acts within the determinations of pre-existing institutional norms that shape her life, and she knows her "ethos" and how to act accordingly. In other words, in tragedies, heroes are not, as it were, "alone" and "abstract" individual agents who undertake to exercise their freedom understood as "free will" or "free choice", but they live, act and interact with others within the network of institutions that constitutes them as well as the political community to which they belong.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

These communal institutions are highly instrumental in shaping individual's lives, consciousness and identities. In ancient



tragedies, individual agency and freedom are only possible within community, within the framework of what Hegel will come to designate as ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). However, as the figure of Antigone exemplifies, such an understanding, Hegel believes, does not at any rate imply that freedom of consciousness and individual agency as such are mere illusions. Of course, tragic freedom, and more generally ancient freedom, was not universal freedom. Nevertheless, as limited as it were, ancient (and tragic) freedom was not an unknowable supersensible substratum, as in what Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, calls the modern “moral worldview” (*die moralische Weltanschauung*). In ancient Greece, freedom, we may say, is rather immanent to the world and those who were free knew their freedom. According to Hegel, it is such a concrete and real freedom that ought to be actualized and expanded to all. And it is, of course, this view that he will reformulate within the framework of his “speculative” and “dialectical” philosophy. In the terms of this philosophy, freedom consists in a process by which the I, the thinking subject undertake to progressively overcome its initial foreignness and estrangement to the world in order to become “simply at home with itself” (*als das schlechthin bei sich seienden Ichs*).<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In Pippin’s words, Freedom, as conceived by Hegel, is not a “characteristic” or a “property” belonging to each individual thinking and acting subject, but it is rather a “norm” or a “rule”, which Spirit (*Geist*) has come to generate and to actualize historically.<sup>xxxviii</sup> And in Pippin’s view, Hegel essentially understands this historical process as actualizing or realizing itself by means of different processes of “recognition” (*Anerkennung*) occurring within the set of institutions (family, society, and state) shaping and informing the lives of individuals.<sup>xxxix</sup>

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In this article, I examined Hegel's theory of action with respect to its view on the connection between intention and action. I began by discussing some aspect of a debate that has been going on for a few decades on this issue. As seen above, some commentators, such as Knowles, Laitinen and Quante, hold that despite its numerous tensions and ambiguities Hegel's view on the connection between intention and action is ultimately in line with the dominant modern conception that claims that a given action is nothing but the effect of an intention, which, in turn, is to be seen as the cause of the action and which is to be traced back to the agent's mental states. By contrast, Charles Taylor and more recently Robert Pippin have argued that Hegel offers a much more complicated and paradoxical story that presents, they believe, the decisive advantage of offering a more accurate and fitting account of the complexity and intricacies of human action. Hegel's theory, they both claim, convincingly shows that intentions cannot be "reduced" to mental states located in the agent's mind, but that they are rather to be understood as being eminently social and historical. As we also saw, it is precisely on this basis that Pippin assigns to Hegel a social theory of action that conveys what he designates as a "retrospective" view on intention, and which, he claims, is ultimately grounded in the thesis of the speculative unity of interiority and exteriority.

In the second section of this article, I undertook to demonstrate that some aspects of Hegel's theory of action, which Pippin does not hesitate to qualify as unusual, paradoxical and even counterintuitive, actually find their model in Hegel's interpretation of the ancient Greek tragic understanding of human action. Of course, Pippin is very far from ignoring the importance of the tragic view for Hegel and he indeed often refers to it in his own account

of Hegel's philosophy of action. However, had he drawn the full consequences of the role that tragedy does effectively play in Hegel's philosophy of action, Pippin's account would not only come to a more thorough and even clearer understanding of the specifics of Hegel's view as opposed to the dominant modern causal (and voluntarist) view, but also of some key elements of Hegel's ethical and political philosophy as such. In this respect, I hope that this article has contributed to such understanding.

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<sup>i</sup> To be sure, the interest in Hegel's "practical philosophy" or Hegel's "ethical and political philosophy" has been and still continues to be fueled by authors belonging to the European or Continental tradition. However, in recent decades, several authors and commentators undertook to define the terms of a dialogue between Hegel's practical philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy of action. In the view of these authors and commentators, Hegel's practical philosophy anticipated some of the key issues which are at the center of current debates in the philosophy of action. Accordingly, these authors

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believe that Hegel's practical philosophy can contribute toward clarifying these issues as well as to propose viable solutions to problems which have seemed intractable within the framework of these debates. Among the publications linked to this dialogue, see C. Taylor, "Hegel and the Philosophy of Action", in *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (1983), pp. 1-18; A. Speight *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* (2001) D. Knowles, *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right* (2002) M. Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action* (2004); A. Laitinen, "Hegel on Intersubjective and Retrospective Determination of Intention", in *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* (2004), pp. 54-72; J. McDowell, "Towards a Reading of Hegel on Action in the "Reason" Chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*", in *Having the World in View. Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (2009), pp. 166-184; R. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (2008); A. Laitinen and C. Sandis (eds.), *Hegel on Action* (2010); C. Yeomans, "Hegel and Analytic Philosophy of Action", in *Owl of Minerva* (2010-2011), pp. 41-62; C. Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (2012); H. Ikäheimo and A. Laitinen (eds.), *Recognition and Social Ontology* (2011).

<sup>ii</sup> C. Taylor, « Hegel and the Philosophy of Action », in *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (1983).

<sup>iii</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 3. As Christophe Yeomans rightly points out, the debates in contemporary analytic philosophy of action revolve around two main views, which are, on the one side, the "causal" view, as defined by Donald Davidson, and the view according to which the connection between intention and action ought to be understood in "interpretive" terms, on the other. This latter view was defined by G. E. M. Anscombe. See C. Yeomans, "Hegel and Analytic Philosophy", in *Owl of Minerva*, p. 42 (1-2), 2010-2011.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>v</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>vi</sup> R. B. Pippin, « The Freedom of the Will: Social Dimensions », In *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (2008), pp. 147-178.

<sup>vii</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1991), § 117, p. 144.

<sup>viii</sup> R. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (2008), p. 151.

<sup>ix</sup> This is how Hegel phrases this thesis: "What the subject is, is the series of its actions. If these are a series of worthless productions, then the subjectivity of volition is likewise worthless; and conversely, if the series of the individual's deeds are of a substantial nature, then so also is his inner will." G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1991), § 124, p. 151.

<sup>x</sup> D. Knowles, "Hegel on Actions, Reasons and Causes", in A. Laitinen and C. Sandis (eds), *Hegel on Action*, (2010), pp. 42-58.

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<sup>xi</sup> Christopher Yeomans argues that the connections between intention and action, cause and effect, internality and externality, means and ends ought to be understood in teleological terms. His arguments certainly rest on Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, but also on the section of the *Science of Logic* devoted to the "doctrine of the Notion" in which Hegel examines the notion of teleology and distinguishes it from the one of mechanism and chemism. In Yeomans' view, this section of Hegel's *Science of Logic* contains precious insights which shed new light on Hegel's view of the relation of intention to action. See C. Yeomans, *Freedom and Action. Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (2012), pp. 183-257.

<sup>xii</sup> In the course of his article, Knowles specifies that, while his objections are explicitly targeted towards Taylor's interpretation, they are also meant to rebut Pippin's.

<sup>xiii</sup> In the second section of *Hegel's Concept of Action*, Michael Quante examines the "right of intention" and argues that it rather includes the causal understanding of the relationship between intention and action. See M. Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action* (2004), pp. 105-173.

<sup>xiv</sup> D. Knowles, "Hegel, on Actions, Reasons and Causes", in A. Laitinen and C. Sandis (eds), *Hegel on Action*, (2010), p. 51. On this issue, see once again the second section of *Hegel's Concept of Action* in which Michael Quante closely examines the distinction made by Hegel in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* between end or goal (*Vorsatz*) and intention (*Absicht*). M. Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action* (2004), pp. 123-156.

<sup>xv</sup> D. Knowles, "Hegel, on Actions, Reasons and Causes", in A. Laitinen and C. Sandis (eds), *Hegel on Action*, (2010), p. 53.

<sup>xvi</sup> Both Michael Quante and Christopher Yeomans advocate such a view. See M. Quante, *Hegel's Concept of Action* (2004); C. Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection. Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (2012).

<sup>xvii</sup> A. Laitinen, "Hegel on Intersubjective and Retrospective Determination of Intention," in *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, no. 49/50, 2004, pp. 57-8.

<sup>xviii</sup> In chapter six of *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, Robert Pippin stresses that it is precisely on these social and collective dimensions of action that he disagrees with Michael Quante. Unlike Quante, he believes that Hegel's theory of action cannot be assessed on the sole basis of the "Morality" (*Moralität*) Chapter in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. The following chapter, "Ethical life" (*Sittlichkeit*) must also be taken into account. See R. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (2008), pp. 168-169.

<sup>xix</sup> On this issue, Hegel agrees with the young Schelling who also wrote on tragedy in the context of an essay devoted to what he then believed was the key



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philosophical conflict or “antinomy” of his time. In his view, tragic art also irremediably belongs to a by gone past. This is how Schelling puts this point in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795): “you are right, one thing remains, to know that there is an objective power which threatens our freedom with annihilation, and with this firm and certain conviction in our heart, to fight against it exerting our whole freedom, and thus to go down. You are doubly right, my friend, because this possibility must be preserved for art even *after having vanished in the light of reason*; it must be preserved for the highest in art” (emphasis mine). F. W. J. Schelling, “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism”, in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge, Four essays (1794-1796)* (1980), p. 192.

<sup>xx</sup> One might want to clarify this complex issue as the following: on the one hand, Hegel, like Schelling before him and Nietzsche after him, holds that there is a historical, cultural and philosophical gap between antiquity and modernity, between ancient tragic fate and modern autonomy and freedom, or, as Nietzsche puts it in the *Birth of Tragedy*, between tragedy and Socratism. However, on the other hand, unlike Nietzsche, Hegel does not argue for a revival of tragedy *per se*, but he rather undertakes to imagine the terms of a synthesis, a conciliation between some ethical and political elements that have been expressed in ancient tragedies and the modern conception of agency grounded in subjectivity, autonomy and freedom. As a whole, Hegel’s philosophy is often described as an ambitious attempt to “synthesize” or to “reconcile” ancient “substantiality” with modern subjectivity and individuality. If this is correct, we may then say that Hegel’s interpretation of ancient tragedy is part of this attempt. For a thorough analysis of this issue, see my work, *Hegel and Greek Tragedy* (2013). See also, D. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks. Tragedy and Ethical Life* (2001), pp. 89-121.

<sup>xxi</sup> In *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, explicit references to tragedy in general and to Greek tragedy in particular are few and far between. However, implicit references are numerous, namely, when Hegel deals with the ancient (and tragic) view of guilt understood as « guilt of innocence » (*Die Schuld der Unschuld*). For a detailed analysis of this notion, see my *Hegel and Greek Tragedy* (2013), pp. 42-73. See also J. M. Bernstein, “Conscience and Transgression: The Exemplarity of Tragic Action”, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: a Reappraisal* (1997), pp. 79-97.

<sup>xxii</sup> I by no means have the intention here to oppose Hegel’s early writings to his later works. On the set of issues I am concerned with Hegel’s trajectory is not marked by ruptures or discontinuity but rather continuity and deepening. Nevertheless, there are, I believe, good reasons to turn towards this early essay on Christianity in order to appreciate the ethical (and political) motives driving Hegel’s understanding of tragedy. Indeed, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as

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well as in his later works, Hegel deals with tragedy within the larger context of an analysis of the decline and fall of the ancient Greek *polis*. By contrast, in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*, Hegel does not first and foremost consider tragedy as an art form belonging to a bygone past, but he rather refers to tragedy with respect to its ethical and political import. In other words, in his essay on Christianity, Hegel does not consider tragedy as expressing a world belonging to an historical past, but rather as a reflection of “actual” ethical and political content. Considering this, one might say that this content appears more “immediate” and is more directly thematized in this earlier essay than in his later works.

<sup>xxiii</sup> This discussion essentially takes place in the sections ii and iii of *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* (1949), pp. 205-53.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>xxv</sup> In the course of the discussion, Hegel, of course, also examines the Christian conception of justice, which, in his view, is grounded in the notion of love (*Agape*) and which, he believes, also escapes these difficulties. However, in the section v, entitled *The Fate of Jesus and His Church*, he outlines what he thinks were the limits, the dilemmas and ultimately the aporias of the Christian understanding of justice.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Op. cit.*, 228.

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>xxviii</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), 284. In both *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel refers to the famous verses in which Antigone affirms that she will know whether she was mistaken if she suffers from her deed. In other words, Antigone does not consider her guilt in light of the law she has violated, but rather with regard to her suffering which may follow her deed. Here are, in R. Fagles’ translation, the verses in which Antigone makes her claim: “Very well: if this is the pleasure of the gods, once I suffer I will know that I’m wrong. But if these men are wrong, let them suffer nothing worse than they mete out to me — these masters of injustice!”, Sophocles, *Antigone*, In Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays. Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (1984), p. 106.

<sup>xxix</sup> In *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*, Allen Speight expounds a detailed analysis in which he argues that Antigone’s declaration can be understood as expressing a “retrospective” view of the relationship between intention and action. A. Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* (2001), pp. 42-67.

<sup>xxx</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1975), 1208-10. For a detailed analysis, see my work, *Hegel and Greek Tragedy* (2013), pp. 139-175.

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<sup>xxx</sup> I do not intend to suggest here that Hegel's philosophy of action is entirely modeled on the tragic view of action. However, I want to suggest that it is this model of causality specific to the tragic view of action which, in his later works, he will come to reformulate in terms commensurate with his "speculative" and "dialectical" philosophy as a whole, and which will play a key role in his theory of action in particular.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Here, I am broadly following the terms of J. M. Bernstein's suggestion on this issue. See J. M. Bernstein, "Consciousness and Transgression. The Exemplarity of Tragic Action", in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reappraisal* (1993), pp. 79-97.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Antigone's guilt differs from Oedipus' guilt, and this difference may be understood as overlapping the distinction Hegel establishes in paragraph §117 in *Elements of Philosophy of Right* between *Tat* (deed) and *Handlung* (action). Oedipus — which is explicitly referred to in this paragraph — assumes full responsibility of his deed (*Tat*) even though he had not full knowledge of the circumstances. Antigone's guilt, by contrast, is the guilt of someone who has knowingly and consciously acted (*Handlung*).

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Once again, I am following a suggestion made by J. M. Bernstein, « Consciousness and Transgression. The Exemplarity of Tragic Action, » in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A reappraisal* (1993), p. 80.

<sup>xxxv</sup> This is how he puts this point in a famous passage of *The Philosophy of History*: « the consciousness of freedom arose among the Greeks... but they...knew only that some were free — not man as such... The Greeks therefore had slaves; and their whole life and their splendid liberty was implicated with the institutions of slavery... The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness, that man, as man, is free." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (1991), p. 18.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> In his essay on *Natural Law* (1802-03) Hegel explicitly opposes the conception of freedom as "free will" or "free choice" which he assigns to Kant, Fichte and, more generally, to those who defend the social contract theory. G. W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law* (1975), pp. 89-90.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1991), § 23, p. 55.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> R. Pippin, "Hegel's Practical Philosophy: the Realization of Freedom", in K. Ameriks (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (2000), pp. 180-199.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Pippin extensively deals with this issue in Chapter 7 of *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical life*.