KIERKEGAARD AND THE TRAGIC

AESTHETIC ENTRIES INTO THE CONCEPTS OF MODERNITY, SELF, AND FREEDOM
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Kierkegaard and the Tragic
Aesthetic Entries into the Concepts of Modernity, Self, and Freedom

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Abbreviations
The collected works of Kierkegaard:
SKS - Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter, Gads Forlag, 1997-2013

The collected works of Lessing:

Specific works by Kierkegaard:
AUE – Afsluttende Uvidenskabeligt Efterskrift
BA - Begrebet Angst
EE - Enten-Eller
G - Gjentagelsen
KG – Kjærlighedens Gjerninger
SD – Sygdommen til Døden
SLV – Stadier Paa Livets Vej

Other works:
Prologue

"hvormeget end Verden har forandret sig, saa er dog Forestillingen om det Tragiske endnu væsentlig uforandret, ligesom det, at gæde, endnu bestandigt er Mennesket lige naturligt." SKS 2, 139

Kierkegaard’s essay on the ancient tragic as reflected in the modern tragic appears in the first part of EE. There, the tragic is presented as a constant much like the natural occurrence of tears. By addressing the tragic as a relatable phenomenon rather than an abstract category or a concrete object, the Aesthete invites the debate into a new field of discourse. From this perspective, the tragic becomes both universal and uniquely individual. Universal in the sense that tears and suffering are inescapable aspects of existence. Uniquely individual in the sense that each person must face their own trials and that these particular trials for each constitute the foundation for comprehending the tears of the other. The tragic is invariably connected to suffering, and yet the central theme of the essay is the question of freedom. The aim of the present project is also to arrive at a tragic concept of freedom. Rather than distinguishing between the spheres of aesthetics, ethics, and the religious, this project is aimed at consolidating the aesthetical objections against speculative philosophy with the ethical claim on the individual and the call to love. This approach to Kierkegaard and the tragic is developed through the connection with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, whose works on and of tragedy were familiar to Kierkegaard.2

The connections between the Aesthete’s essay on the tragic and Kierkegaard’s concept of freedom have already been addressed from several angles. In Tanken i Billedet, Isak Winkel Holm considers the Aesthete’s essay on the tragic in relation to the juridical question of accountability. The tragic is another means for portraying the human condition as somewhere between freedom as rational agency and necessity as a boundness by exterior causes. In Kierkegaard’s Psykologi, Kresten Nordentoft connects the essay on the tragic with the notions of guilt, anxiety, and despair from BA and SD. Freedom is considered in relation to guilt as an aspect of Kierkegaard’s complex anthropology and Nordentoft makes use of the Aesthete’s essay on the tragic to show the connection between the uniquely personal aspect of Kierkegaard’s own life with the general reflections over the human

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1 “no matter how much the world has changed, the idea of the tragic is still essentially unchanged, just as weeping still continues to be equally natural to humankind.” KW EO1, 139
2 Kierkegaard makes references to the aesthetic writings in Lessing’s Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel, Laokoon and Hamburgische Dramaturgie, and to Lessing’s own dramatic productions in Minna von Barnheim and Emilia Galotti.
condition. There are many more relevant readings of the Aesthete and the connection between freedom and the tragic, but the connection between Lessing and Kierkegaard’s use of aesthetics has not been explored to a great extent. The most common connection is made with Hegel, as is also noted by Leonardo Lisi in the article, *History, Tragedy and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or.*³ Lisi explores another approach through Kant and Schelling and underlines the novelty of Kierkegaard’s approach to history and philosophy. In *Kierkegaard and the Quest for the Unambiguous Life*, George Pattison arrives at a similar conclusion of Kierkegaard’s aesthetics as distinctively different from the Hegelian. Pattison writes that Kierkegaard alters the rules of the game compared to Hegel. I hope to point towards a similar observation, and how this difference can be considered through the connection with Lessing.

Kierkegaard’s reading of Lessing in PS and AUE contains a reflection over style and method that is also relevant to Kierkegaard’s aesthetical writings in EE and G. This angle ties together the critique of a speculative philosophy with the aesthetic possibilities of an alternative approach. The possibilities of an aesthetic engagement with the central theme of freedom is developed in dialogue with Arne Grøn’s work on negativity as connected to imagination and subjectivity. In AUE, Johannes Climacus claims that he is a devil of a philosopher called to shape a new direction in philosophy. He writes this with a note of irony as he is clearly indebted to his intellectual forerunners, but there is also an earnest note of reflection on his method as different. This difference in form is also what Lisi aims at in his consideration of the Aesthete’s essay on the tragic.⁴ Through the connection with Lessing and the departure in aesthetics, this project attempts to draw out one of the novel aspects of how the experience and expression of suffering plays into Kierkegaard’s philosophy.

This is the tragic aspect of Kierkegaard’s philosophy and this aspect in turn also reflects back on the research on tragedy and the tragic. George Steiner in his acclaimed, *The Death of Tragedy*, operates within a Hegelian

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³ Leonardo F. Lisi, ‘Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or’, *Konturen*, 7.0 (2015), 102–31 <https://doi.org/10.5399/uo/konturen.7.0.3673>. “The misunderstandings largely derive from the tendency in the scholarly literature to view the text in light of Hegel’s more famous theory of tragedy, something likely due to the fact that Kierkegaard, too, draws on Sophocles’ *Antigone* for his analysis. This approach, however, has obscured the originality of Kierkegaard’s contribution, which centers on two basic claims of far-reaching consequences for the theory of the genre and for philosophy more generally.”

⁴ Lisi, ‘Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or’. “Kierkegaard’s rejection of Schelling’s argument on this point goes to the heart of the idealist project and ultimately questions what the form of philosophy should be.”
perception of historical progress pointing towards the dissolution of the external claims on the individual in modernity. He claims that tragedy has died because the modern individual no longer accepts the external conditions of fate or destiny, and that the fundamental aspect of helplessness and hopelessness doesn’t fit with the modern perception of the self as a rational agent. Steiner also considers Kierkegaard and his use of the Antigone figure in his book, *Antigones*. Steiner’s approach to the Aesthete’s reimagined Antigone found in EE confirms Hegel’s cumulative conception of historicity in the distinction between antiquity and modernity. This approach overlooks the notion of the truly tragic and the phenomenological approach of the imaginary engagement. In a more recent article, Steiner confirms his suspicions from fifty years ago when *The Death of Tragedy* was first published: that the tragic represents an epitome of hopelessness and this still doesn’t fit with modernity. In her introduction to the collection of essays on tragedy in *Rethinking Tragedy*, Rita Felski presents the view of Terry Eagleton, that only in modernity does the tragic really become meaningful, because only in modernity can we properly claim that the individual takes part in the tragic and is held accountable. In either perception, there lies a reflection over the relation between tragedy and modernity, as either incompatible or inseparable. In *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, Terry Eagleton describes the research on tragedy and the tragic to be a theory in ruins. This image represents the difficulty of arriving at a categorical definition of the tragic. And yet, there seems to be two consistent claims within the research on the tragic. That the tragic is inseparably tied to suffering, and that the conditions for the tragic changes in modernity. I will argue that Kierkegaard’s position on the tragic to some extent counters both these notions. The first assumption on the tragic as solely focused on suffering is also challenged in the short essay by Simone Weil, *The Iliad – Or the Poem of Force*. Going against the portrayal of the epic solely as an expression of force, Weil underlines the connectivity between friend and foe on the shared condition of suffering. This leads her to trace a line going from Homeric epic, over Attic tragedy and into the Gospels. This line is

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7 Rita Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy* (JHU Press, 2008). P.9. “modernity, rather than destroying tragedy, may be the precondition for universalizing tragic potential. Democracy, after all, does not guarantee happiness, but promises at best the pursuit of happiness, a pursuit that can all too easily result in disastrous judgments, Faustian over-reaching, or the agony of being torn apart by conflicting desires or values. As Eagleton points out, only with freedom does the tragic gulf between desire and realization become possible.”
considered as the particular Greek genius, that gave insight into the basic condition of suffering.

“The Gospels are the last marvelous expression of the Greek genius, as the Iliad is the first: here the Greek spirit reveals itself not only in the injunction given mankind to seek above all other goods, "the kingdom and justice of our Heavenly Father," but also in the fact that human suffering is laid bare, and we see it in a being who is at once divine and human.”

I will argue, that Kierkegaard traces a similar line in the aesthetic engagement with the tears of the tragic that also point towards the ethical claim on the individual and towards the religious call to love. This endpoint of the tragic as also overcoming suffering connects with the final aim of presenting the possibility of a tragic freedom. The second claim on the tragic is tied to the epochal distinctions between antiquity and modernity. Since the early aesthetics from the 18th century, this fascination with antiquity and the contrast to modernity has been a central point. The terminology has developed in extension of the Aristotelian categories, and with a slight reference to ‘hiin første’, the Aesthete also takes this origin into account, though he proceeds quickly to address the other issue that is more present for his own essay: the truly tragic. By focusing on the tragic as a constant, the Aesthete invites his listeners to question the concept of modernity. Beyond these claims, the tragic for Kierkegaard also represents the possibility of an aesthetical challenge to the authority of facticity. When summarizing recent research on tragedy, Rita Felski describes tragedy at the center of the recurring clash between passion and reason:

“Even as Greek tragedy diagnoses the dangers of intellectual hubris, single angles of vision, and attempts at theoretical mastery, even as it faces up to the waywardness of language and depicts a world riven by agonistic politics and Dionysian turbulence, it also underscores the inescapability of epistemological reflection and the ethical urgency of claims to justice.”

The epistemological reflection is also at the center of Kierkegaard’s objection to the Hegelian climate of his times. Therein lies part of the attraction of considering the tragic in relation to Lessing and Kierkegaard. For both Lessing and Kierkegaard, aesthetics is not just an object of intellectual interest. It is an epistemological challenge to the self-sufficiency of a theoretical mapping out of existence. Lessing produced his writings on and of tragedy in an objection against the intellectual optimism of the Enlightenment. Kierkegaard in opposition to the systematic nitpickery of a late stage Idealism. The qualitative difference in Lessing and Kierkegaard is that they don’t just write about aesthetics so much as they write aesthetically. In this approach, Lessing is distinct from Baumgarten and Winkelmann, just

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as Kierkegaard is different from Hegel and Schelling. The difference can be seen in light of the imaginative engagement with narrative and imagery opposed to the intellectual explanation. Lessing and Kierkegaard place themselves within the fiction and redevelop the fiction in order to arrive at a more nuanced reflection.

This objection against objectivity contained in their aesthetics is one reason for looking through the lens of the tragic. The other is mainly connected to Kierkegaard as he also adopts the tragic as the outset for his pseudonymous writings and as the beginning of his existential philosophy. The new direction in philosophy departs from the isolated suffering of the individual. The sense of isolation, of powerlessness, uncertainty and unbelonging is at the heart of the tragic. As such, the focus on the tragic is aimed at the outset for Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy. This outset in the Aesthete’s musings over the tragic underlines the confluence of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious within the tragic.10 The intention in this project is to show how the aesthetic engagement with the tragic already represents a vector pointing towards the ethical claim on the individual and the religious call to love.

When the Aesthete engages with Antigone in the essay on the tragic in EE, he quotes Sophocles’ lines, where Antigone cries out in despair after she has been buried alive. She voices the universal experience of unbelonging as she is caught between life and death, neither at home among the living nor among the dead. This sense of the insurmountable gap between the self and the other, the inner and the outer is described in the foreword to the first part of EE and at the very outset for Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship. Here, Victor Eremita explains how he came to possess the papers that he had put into order and published. He gives the account of how he once came across an old writing desk at a pawn shop and how he was drawn towards it.11 He bought it at a high price and later, in a fit of passion because it would

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10 Lisi, ‘Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or’. The distinction between the various approaches to the tragic in Kierkegaard’s works is noted by Lisi who underlines the difference: “This essay is the most exhaustive and detailed discussion of tragedy and the tragic in Kierkegaard’s corpus, but it does not represent the full scope of his thinking on the topic. As I have argued elsewhere (“Tragedy”), Kierkegaard in fact provides three different understandings of the tragic, one for each of the stages of existence he repeatedly returns to in his authorship: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. “The Tragic in Ancient Drama” articulates most fully the theory of tragedy proper to the aesthetic, while the tragedy of the ethical is presented most extensively in Fear and Trembling, and that of the religious in Stages on Life’s Way.”

11 ”Det er nu omkring 7 Aar siden, at jeg hos en Marchandiser her i Byen bemærkede en Secretair, der strax første Gang jeg saae den tildrog sig min Opmærksomhed. Den var ikke af moderne Arbeide, temmelig brugt, og dog fængslede den mig. At forklare
not open, he struck it with an axe. This resulted in a secret compartment opening up and revealing the papers that would constitute the two parts of EE.\textsuperscript{12} There is a connecting point in secrecy that points towards the Antigone figure who is presented later in EE, and this secrecy recurs throughout the authorship.\textsuperscript{13} The interest in the tragic connection with secrecy is not directed at the content of the secret so much as it conceives of secrecy as an impossibility of direct communication between the self and the other and sometimes even within the self. Secrecy is contained in the ‘Secretair’ that contains the hidden papers, and Kierkegaard also returns to this image of the writing desk in his first and last explanation at the end of AUE, when he states that he is both the ‘Secretair’ and the author of the authors: ”Thi mit Forhold er Eenheden af at være Secretairen og ironisk nok, dialektisk redupliceret Forfatter af Forfatteren eller Forfatterne.” SKS 7, 571\textsuperscript{14} The secrets that the writing desk concealed were only revealed through a

Grunden til dette Indtryk, er mig en Umulighed, men de Fletse have vel i deres Liv erfaret noget Lignende.” SKS 2, 12

“"It is now about seven years since I spotted in a secondhand shop here in the city a writing desk that immediately attracted my attention. It was not a modern piece of work, had been used considerably, and yet it captivated me. It is impossible for me to explain the basis of this impression, but most people presumably have had a similar experience during their lives.” KW EO1, 4


“Whether in my rage I aimed wrong or the drawer was just as stubborn as I, the result was not what was intended. The drawer was shut, and the drawer stayed shut. But something else happened. Whether my blow struck precisely this spot or the vibration through the entire structure of the desk was the occasion, I do not know, but this I do know—a secret door that I had never noticed before sprung open. This door closed off a compartment that I obviously had not discovered. Here, to my great amazement, I found a mass of papers, the papers that constitute the contents of the present publication.” KW EO1, 6

\textsuperscript{13} The recurring theme of the grand secret is also considered in George Pattison, \textit{Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism: Selected Essays}, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).P.156. Pattison also regard’s the secret pertaining to more than something unsaid in SLV: “In a sense, it seems, the ‘secret’ that dominates and continually undermines his life is a secret also to him.”

\textsuperscript{14} “My role is the joint role of being the secretary and, quite ironically, the dialectically reduplicated author of the author or the authors” KW CUP, 627
passionate approach of an axe. Kierkegaard’s first approach comes close to Nietzsche’s philosophizing with a hammer, though perhaps less blunt. In this, he might be said to be a devil of a philosopher and called to shape a new direction in philosophy. The tragic approach is an attempt to pursue the distinctive quality of the aesthetic entry into philosophy.

The project is structured in five acts preceded by a prelude. The first two acts develop this method, and in the third, fourth, and fifth act, I attempt to employ the method of including the imaginary engagement with fictional characters into the philosophical argument pointing towards a refined perception of the self and of freedom. In the prelude, we consider the research specifically related to the essay on the tragic from EE, and we develop some of the themes that reverberate throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship and this project. The first act is directed at establishing the scope of the conflict that the argument then attempts to resolve. This conflict is centered on the concept of human freedom. The first act aims at depicting the difficulty of debating this concept in a direct manner and points towards the need for an alternative approach. It is this alternative approach that we call the aesthetic entries.

There is no direct reference to Lessing in the essay on the tragic, but as shall be argued in the first act, there is good reason to read the Aesthete’s development of the tragic in antiquity and modernity in connection with Lessing’s Laokoon. In both the essay on the tragic and Laokoon, we find objections against a simplified concept of freedom. This is expressed in the ironical image of the modern kingdom of gods, through which the modern ideal of individual freedom is challenged as an abstract concept that breaks upon the complexity of concrete existence.

In the second act, we consider the particular approach to and through the tragic in Lessing and Kierkegaard. This is seen in contrast to a more objectifying sense of the tragic and tragedy as objects of research, where our focus is more on possibilities of imaginatively engaging with the tragic. This possibility is pursued in dialogue with Arne Grøn’s work on negativity. It opens up towards both a critique of a speculative philosophy but also a constructive aspect of a philosophy that departs from the concrete experience of suffering. Following these preliminary considerations, we will make an attempt at employing the reflections on the tragic when considering the concepts of modernity, self, and freedom. Attached to each of these terms is a tragic character that will take us further into the borderland between abstract ideas, imagination, and concrete existence.

Our guide into the gap between antiquity and modernity is Antigone, as she is also the guide who leads Kierkegaard through his terminological difficulties when describing the ancient tragic as reflected in the modern. Her
role is, on the one hand, to exemplify the distinction between the ancient and the modern in her two representations in the Sophoclean tragedy bearing her name and in Kierkegaard’s reimagined version in the essay on the tragic. On the other hand, she also represents the truly tragic that transcends the distinguishing traits of the various forms and expressions of the tragic and points towards the tragic condition as something universally human.

Philoctetes will be our guide when debating the origin of the self and the state of the self in modernity. He appears in the original dress of the tragedy by Sophocles’ but his suffering and lamentation also echo in the poetics of G. Where the Antigone figure was reflected in a visual sense in the modern rewriting, the Philoctetes figure reverberates in an audial sense. The exclamations of isolated suffering find their way into Kierkegaard’s notebooks where he wonders why the ancient tragedy hardly seems ancient. In Sophocles’ representation, Philoctetes seems to lose his mind and former identity in his isolation. There is a loss of self in the loss of company. Sophocles’ Philoctetes is seen in contrast to a variety of modern reimagined narratives concerning the individual in isolation. In these narratives, the self is depicted as self-contained and self-sufficient – a solid and centered sort of self. Through the contrast between the depictions of the self in its isolation, we consider Lessing’s and Kierkegaard’s aesthetic objections to the underlying notion of the self in their times. For Kierkegaard, the self becomes a more porous concept, and it is seen as only really existing in the shadows that it projects onto others.

Lessing’s tragic heroine, Emilia Galotti is our guide when we finally arrive at the concept of freedom. Her fate was to become the object of desire for a powerful prince and to suffer from the consequences – and yet we take her as an example of freedom. Emilia’s narrative is composed by Lessing and it is structured on the ancient roman tale of Virginia and Appius, and so she also stands with one foot in antiquity and one in modernity. The question of freedom is taken up in the imbalance of the power relation between Emilia and the prince. Through their developing characters, the tragedy questions the relation between freedom and force. Emilia resists temptation and seduction at the cost of her life, but in this sacrifice, she maintains her subjectivity and a level of freedom in opposition to the exterior forces that would sweep her away as an object of desire.

The tragic freedom unsatisfyingly remains uncertain, but it points towards an ethics based on empathy and the ability to see oneself through the eyes of another. This freedom is on one hand a release from the confines of the isolated self. On the other hand, it takes the shape of responsibility and as such, freedom also represents a burden. In this way the aesthetic objection to

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15 See SKS Not10:5-7
a simple understanding of freedom as force also points towards the ethical claim on the individual and the religious call to love. The tragic contains the prophetic ‘thou’ of Nathan’s admonition of David, and it contains the call towards the individual from the gospel. The Aesthete’s engagement with the tragic constitutes this possibility for iterating the complexity of existence without an explicit theological categorization. Departing from the tears of the tragic rather than religious dogma or an axiomatic philosophy, Kierkegaard invites each individual to reflect over these universal questions of self and freedom.
Prelude: Kierkegaard and the Essay on the Tragic

The prelude is devoted to the main text by Kierkegaard when considering the tragic in the essay from EE: *Det antike Tragiskes Reflex i det moderne Tragiske*. The introduction is used to convey some of the research on this specific text and some of the dimensions that it opens up towards within Kierkegaard’s wider authorship. The intention is to draw out the implications of the essay on the tragic in order to show how the voice of the Aesthete also echoes within the other voices of Kierkegaard’s works and how the tragic relates to the concepts that are more central in the later part of the authorship. It stands as a prelude as it leads us towards the more particular analysis of the tragic. In dramatic terms, we could say that we are introducing the dramatis personae before the unfolding of the conflict, or that this is an overture that touches upon the themes that will later be developed in more detail. Within the prelude, the themes are considered in dialogue with texts by Kresten Nordentoft, Isak Winkel Holm, and George Pattison. Common for the included readings of the essay on the tragic is an awareness of the connection with and the departure from Hegel’s speculative take on aesthetics and the tragic. The Aesthete explicitly positions himself in relation to Hegel. Through this introduction, we come to an understanding of the Aesthete's perception of the ancient heroine Antigone and her relevance for a modern audience. In the prelude, we consider this connection with Hegel both also what distinguishes Kierkegaard’s take on the tragic from the Hegelian position. In the first act and the following development, this distinction will then be described through the less explored connection with Lessing and his engagement with tragedy.

We will consider the distinction between the ancient and the modern but focus mainly on the transcending aspect of the truly tragic. Via the consideration of the tragic, the Aesthete arrives at a universal iteration of existence that transcends the epochal distinctions of antiquity and modernity. Though he does not level all the characteristics of the various ages, he allows for an uncertainty as to the inner workings of the self in both antiquity and modernity. There is simply a limit to the positive description of the self as it is never clearly or fully perceived from within or without. In line with this caution, the Aesthete is hesitant to follow Hegel into his qualifications of the modern self as different from the ancient. In opposition to Hegel’s speculative approach, the Aesthete departs from uncertainty. This aesthetic ambiguity is central to the various readings of the essay on the tragic and on
this intentionally unstable foundation, we can begin to construct our rickety
tower of tragic knowledge.

Compositionally, the essay on the tragic lies between, on one side, the
suffering felt in Diapsalmata and the suffering caused in the essay on the
immediate stages of the erotic. Both reveal a sharp intellect, but there is
distinction between intellect as a mere thought process, and reflection that
carries the visual connotation of the mirror. Reflection is not possible in
isolation as a purely internalized process. Reflection entails a confrontation
with something or someone outside of the self. This is where the tragic comes
into play, and this could also explain the central position of the term
reflection within the title of the essay. Through the tragic, the suffering self
sees itself reflected in the other. This element of reflection also allows the
self to see itself from the outside, and so the self is called to responsibility.
In this tragic call to responsibility lies the possibility of self-determination.

On the other side of the tragic, if we look at the composition of the first
part of EE, suffering is no longer immediate. The relative innocence of the
immediate stages of the erotic is no longer possible after the tragic reflection
of the self in the other. The movement from immediacy towards reflection is
contained in the tragic, and the end point of this realization is found in the
Seducer. He, who knowingly seduces and deceives Cordelia and understands
the destructive implications. This postulate on the tragic within EE of course
demands a qualification. The prelude only stands as a sketch of the academic
scenery surrounding the essay on the tragic, and the reader will have to allow
for the argument to unfold in its own time. For now, we must attempt to draw
together some of the strands of the research on the Aesthete and his function
within the works of Kierkegaard. This in turn should also serve at least to
justify the tragic as an entry into Kierkegaard’s perception of self and
freedom.

A Comment on Style – Towards a Fragmentary Striving
Throughout the thesis, we pursue the idea that the tragic plays a crucial part
within Kierkegaard’s existential outset for philosophy. The cornerstone of
this argument lies within the brief but dense essay on the tragic attributed to
the Aesthete. The themes and terminology developed in this text reverberate
throughout Kierkegaard’s works, and the essay can be considered a
collection of questions that the later Kierkegaard returns to and attempts to
answer from his various positions and alter-egos.\textsuperscript{16} As always, Kierkegaard
is careful here not to betray a solid position and one remark on his style

\textsuperscript{16} We have the recurring themes of freedom and determinism, of the self in relation to the
other, family and history, of anxiety, of despair, and the allusions to the biographical
secrets of Kierkegaard’s life, which riddle the authorship.
within the essay seems illustrative of this approach. His style has made an attempt to appear what it is not – revolutionary.\(^\text{17}\) This note on style indicates that the Aesthete’s philosophy in fact is not as radically different as it might seem. In the essay, there is a tone both provocative but also consolidating the Aesthete with Kierkegaard’s other voices that followed in the years after the publication of EE.

At a first glance, the impression of the essay is that of deceptive ease as it almost playfully develops long lists of categories within the tragic, while also ironically pulling them apart. The Aesthete is openly bringing German idealism into play as he argues through and against the concepts taken from Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics. The connection between the two is extensively developed by Isak Winkel Holm in *Tanken i Billedet*. There, the major point of distinction is that the Aesthete’s objection attempts to consolidate the conflicting aspects of freedom and determination through his point of departure in the tragic.\(^\text{18}\) Through the tragic, the aesthete points towards the limitations of the Hegelian approach and attempts to go further in his own development of a consequential counter position, which consolidates the hard distinctions. Departing from the aesthetical, the Aesthete doesn’t so much argue against Hegel as he brings the discussion into another realm of argument.\(^\text{19}\) This would be the seeming intention of the alternative style, but as stated in his note on the style, the Aesthete is not as revolutionary as he might appear. What then is the purpose of the Aesthetes objection against Hegel depiction of the ancient tragic?

The scope and the aim of the essay on the tragic is alluded to in its two subtitles. It is firstly described as an attempt in the fragmentary striving\(^\text{20}\). In

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\(^\text{17}\) “... har gjort et Forsøg paa, tilsyneladende at være, hvad den ikke er – revolutionair.” SKS 2, 151

“... attempts to appear what it is not – revolutionary.” KW, EO, 152


\(^\text{19}\) As also noted in Pattison, G., 2013. *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism: Selected Essays*. OUP Oxford. P. 156. “If Kierkegaard’s essayist has therefore found a ‘solution’ to a Hegelian dilemma, it is only by virtue of having changed the rules of the game.”

\(^\text{20}\) I choose to translate *Stræben* as *striving* rather than *endeavor* to maintain the durative and unfinished aspect of the process. There is a more detailed discussion of this in Lisi, ‘Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or’. 
line with the two preceding texts in EE, *Diapsalmata* and *De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier eller det Musikalsk-Erotiske*, the essay on the tragic represents a step towards a more comprehensive portrayal of the individual, which is in the process of becoming a self. Where *Diapsalmata* is entirely fragmented, aphoristic and poetic in the expression of existential dread, the essay on the erotic moves towards a musicality and rhythm of both expression and content. Following these two stages, the text on the tragic contains a level of both despair and a slight hope of moving beyond the tragic isolation of the self. The tragic bridges the purely poetical expression of suffering and the musicality of the erotic and moves beyond both in an attempt at drawing a more sober silhouette of existence through the tragic character of Antigone. But what exactly is meant by deeming the style of the essay fragmentary and placing it after the poetic and the musical? The Aesthete generously provides the reader with a methodological exposition of the fragmentary striving almost in the exact compositional middle of the essay. Before the explanation, in the first half, the Aesthete addresses the Hegelian terminology on the tragic and in the half following, A is concerned with the tragic figure of Antigone and how she can be redressed to suit a modern audience. The fragmentary striving is described in an open statement directed at the imagined audience of the lecture:

"Da det strider mod vor Forenings Bestrebelse at levere sammenhøngende Arbeider eller større Heelheder, da vor Tendens ikke er at arbeide paa et babylonisk Taarn, som Gud i sin Retfærdighed kan stige ned og ødelægge, da vi i Bevidsthed af, at hiin Forvirring skete med Rette, anerkjende det som det Eiendommelige for al menneskelig Stræben i sin Sandhed, at den er fragmentarisk, at det netop er det, hvorved den adskiller sig fra Naturens uendelige Sammenhæng; at en Individualitets Rigdom netop bestaar i dens Kraft i fragmentarisk Ødselhed, og at det, der er det producerende Individs Nydelse, ogsaa er det recipierende Individs, ikke den besværlige og nøjagtige Udfoersel, eller den langvarige Opfattelse af denne Udfoersel, men Frembringelsen og Nydelsen af den glimtende Flygtighed, der for den Frembringende indholder et Mere end hvad den gjenemførte Udfoersel har, da den er Ideens Apparens, for den recipierende indholder et Mere, da dens Fulguration vækker hans egen Productivitet – da Alt dette, siger jeg, strider mod vor Forenings Tendens, ja, da næsten den forelæste Periode maa ansees for et betenkeligt Attentat paa den Interjections-Stiil, hvori Ideen bryder ud, uden at komme til Gjenembrud, der i vort Samfund er tillagt Officielitet, saa vil jeg, efter at have gjort opmærksom paa, at min Afdærd dog ikke kan kaldes oprørske, da det Baand, der sammenholder denne Periode, er saa løst, at de indeholdte Mellemsætninger stritte aphoristisk og egenraadigt nok frem, blot erindre om, at min Stil har gjort et Forsøg paa, tilsyneladende at være, hvad den ikke er – revolutionair."  

SKS 2, 150-51

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21 “Since it is at variance with the aims of our association to provide coherent works or larger unities, since it is not our intention to labor on a Tower of Babel that God in his righteousness can descend and destroy, since we, in our consciousness that such confusion justly occurred, acknowledge as characteristic of all human endeavor in its truth
This remarkable statement contained in the one long breath of a single sentence, alludes to some of the characteristics of the style and the doubt with which the Aesthete confronts the more stable perceptions of truth. The audience that the Aesthete addresses, is joined with him in disregarding the illusion of coherency. The *Symparanekromenoi* are aware of the human desire for projecting order into phenomena – of making sense of the world as it appears. The society of the dying have moved beyond this conceited ambition of describing the totality and accepted the fragmentariness, which makes it infinitely more difficult and all the more imperative for each individual to conduct their own. There is a connection between the fragmentary style in the Aesthete’s essay and the later developed method of negative philosophy. The negative philosophy will be described in more detail in the second act, and for now the intention is to show how the style and the reflections on the style also connects to Lessing. The connection between Kierkegaard, Schlegel and Novalis in the fragmentary striving is described by Isak Winkel Holm in the article, *Sansen for Fragmenter.* Holm however doesn’t consider the link with Lessing, and this is only natural as Lessing does not expound his method as fragmentary. Still, Winkel Holm refers to a line in *G*, where Constantine Constantius compares his own distaste for hard work with that of Lessing:

“Hvis jeg udforligt vilde forfølge Stemningerne i det unge Menneske, saaledes som jeg lærte dem at kjende, endsige hvis jeg paa Digtervis vilde tage en Mængde uvedkommende Ting med: Dagligstuer og Gangklæder, skjønne Egne, Paarørende og Venner, saa kunde denne Historie blive en alenlang Novelle. Det gider jeg imidlertid ikke. Jeg spiser vel Salat, men jeg spiser altid kun Hjertet, Bladene tænker jeg er for Svinene; jeg foretrækker med Lessing Undfangelsens Vellyst for Fødselens that it is fragmentary, that it is precisely this which distinguishes it from nature's infinite coherence, that an individual's wealth consists specifically in his capacity for fragmentary prodigality and what is the producing individual's enjoyment is the receiving individual's also, not the laborious and careful accomplishment or the tedious interpretation of this accomplishment but the production and the pleasure of the glinting transiency, which for the producer holds much more than the consummated accomplishment, since it is a glimpse of the idea and holds a bonus for the recipient, since its fulguration stimulates his own productivity-since all this, I say, is at variance with our association's inclination, indeed, since the periodic sentence just read must almost be regarded as a serious attack on the ejaculatory style in which the idea breaks forth without achieving a breakthrough, to which officiality is attached in our society-therefore, after having pointed out that my conduct still cannot be called mutinous, inasmuch as the bond that holds this periodic sentence together is so loose that the parenthetical clauses therein strut about aphoristically and willfully enough, I shall merely call to mind that my style has made an attempt to appear to be what it is not: revolutionary.” KW EO, 151-52

22 Isak Winkel Holm, ‘*Sansen for Fragmenter : En Introduktion Til Fragmentets Teori i Romantikken Og Hos Søren Kierkegaard*’, Den Blå Port, 1995.
Besværligheder. Er der Nogen, der har Noget derimod at sige, saa vær saa god, jeg er lige glad."SKS 4, 18

The delights of conception match the enjoyment of the producing and the receiving individual in the description of the fragmentary striving. This link with Lessing in a style that defies the coherent works and larger unities, is more fully developed in AUE. We consider this connection now, only to show how the Aesthete voices his doubt of all-encompassing systems of thought and how he also points towards Climacus. The Aesthete anticipates the later argument against the positive thinkers as deluded, while the negative at least have the certainty of knowing their limitations.

The fragmentary aspect is developed in the interplay between producer and receiver. Against the interjection style that has been officialized in their age, the fragmentary striving of the Symparanekromenoi aims at producing in each receiver the movement of the idea rather than the result. This connects to the previous essay in EE, where the long, musical digression might seem aimless in its outstretched repetitiveness. Through the grasp of lulling the receiver into being less guarded, the point comes across in a very different manner from the interjection style, which would demand the receiver’s attention and agreement. In a similar way, the operas of Mozart touch upon the themes in the overtures and patiently develop each in their own turn before bringing them together. The receiver is slowly prepared for the expression through boredom. Only at the end of this process do the receivers arrive at a responsiveness to the music. This is an important and

23 "If I were to elaborate on the young man's moods as I learned to know them, to say nothing of anecdotally including a host of irrelevant things—living rooms and wearing apparel, lovely localities, relatives and friends—this narrative could become an interminable story. That, however, I do not want. I like to eat lettuce, but I always eat only the heart; in my opinion the leaves are for the pigs. Along with Lessing, I prefer the delights of conception to the discomforts of childbirth. If anyone has anything to say against this, go ahead—it is all the same to me” KW FT, 141

24 "Men naar man ikke har indseet dette med det speculative Øies allesledsnærværende Sikkerhed, saa kan man ikke tale værdeligen eller retteligen om Don Juan, om man end, hvis man havde indseet det, var istand til at tale langt herligere og rigere og fremfor Alt sandere derom, end den, der her vover sig til at føre Ordet – Derimod vil jeg bestandig opspore det Musikalske udaf Ideen, Situationen o. s. v., udlytte det, og naar jeg da har bragt Læseren til at blive i den Grad musikalsk receptiv, at han synes at høre Musikken, skjøndt han Intet hører, da har jeg fuldkommet min Op gave, da forstummer jeg, da siger jeg til Læseren som til mig selv: hør. I venlige Genier, som beskytte al uskyldig Kjærlighed, til Eder befaler jeg mit hele Sind, bevogter I de arbeidende Tanker, at de maae findes Gjenstanden værdige, danner I min Sjæl til et velklingende Instrument, lader I Veltalenhedens milde Luftninger ile hen over den, sender I frugtbare Stemninger Vedervægelse og Velsignelse.” SKS 2, 91-92

“But if one has not discerned this with the ubiquitous certainty of the speculative eye, then one cannot speak worthyly or validly about Don Giovanni, even though, if one has
direct reflection on style versus content – which in turn is also a reflection on purpose. The purpose becomes the receiver, as the idea can only come to fruition there and not within a text or a closed system of thought.

The disregard for the ubiquitous certainty of the speculative eye corresponds with Climacus’ admiration for Lessing as disregarding results and conclusions and always making space for an anecdote and a jest. It is not to be disregarded as mere jest, when the aim of the fragmentary striving is presented as an attempt at the life of the interjection style. The Aesthete is at the same time ironically self-aware and deadly serious in his pretension to dethrone a philosophical paradigm. In his article on the fragmentary sense, Holm does not refer to the essay on the tragic from EE, so he does not comment on the ironical ending of the Aesthete’s definition of the fragmentary striving as not being as revolutionary as it might seem. Holm considers the Aesthete in the works of Kierkegaard as a voice, which is only there to prove its own limitations in comparison with the religious existence:

discerned it, one would be able to speak far more magnificently and richly and, above all, more truthfully about it than the one who here dares to speak. I shall, however, continually track down the musical in the idea, the situation, etc., explore it by listening, and when I have brought the reader to the point of being so musically receptive that he seems to hear the music although he hears nothing, then I shall have finished my task, then I shall fall silent, then I shall say to the reader, as I say to myself: Listen. You friendly jinn who protect all innocent love, I commit my whole mind to you; guard my laboring thoughts so that they may be found worthy of the subject; form my soul into a euphonious instrument; let the gentle breeze of eloquence hasten over it; send the refreshment and blessing of fruitful moods!”

KW EO, 86-87

25 “Og nu hans Stil! Denne polemiske Tone, der hvert Øieblik har uendelig god Tid til en Vittighed, og det endda i en Gjærings-Periode; thi ifølge en gammel Avis jeg har fundet, skal det dengang akkurat ligesom nu have været en Gjæringsperiode, som Verden aldrig har seet Magen til. Denne stilistiske Sorgløshed, der udfører en Lignelse indtil den mindste Detail, som havde Fremstillingen selv et Værd, som var der Fred og Tryghed, og det uagtet maaskee Bogtrykkerdrengen og Verdenshistorien, ja den hele Menneskehed ventede paa, at han skulde blive færdig. Denne videnskabelige Ørkesløshed, der ikke lyyster Paragraph-Normativet. Denne Blanding af Spøg og Alvor, som gjør det umuligt for Trediemand med Bestemthed at vide, hvilket der er hvilket – det skulde da være, at Trediemand vidste det ved sig selv.” SKS 7, 70

“And now his style! This polemical tone, which at every moment has plenty of time for a joke, even in a period of ferment. According to an old newspaper I found, the age then (just as now) was supposed to have been a period of ferment the likes of which the world had never seen. This stylistic nonchalance that works out a simile down to the minutest detail, as if the presentation itself had a value, as if peace and quiet prevailed, although the printer's devil and world history, indeed, all of humankind, were waiting for him to finish. This scholarly idleness that does not subscribe to the paragraphic norm. This mixture of jest and earnestness that makes it impossible for a third person to know definitely which is which-unless the third person knows it by himself.” KW CUP, 69
"Set i lyset af den overordnede arkitektur i Kierkegaards værk er det pointen med æstetiske pseudonymer som denne Constantin, at deres æstetiske udlægning af verden skal afsløres som en eksistentielt blindgyde - og som et ugenligt modbillede til den religiøse eksistens. Dermed bliver den romantiske fragmentform suspekt. for det er den form, æstetikeren hylder."  

The Aesthete’s reflections on style are echoed in Climacus’ expression of gratitude towards Lessing in AUE, and in both instances the measure of illusiveness is by no means indicative of an inferior position or a counter position unreconcilable with the religious perspective. The Aesthete’s fragmentary striving stands as a critique of the officialized interjections – the philosophical, scientific, speculative authoritative voices that lay claim to truth. Rather than revealing the aesthete as an existential cul de sac, the fragmentary striving connects with negative philosophy as the only earnest entry into philosophy. Fragmentariness is not only related to the aesthete and Constantin, as all Kierkegaard’s works consist of collages of different types of text. This does not mean that the fragmentary striving cannot be constructive. It structures an argument above the universal certainty of uncertainty.

Returning to the longer quote explaining the fragmentary striving, we find that the Aesthete lends divine authority to this project of tearing down the Babylonian tower of accumulated knowledge by maintaining that God’s act of destruction was just and that the following confusion was right. “da vor Tendens ikke er at arbeide paa et babylonisk Taarn, som Gud i sin Retfærdighed kan stige ned og ødelægge, da vi i Bevidsthed af, at hiin Forvirring skete med Rette “27 The honesty of fragmentary striving lies in the acceptance of understanding as a process rather than a product and as something achieved by each individual. All human striving is characterized by its fragmentariness. This developing perception of the self within the world is structured upon the isolated suffering of the poet in Diapsalmata, who’s first step into philosophy is his growing awareness of isolation. Through that isolation and his fragmented aphoristic images, the Aesthete begins to paint a larger picture and begins to include the other into his


“In light of the overall architecture of the works by Kierkegaard, the purpose of the aesthetical pseudonyms, such as Constantine, is that their aesthetical interpretation of the world have to be revealed as an existential cul de sac – and as an irrelevant counter position to the religious existence. This makes the romantic fragmented form suspicious, as that is the preferred form for the Aesthete.” (My translation)

27 “since it is not our intention to labor on a Tower of Babel that God in his righteousness can descend and destroy, since we, in our consciousness that such confusion justly occurred,”
awareness and into his understanding of himself in the world. Through this movement the fragmentary striving is not revolutionary. It does not only tear down as it itself is also structured upon the accumulated knowledge of earlier works, only it goes further in being aware of its own limits, much like Lessing as a negative philosopher is more honest in showing an awareness of the limits of different forms of truth. The Babylonian tower is both torn down and rebuilt in each fragmented attempt at making sense of existence, but we can still take inspiration from the ruins of these towers and we can still leave ruins for others to explore. In the paragraph following the citation, the Aesthete states that the aim of the fragmentary striving is to write posthumous papers and that these papers are much like a ruin:

"Lader os da betegne vor Tendens som Forsøg i den fragmentariske Stræben eller i den Kunst at skrive efterladte Papirer."28 "Efterladte Papirer ere som en Ruin, og hvilket Tilholdssted kunde være naturligere for Begravne?"29

These two uncommonly short sentences contrast the previous quote and they tie a beautiful knot on the various elements connected to the fragmentary striving. In a very simple and straightforward manner they describe the purpose of fragmentary striving as producing unfinished work, which leaves the work to the receiver who must filter the unearth the findings for anything which might make sense. Posthumous papers are like ruins and these are the natural habitat for the buried. The buried relate to the Symparanekromenoi, as both the listeners the essay, but also to the ancient and modern version of Antigone. This community of the dying is taken up again in the third act. In relation to the essay on the tragic as an attempt in the fragmentary striving, the image of the buried is a representation of each individual as isolated. Communication between the producer and the receiver will always be limited to a fragmentary endeavor. The producing individual can only hope to spark a productivity in the receivers that will allow them to go further on their own paths.

The Ancient, The Modern, and the Truly Tragedy
The title of the essay on the tragic alludes both to a distinction between the ancient and the modern tragic, but also to the connecting point in reflection. This double aspect of antiquity and modernity and the reflection contained in the tragic is developed through the concept of the truly tragic that transcends the boundaries of these terms. In this, the Aesthete departs from Hegel’s lectures on Aesthetics that pursues the distinction between antiquity

28 “Let us, then, designate our intention as a venture in fragmentary endeavor or the art of writing posthumous [efterladt, left behind] papers.” KW EO, 152
29 “Unfinished papers are like a ruin, and what place of resort could be more natural for the buried?” KW EO. 152
and modernity and arrives at the characteristics of a modern existence. The Aesthete also considers the distinction, but by way of the uncertain outset for his reflections he undermines the assumptions on progressive historicity and subjectivity as philosophical constructs.

In *Kierkegaards Psykologi*, Kresten Nordentoft places the Aesthete’s development of the tragic within the larger context of existential crisis as described in BA and SD. On one side, he takes the Aesthete’s use of Antigone to represent a position between the personal and autobiographical aspect of Kierkegaard’s floundered relation to Regine Olsen. On the other, he considers it in relation to the universalized psychological works in BA and SD. As Nordentoft states, one aspect does not rule out the other. 30 The individual expression might lead the reader towards an understanding of a common human experience, just as the subjective outset might point in the direction of the universal. Nordentoft underlines the distinction between the ancient and the modern tragic in terms of reflection. Reflection here refers specifically to the individual’s reflection over guilt. Opposed to the binary structure, the Aesthete underlines the unifying aspects of the tragic as containing elements of both antiquity and modernity. The distinction between the ancient and the modern is developed within the extremes of Augustinian determinism and Pelagian free will. The reflection, which lies between the two extremities, is connected to an uncertain awareness of guilt.31

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"But though it concerns Kierkegaard it is also elevated beyond the private biographical sphere: unum noris, omnes. And yet, such a thesis does make the same universal claim as the other psychological texts and theories in the authorship do."


Kresten Nordentoft, *Kierkegaard’s Psychology*. Translated by Bruce H. Kirmmse. (Pittsburgh, Duquesne UP, [, 1978). P.267. “In what does the difference consist between the ancient and the modern tragic, between sorrow and grief? One can say that it consists in self-reflection, and one can add that the difference thus described corresponds more or less to the difference in The Sickness Unto Death between “weakness’s consciousness” and the intensification of this in “a new consciousness, which is about its weakness.”
ancient tragedy is presented as defined by the substantial claims, while the modern tragedy is driven by the free individual. In this distinction, substantiability stands in contrast to subjectivity.32 For the Aesthete, the movement between the two forms of the tragic, the ancient and the modern, is contained within the individual and it revolves around the notion of reflection. There is an interplay between cultural history and individual development. Each individual goes through the immediacy of antiquity and moves towards the reflection in maturity. When the Aesthete describes the distinction between the sorrow of antiquity and the pain of modernity, he does it with the example of a child that might feel sorrow at the suffering of an old man, while the old man would only feel pain at the suffering of the child.


In the quote, we see how the Aesthete defines the gap between the ancient and the modern as the awareness of guilt. The Greek sorrow is mild and deep, at peace and in harmony, because it does not reflect on the question of guilt.

Nordentoft. P.268. “That Greek sorrow is substantial means that man is understood as firmly and unreflectedly anchored in wholes which were larger than the individual himself,”
33 “In ancient tragedy, the sorrow is more profound, the pain less; in modern tragedy, the pain is greater, the sorrow less. Sorrow always has in it something more substantial than pain. Pain always indicates a reflection upon the suffering that sorrow does not know. Psychologically, it is very interesting to observe a child when he sees an adult suffer. The child is not sufficiently reflective to feel pain, and yet his sorrow is infinitely deep. He is not sufficiently reflective to have an idea of sin and guilt; when he sees an adult suffer, it does not cross his mind to think about that, and yet if the reason for the suffering is hidden from him, there is a dark presentiment of the reason in the child's sorrow. So it is also, but in complete and deep harmony, with the sorrow of the Greeks, and that is why it is simultaneously so gentle and so deep. On the other hand, when an adult sees a young person, a child, suffer, the pain is greater, the sorrow less. The more -pronounced the idea of guilt, the greater the pain, the less profound the sorrow.” KW, EO 147-148
As Isak Winkel Holm notes, this idealized harmony is also present in Hegel’s description of the ancient tragedies. The defining difference from Hegel though, is that the Aesthete draws back from the absolute distinctions of innocence and guilt. These absolutes belong in the realm of metaphysics and not in aesthetics. The Aesthete deals with the tragic, and in the realms of the tragic neither absolute would constitute a foundation for a truly tragic representation. The absolutes would not make for convincing fiction, as it would lack the mimetic quality that renders the fiction relatable for the audience. This notion of mimesis will be developed on fictional terms in the first act and philosophically in the second. There must be elements of both innocence and guilt, of circumstance and responsibility for the tragedy to affect the emotions of the audience. The tragic condition, which the Aesthete maintains, and which Nordentoft brings out, is that neither would work without elements of the other. The Aesthete uses Sophocles’ Antigone as an example of how the subjective, free aspect of a modern heroine can be found in the ancient version. When the Aesthete constructs his own modern version, it is equally imperative to keep his Antigone trapped within the


"There is an unmistakable utopian hue to Hegel’s description of the wonderful Greek morality, where the subject’s relation to the general is not founded upon faraway abstractions but where one unthinkingly allows oneself to be led by an unreflected wealth of norms and habits.” My translation

35 “Et Moment af Skyld bliver der altid tilbage, men dette Moment er egentlig ikke subjectiv reflekteret; derfor er Sorgen i den græske Tragedie saa dyb. For at forhindre utidige Conseqvenser vil jeg blot bemærke, at man ved alle Overdrivelser kun bringer det dertil, at man fører Sagen over paa et andet Gebeet. Eenheden nemlig af den absolute Uskyld og den absolute Skyld er ingen æsthetisk Bestemmelse, det er en metaphysisk.” SKS 2, 149

“An element of guilt always remains, but this element is not actually reflected subjectively; this is why the sorrow in Greek tragedy is so profound. To forestall premature conclusions, I shall just point out that overstatements result only in shifting the issue over into another realm. The unity of absolute guiltlessness and absolute guilt is not an esthetic category but a metaphysical one.” KW EO, 149-150

36 Nordentoft, K., 1972. Kierkegaards Psykologi. GEC Gad. P. 345: ”Det han vil fremstille i sin afhandling er hverken det antikke eller det moderne, men han vil skitsere disse to opfattelser for derefter at vise, hvorledes de kan forenes, >>saaledes, at det sande Tragiske heri vil komme tilsyne<< (I 137).”

Nordentoft. P.269. ”The intention of the essay, however, was not to describe the ancient and modern tragic, respectively, but to connect the two views in the definition of what is truly tragic.”
substantial claims of her family. By dissolving the distinctions, the Aesthete arrives at the truly tragic, which is marked by the aesthetic ambiguity.

Where the Aesthete does find a concrete difference between the ancient and the modern is within the audience that has lost its sympathy. This is where Kierkegaard directs a hard kick at his times and peers from under the table of pseudonymity. It is one of the more subtle points made by the Aesthete, who does not have to argue extensively about the justification of his observations, when he senses an unresponsiveness to the tragic in his contemporaries. It is an aesthetic critique of his age as having moved beyond the honest sorrow of Greek antiquity to a point where there is only guilt and repentance and no room for the aesthetic duplicity. As will be developed in the first act, the modern kingdom of gods stands as an ironic critique of Kierkegaard’s age as conceived in thinking itself beyond the substantial categories. It is contained in the call to the suffering character on the stage: “help yourself, and heaven will help you.” The difference lies less in the tragic on the stage and more within the audience thinking itself beyond the tragic condition of suffering. Antigone both in her ancient and modern form contains elements of activity and passivity, innocence and guilt. The modern audience though, doesn’t take part in the suffering of the tragic character. This lack of sympathy is considered the turning point between the ancient and the modern, where the modern would consider the sufferings of the tragic characters to be somehow self-inflicted. This point is developed in the first act when considering how Kierkegaard’s criticism of his modernity connects with that of Lessing, and it connects with the engagement with suffering in fourth act. For now, it will suffice to state, that the Aesthete argues directly against Hegel on this point, where the human condition of suffering is maintained as traversing the distinctions between antiquity and

Nordentoft. P.269. "What interests Kierkegaard in the modern tragic is that it makes guilt into something individual and ethical, and thus into the object of conscious reflection. (...) The tragic depends precisely upon the ambiguousness which makes it unclear whether the hero is guilty or his fate, or whether the fate is the cause of his suffering. In the absence of this unclarity, the spectator’s sympathy for the hero, which is the special characteristic of the tragic, disappears.”
38 “hjælp Dig selv, og Himlen skal hjælpe Dig;” SKS 2, 148.
KW EO1, 149
modernity, while the idea of thinking one-self beyond the exterior constraints is a modern delusion.

Aesthetic Ambiguity
Nordentoft accentuates the connection between the Aesthete’s reflections over the human condition in suffering and Kierkegaard’s wider authorship, when he develops the connection between subjectivity and substantial claims upon the individual.\textsuperscript{39} The individual is always participating within the spheres of family, state and history, and so never entirely detached from the broader contexts of existence. In the essay on the ancient and modern tragic. This double possibility is termed the aesthetic duplicity (Tvetydighed) or the aesthetic ambiguity (Amphiboli) of the tragic. The Aesthete emphasizes the aesthetic ambiguity regarding the individual’s detachment and dependency. The Aesthete’s unresolved question of self-determinacy remains central throughout Kierkegaard’s writings as the intellectual block that keeps the doors of reflection ajar.

The ambivalent anthropology of the tragic is also at the center of Isak Winkel Holm’s analysis of the Aesthete’s essay on the tragic in Tanken i Billedet. Holm departs from the notebooks, where the youthful Kierkegaard sets out to portray humanity between Augustinian original sin and Pelagian freedom. He locates the outset for the discussion of freedom in the public debate following an article on legal accountability published by the doctor F. G. Howitz in 1824. In this, Howitz points towards the philosophical inflexibility of an either/or solution to the question of accountability.\textsuperscript{40} The


Nordentoft. P. 268: "One might perhaps expect that Kierkegaard would place himself at a greater remove from heathen determinism, but in anthropological matters the aesthete is in complete agreement with Judge Wilhelm, when the Judge speaks of the individual as the product of a particular environment, and with Vigilius Haufniensis, when he says that the race participates within the individual and the individual in the race, and criticizes the Pelagianism which ignores these connections. Aesthete A also calls this view Pelagian [I 140, E/O I 142], and this expresses his criticism of it."

\textsuperscript{40} Holm, Isak Winkel. P.260. “Tilregnelighedsloven bygger ifølge Howitz på den filosofiske idealisme og først og fremmest på Kants skarpe skelnen mellem frihedens og nødvendighedens rige: enten har man sin frie moralske dømmekraft i behold, eller også er man åbenlyst forrykt og er dermed underkastet Newtons mekaniske naturlære ligesom
argument against a hard line between mental health and sickness constitutes a relativization of the question of boundness and freedom, which Kierkegaard develops through the reimagined, tragic figure of Antigone. The same critique of the age as circling the accountability contained in the Pelagian freedom, which Nordentoft accentuates, is brought forth in this connection between Howitz and Kierkegaard. Holm’s departure from the medical and judicial question of accountability accentuates the significance of the unanswerable question of human freedom, and it places Kierkegaard’s reflections on the tragic and on Antigone within the context of a heated public debate on culpability. Howitz’ question on accountability leads towards a question regarding the underlying anthropology in the debate:

"Tilregnelighedslæren bygger på en klassisk dualistisk sondring mellem sjæl og legeme, mellem frihed og nødvendighed, men Howitz foreslår at opfatte mennesket som et homo triplex. Mellem sanselighedens tvang og fornuftens frihed skyder han sygdommen ind som den tredje instans."41

This question of anthropology is at the heart of the essay on the tragic and it points towards the denser works on anxiety and despair as the results of the human condition. In BA and SD, humanity is considered a duplex consisting of body and spirit. Within this duplicity lies the foundation for existential doubt and what Howitz deemed the third instance – that of sickness. Within the ambivalence and ambiguity of our synthetic nature, the Aesthete plays a significant role as he can only wonder at his own intellectual superiority and irrational despair. This sensation of suffering combined with acute intellectual cynicism is the aesthetic entry point into an engagement with subjectivity. The Aesthete utilizes the Antigone figure to cut across the Hegelian distinctions between substantiality and subjectivity. Even in her ancient form, Antigone contains the distinguishing traits of modernity in anxiety and despair. Antigone carries the aesthetic ambiguity like a Mona Lisa smile to confuse the modern audience that denies antiquity equality in the complexity of existence.

41 Holm, Isak Winkel. P.261. “The theory of accountability rests upon the classical, dualistic distinction between soul and body, between freedom and necessity, but Howitz suggests an understanding of humanity as homo triplex. Between the coercion of the senses and the freedom of reason, Howitz places sickness in between as the third condition.” My translation
The Aesthete sees himself and his listeners in the *Symparanekromenoi* expressed through ancient figure of Antigone as an equal and as an expression of isolated suffering. This is a considerable claim against the historicity of Hegel contained in his portrayal of Antigone. In Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics, Antigone becomes a sublime expression of antiquity, where the self is tied to the substantial claims. Hegel’s analysis aims at this gap between subjectivity in its ancient and modern form. For the Aesthete, Antigone as a literary figure transcends the gap as her despairing cries from the tomb accurately expresses the isolation of the self in modernity. We return to this isolated suffering of Antigone in the third act and develop it further in connection with Philoctetes and Job in the fourth. The tendency of reading modern and postmodern notions of a fragmented self into ancient text has come under critique as it might eisegetically and anachronistically read modern perspectives into an ancient context, but to justify Kierkegaard’s reading, one might ask with equal right whether there is not also an anachronistic error in reading existential complexity out of antiquity. The aesthetic ambiguity qualifies the ethical claim on the individual, as it moves the perspective away from ethics as an ideal of what we ought to be but rather returns to the complexity of what we are.

The Redemptive Possibility of the Tragic

This possibility of an aesthetic entry point into questions of ethics can also be seen in relation to the tragic. A more hopeful view on the tragic can be seen essay written by George Pattison under the title, *Antigone and the End of Art*. The gloomy title hides the fact, that Pattison with his text does the very opposite, as he brings out an optimistic note in the Aesthete’s description of the tragic. Pattison finds a hope in the Aesthete’s essay, which points beyond the suffering usually connected with the tragic. He does not leave the author of the text to wallow in his misery, but drives at the brief glimpse of light that penetrates the isolated tomb of Antigone as well as the despair of the Aesthete. Pattison has an eye for the fragile element of hope alluded to within the essay on the tragic and within the tragic character of Antigone. In this reading, the tragic is not a final condition. It points beyond

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42 Felski. P.5. “Raymond Williams was one of the first to argue that modern critics had projected the individualist and existentialist philosophies of their own time onto the entire history of tragedy as a genre, thereby misrepresenting key aspects of that history.”

43 Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*.

44 Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*. P.143: “Later in this chapter we shall look at how a self that is constituted rather like the fictional Antigone of the Either/Or essay might begin its long and tortuous journey from the darkness of selfimmolation towards the light of religious transfiguration.”
itself towards what Pattison describes as the light of religious transfiguration. The tragic contains a hope that defies suffering and this hope is contained in the ambiguity, which Pattison also points to as a limit of positive philosophy. We are never likely to conclusively confirm the exact measure of an individual’s dependency upon or detachment from family, society, or history. The sharp, critical sense of the Aesthete undermines the ‘panoptic gaze of the philosopher’ by pointing towards the limits of what we can speak of with certainty.\(^{45}\) The philosopher in question, is Hegel, and Pattison develops the connecting points but also the point where their ways part. Kierkegaard’s movement away from Hegel is described as connected to a growing awareness of the limits of a positive philosophy.\(^{46}\) In the essay on the tragic, the positive philosophy is driven back by the fragmentary striving. The response to the positive philosophy is also taken up later in Kierkegaard’s authorship, in AUE, where the positive is countered by a negative philosophy in the chapter, *Mulige og virkelige Theses af Lessing*. This negative philosophy is also the starting point of the first act, when we will try to establish the tragic as a philosophical outset, and it is central to the second act, when we consider the constructive aspects of a negative philosophy. Pattison develops the connection between the terms substantiality and subjectivity that are taken over from Hegel in his distinction between the ancient and the modern. We can go further from this vantage point to describe where the comparison comes to a halt and where the Aesthete departs from the Hegelian exposition of the tragic.

The Aesthete’s fragmentary objection departs from the individual, in whom the tragic is a moment that always occurs for the first time and not as part of a historical progress and no differently in antiquity. The tragic represents a point in time where the individual is faced with both a sense of helplessness but also responsibility or the other. A similar point is made in the first and second caput of BA, where the originality of sin in each individual is stressed. The tragic is part of the movement towards an understanding of one’s guilt and responsibility in relation to the other, and

\(^{45}\) Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*. PP. 160-61: “As the polemics against Hegel make clear, Kierkegaard never endorsed the Hegelian claim—also made by any number of philosophers of various non-Hegelian kinds—that everything in heaven and earth lies open to the panoptic gaze of philosophy. Philosophy is not in a position to grasp or illuminate all there is, but consists at best and at most in the philosopher’s infinite striving to achieve clarity about his life and his world, right up to the frontier dividing the known from the unknown and unknowable.”

\(^{46}\) Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*. P. 152: "Late 1841, then, sees Kierkegaard simultaneously absorbing Hegelian thoughts on theology, logic, and aesthetics—whilst also (and more famously) becoming rapidly disillusioned with Schelling’s lectures on positive philosophy.”
this is universally, completely individual to speak in absolute terms. For Pattison, the tragic awareness of the other points towards the religious transfiguration that transcends speculative philosophy. Even within the Aesthete’s musings over the tragic we find a redemptive aspect of sympathy. The Aesthete bends down to pick up the possibility of redemption from an irreligious foundation at the limitations of what we can know with certainty. The element of an irreligious redemption also points towards Wilhelm the Assessor who, in the second part of EE claims that sin might have come into this world through Eve but that 99 out of a hundred men find salvation by the love of a woman. In the perspective of the tragic, sin or transgression is the religious language for an existential point referring to the individual as only reaching an awareness of self through guilt. It is noteworthy that even Wilhelm considers ‘getting lost’ a worthwhile activity in the process of becoming a self. Transgression in this perspective becomes necessary in the movement towards becoming a self. This is an aspect of the Antigone figure, as she transgresses on the borders between the self and the other, and we will return to this point in the third act. Redemption is achieved only through that, which is outside of the self. The Aesthete already manages this breakdown of the isolation by resituating the individual within external conditions. This again relates to the mirror reflection contained in the tragic. Redemption on both the religious and irreligious count is achieved through someone external to the self: The Other or the other, as the absolute other in the divine and the immediate other in the concrete individual who has become the object of love. For now, this is to say that the Aesthete’s use of the Antigone figure also points beyond what would usually be considered the boundaries of aesthetics and he points towards both ethical claim and a religious transfiguration, not as opposites to aesthetics but as natural conclusions to an aesthetic criticism.

47 “thi af 100 Mænd, der forvilde sig i Verden, frelses de 99 af Qvinder, 1 frelses ved en umiddelbar guddommelig Naade. Og da jeg nu tillige mener, at det hører en Mand til, enten paa den ene eller paa den anden Maade at fare vild, at dette gjelder med samme Sandhed om Mandens Liv, som det gælder om Qvindens, at hun bør forblive i Umiddelbarhedens rene uskyldige Fred, saa indseer Du let, at efter min Mening Qvinden giver fuldelig Vederlag for den Skade, hun har gjort.” SKS 3,199

“for of a hundred men who go astray in the world, ninety-nine are saved by women, and one is saved by an immediate divine grace. And since I also think that it is the nature of a man to go astray either in one way or in another and that it holds just as truly for the life of the man as it holds for the life of the woman that she ought to remain in the pure and innocent peace of immediacy, you readily perceive that in my opinion woman makes full compensation for the harm she has done.” KW EO 2, 207
The Universality of Isolated Suffering
The doubting and cynical questioning of the Aesthete asks whether the isolated individuality might not represent a universal experience of existence not limited to modernity. It is a similar observation to that of Hegel but with alternative focus on isolation as a constant in the same way that the truly tragic is a human constant. The experience of being a self is always an experience of isolation. This supposedly modern reflection can also be seen in the ancient representation of suffering and despair. In Ecclesiastics, in the Book of Job, in Philoctetes and in Antigone. There, the loneliness of the suffering individual comes out as the anguished cries against the heavens. There is something recognizable for the modern audience in ancient expressions of suffering and there is a consolation in the awareness that existence has always carried within it this burden of loneliness.

The Aesthete emphasizes the resemblance of the ancient and modern subject in its isolation. The Aesthete sees his own reflection in Sophocles’ Antigone and places himself inside her narrative and within her despairing cry of isolation as not being among the living or the dead:

(850) ἰὼ δύστανος, 
οὔτ' ἐν ἄρσοτις οὔτ' ἐν νεκροῖς 
μέτοικος, οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσι
SKS 2, 157

In this way, the Aesthete claims that fragmentariness is not only true to the modern individual. He further underlines the connection between the ancient and modern version of Antigone as both contain elements of the other and the truly tragic transcends the distinction. With the Aesthete, we can at least claim against Hegel, that it would be presumptuous to make claims as to the inner workings of the self in antiquity or to entirely deny the possibility of a refined perception of self in ancient tragedy. On one side, the Aesthete defies the distinction between the ancient and the modern as the detachment of the self from substantial claims. On the other, he defies the manner in which this modern isolation can be bridged. Pattison describes this point as Kierkegaard’s religious solution to the problem of the isolated self, which Hegel attempts to solve philosophically. An important addition to the

48 “[alive to the place of corpses, an alien still, never at home with the living nor with the dead],” KW EO1, 159
49 Pattison, Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life. P. 157: “For Hegel, it seems, it is philosophy—thought and reflection themselves—that are to order and harmonize the otherwise fragmentary and mutually contradictory powers of modern subjectivity; for Kierkegaard, it is religion, via repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sins.”
description of the self is that it is not only defined by its subjectivity. It is also defined as being the object of the Other or the other. Pattison underlines the religious aspect of being beheld by God in Christ as objects of unconditional divine love. Beyond the religious possibility of redemption of the subject as the object of divine love, we could add the 99 subjects out of the 100, who have found themselves saved as objects of a more mundane love.

Forgotten Sympathies
The interconnection between isolated individuals is brought out by the Aesthete when defining his position on the tragic in relation to Hegel. The suffering contained in the tragic contains the possibility of transgressing on the borders of the self, and the audience is allowed to partake in the suffering of the other and perhaps of placing one’s suffering within the narrative of the other, just as the Aesthete places his suffering within Antigone’s lamentations. The Aesthete directly distances himself from Hegel through the difference in his perception of sympathy - Medlidenhed:

"Medens Hegel nu mere betragter Medlidenheden i Almindelighed og dennes Forskjellighed i Individualitets-Forskjelligheden, vil jeg foretrække at udhæve Medlidenhedens Forskkel i Forhold til den tragiske Skyls Forskjel. For strax at antyde denne, vil jeg lade det »Lidende«, som ligger i Ordet: Medlidenhed, kløfte sig og tilføje hver især det Sympathetiske, som ligger i det Ord: med, dog saaledes, at jeg ikke kommer til at udsige Noget om Tilskuerens Stemning, der kunde tyde paa hans Vilkaarlighed, men paa den Maade, at jeg, idet jeg udtrykker hans Stemmings Forskjellighed, tillige udtrykker den tragiske Skyls Forskjellighed.” SKS 2, 147

The ambivalent mood in which the spectator perceives the tragic is not just coincidental but reflects the ambivalence of the tragic guilt as containing element of both innocence and responsibility. Hegel, according to the Aesthete, considers the differentiation of Medlidenhed between antiquity and

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50 Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life*. P. 158: “Ultimately, for Kierkegaard, recognition is achieved by learning that we are each of us, as individuals, beheld by God in Christ as objects of unconditional divine love. But this is something that we can only discover in conscience, in repentance, as individuals ‘before God’ (which, Kierkegaard himself believed, might be enacted in sacramental confession and communion).”

51 “Whereas Hegel considers compassion more in general and its differentiation in the difference of individualities, I prefer to stress the difference in compassion in relation to the difference in tragic guilt. To indicate this difference at once, I shall separate the Lidende [suffering] in the word Medlidenhed [compassion] and add in each instance the sympathy implicit in the prefix med [with], yet in such a way that I do not come to predicate something about the spectator's mood that could indicate his arbitrariness, but in such a way that in expressing the difference in his mood I also convey the difference in the tragic guilt.” KW EO, 147-148
modernity within the context of individual differentiations. In plain terms, that Hegel considers the modern individual different from the ancient. In this differentiation lies an odd claim of certainty, as we moderns can hardly perceive the inner workings of the individuals of antiquity. The Aesthete’s claim is more subtly related to the commentators, the critics and the philosophers. This could be taken to mean, that Hegel supposedly claims a distinction between the individual of antiquity and the individual in modernity, where the Aesthete emphasizes the distinction in the philosophical approach to the individual. The distinction lies in the receivers of the tragic, who in modernity have lost their sympathy: “Tilskueren har tabt Medlidenheden, men Medlidenhed er saavel i subjectiv som objectiv Forstand det egentlige Udtryk for det Tragiske.” SKS 2, 148

The inability or the unwillingness to suffer with the other describes the critics and the philosophers rather than modernity as a whole. The Aesthete ironically reflects the theoretical approach to antiquity in order to show how the panoptic gaze of the positive philosopher is revealed to be often times directed at the philosopher’s navel.

Sophocles’ Antigone is used by the Aesthete to counter Hegel’s claim, that antiquity is defined by substantial claims and that it is harmonious in its immediacy. The tragic heroine carries within her the complexity and isolated suffering of a modern tragedy and so the sharp distinctions begin to corrode. For the Aesthete, the defining difference between antiquity and modernity lies in the audience which has lost its ability to suffer with the other and to feel sympathy. Of course, there are many parallels between Kierkegaard’s and Hegel’s approach, but there is also a distinction. The difficulty lies in locating the distinctive point of difference. In the first act, we will see how Lessing and the connecting points with Kierkegaard on aesthetics and the tragic might prove a good point of incision. The idea is not that Kierkegaard uncritically denies all the ideas of Hegel, but it is still important to search out where they differ where Kierkegaard’s critique might still contain a chaotic counter voice that is fit to dishevel the contented calm of the system. When reading the excerpts of the debates during Kierkegaard’s time at university, one can easily agree with Kierkegaard, that the scholarly interest had moved so far into abstraction that even the basest of experiences and emotions had become entangled in a theoretical mesh. The problem that Jon Stewart points towards in his work on the relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard, is that the intellectual detachment also fosters a demoralization. For Kierkegaard,

52 “the spectator has lost compassion, but in a subjective and also in an objective sense compassion is the authentic expression of the tragic.” KW EO 1, 149

53 Jon Stewart, Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). P.203:
there is good reason in going back to retrieve a more sensible outset for a more sensible philosophy, and here the tragic is a starting point. The Aesthete goes back to the tragic is to establish a foundation for expressing the complexity and the suffering inherent to existence but also the possibility taking responsibility. In contrast to the ethical and philosophical systems, suffering and sympathy lay a claim upon the individual. With this in mind, we turn to the first act where we will consider the other and less explored connection with Lessing in a tragic critique of a modernity that has become intellectually detached from existence.

“The point seems to be that the philosopher, burying himself in speculative analyses, neglects his ethical obligations by neglecting the realm of freedom altogether. Questions of ethics, which should be pressing, never arise for him.”
Act I:
The Modern Kingdom of Gods

The first act is dedicated to making introductions and to setting the stage for the following enterprise of engaging with the tragic in relation to the concepts of modernity, self and freedom. The introductory aspect lies in giving an overview of the two protagonists, Lessing and Kierkegaard, and allowing them to meet in the arena of aesthetics and tragedy. Essential to the opening act is of course also the description of the conflict, which the plot then aims to resolve. The conflict is the age-old dispute between Augustine and Pelagius, Luther and Erasmus, on humanity as either bound and determined or free and responsible. The either/or construction of the conflict is contained in Kierkegaard’s first title as he embarks upon his pseudonymous authorship. The title contains an ironical awareness of the impossibility of a final answer to the question of freedom but also an acceptance of the continuous task of engaging with the question for every individual in every age. Before we can begin to speak about freedom, we need to qualify how we can speak of the self. In the third act we consider the universality of existence through Antigone, who transgresses on the distinctions between freedom and boundness as well as antiquity and modernity. Through her, we consider the outline of what is the universal condition of existence before we move into the fourth act where we consider the self in its process of becoming. Only once these stages are set, do we arrive at the final task of defining the limits of a tragic freedom.

The meeting between Lessing and Kierkegaard would historically and biographically be Berlin in 1842, when Kierkegaard was working on EE and considering the aesthetic writings of the renowned Lessing. In EE, there is reference to Laokoon, and in his notebooks from the period, he mentions "Siden den Tid da Lessing ved sin berømte Afhandling Laokoon afjorde Grændsestridighederne mellem Poesi og Kunst, kan det vel ansees for et Resultat, der eenstemmigen anerkjendes af alle Æsthetikere, at Forskjellen er den, at Kunsten ligger i Rummets, Poesien i Tidens Bestemmelse, at Kunsten fremstiller det Hvilende, Poesien det Bevægelige.” SKS 2, 167

54 The title is considered in relation to Hegel and the philosophical debates of Kierkegaard’s time in chapter 4, III of Jon Stewart’s Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel Reconsidered. Here, Hegel’s Aufhebung stands in contrast to the either/or, aut-aut, structure of logical argument, while Kierkegaard at some level maintains the either/or as a moral category.

55 “Since the time when Lessing defined the boundaries between poetry and art in his celebrated treatise Laokoon, it no doubt may be regarded as a conclusion unanimously
the letters on tragedy between Lessing, Moses Mendelsohn, and Friedrich Nicolai, as well as Lessing’s aesthetical and critical writings from Hamburgische Dramaturgie.\textsuperscript{56} Conceptually, the meeting point is more complex. The first act has been given the title \textit{The Modern Kingdom of Gods}. This headline functions both as a reminder of the connection between Lessing and Kierkegaard in their aesthetic critique of a simple representation of freedom in their respective modernities, and as a vector pointing towards the final act, where the theory of tragic freedom will be considered in dialogue with Lessing’s tragic heroine, Emilia Galotti.\textsuperscript{57}

Much of Kierkegaard’s authorship is centered on becoming a self and becoming free. This process is described in more direct terms in BA and SD, and this is also where philosophical interest has found a firmer grasp. And yet, there is good reason to consider the Aesthete’s role in the process and to place more weight on the seemingly unstable footing. In the first act, we will hone in on how the tragic takes part in the process and how Kierkegaard uses the aesthetic thought of Lessing as an outset for his existential philosophy. Both writers comment on their age, and both are at odds with their times and somehow consider themselves to be adversaries of a norm. The norm or zeitgeist is hidden in plain sight. It is a tendency more than a straight-forward philosophy – something intangible and yet corrosive and omnipresent. In


\textsuperscript{57} She is also mentioned in Kierkegaard’s notes from 1842: SKS Not12:12

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\textsuperscript{56} ἀδιέξοδος και φόβοι περαινοῦσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων πάθηματον καθαρσίν. Aristoteles cap. 6. Dispute about this phrase (Lessing hamburgische Dramaturgie, - Correspondance with Nicolai and Moses M.) The meaning is undoubtedly this, that through pity and fear (the medium – their necessity and aesthetic meaning) tragedy effects their catharsis by ennobling sympathy. \varepsilon λεος και φοβος as egoistische categories are the condition for acquiring an aesthetic impression. The effect is that \varepsilon λεος και φοβος become purely sympathetic, that I forget myself in the aesthetic, purely sympathetic \varepsilon λεος and \varepsilon φοβος. This is in fact the calmness that the aesthetic gives, not through the thought that others suffer more, but in being lost in the contemplation of the aesthetic itself, in the aesthetic suffering.” Notebook 12:9, KJN, vol. 3.
\end{flushright}
order to address this norm, Lessing and Kierkegaard depart from the aesthetic expressions from their times in art, music, and theatre. Through the first act, we will see examples on how their style of argument looks alike and how aesthetical observations can constitute a philosophical critique and a constructive foundation for a more subtle departure for philosophy. In two similar statements directed at their times, Lessing and Kierkegaard describe their ages as modern kingdoms of gods. Lessing does so in the fourth section of his *Laokoon* and Kierkegaard allows the Aesthete an almost identical phrasing in the essay on the tragic in EE. In EE, the phrase is contained in a paragraph, where the Aesthete ridicules his age for making the characters entirely responsible for their own lives in modern fiction. Ironically, the Aesthete marvels at the times and the individuals of his generation as above and beyond the external forces that made people powerless in antiquity: "Man skulde nu troe, at det maatte være et Kongerige af Guder, den Slægt, hvori ogsaa jeg har den Ære at leve." SKS 2, 144.58 In *Laokoon*, a similar aesthetic critique is made of the modern people as not understanding the tragic on account of their assumption of autonomy. Lessing ironically states that his generation no longer believes in demigods, but that they are all expected to feel and act as demigods: “Wir Neuern glauben keine Halbgötter, aber der geringste Held soll bei uns wie ein Halbgott empfinden, und handeln.” Werke V-II, 47.59

The ironic remarks on divinity and freedom portray the two ages as conceited and the notion of freedom as hollow. For both Lessing and Kierkegaard, the allusions to their peers as gods and half-gods occur in a reflections over Sophoclean tragedy. In *Laokoon*, Lessing is considering the suffering of Philoctetes and in EE, the Aesthete is considering Antigone. Within this shared image, there is a contrast between the empowered demigods of modernity and the suffering characters of antiquity. The image of human suffering, which is held up as a mirror before modernity, reveals an incongruence based on the perception of the individual as free and responsible. Through aesthetics, and this might have been one of the attractions for Kierkegaard in Lessing, it is possible to establish a critique of this underlying assumption of a simple freedom. Both are taking observations from fiction in their times and reflecting on these observations as symptoms of something rooted deeply in the perception of the self in modernity. The method itself, seems almost deconstructive and post-modern.

58 "One would think that the generation in which I have the honor of living must be a kingdom of gods." KW EO1, 145
59 “We moderns are no believers in demi-gods, yet the least important among us is expected to feel and act like one.” Laococon, W. Ross, P. 56.
The tragic critique of freedom departs from the aesthetics of suffering, and the tragic in this initial act will be considered from the perspectives of mimesis and pathos. These are categories taken over from the Poetics of Aristotle, and both Lessing and Kierkegaard refer to them when engaging with the ancient tragedies. In his Laokoon, Lessing considers two versions of Philoctetes and in EE, the Aesthete, considers the ancient form of Antigone and sketches his own modernized version. Following this excurse on the discrepancy between the antique and modern tragedy with regard to the two parameters of mimesis and pathos, we will address the modern kingdom of gods, as we go into a parallel analysis of two ancient plays by Sophocles and their rewritten forms in modernity.

Tragedy and the Tragic

Tragedy as a term stems from the ancient Greek words Thragos and ōidē, meaning the song of the goat. This might have been connected to the beastly attire of the Satyrs on stage or to the bleating moans of suffering from the choir. In either case, the connection with the deeper and darker parts of the human soul, coincides with the use that Lessing and Kierkegaard make of the tragic as an objection against the modern kingdom of gods. The next step in the development of our overall plot is a qualification of the term tragic. Tragic stems from the French ‘Tragique’ and is most commonly utilized in the adjective form. To describe a subject or an object as tragic indicates an extremity of suffering. It may be used categorically or critically to place and label a fictional narrative. It may ironically be used to describe an unfortunate haircut or a social misconduct of some proportion. Kierkegaard’s reverence for Lessing is most explicitly developed in AUE. There, much of Kierkegaard’s philosophical project of questioning the authoritative voices of philosophical systems is connected to the subtler voice of Lessing. Lessing might have concluded less, but he questioned the conditions more accurately and with more earnestness than many of his peers and successors. This places Lessing both in the background of the more impressive figures of Hegel and Schelling, but also methodologically at the forefront because his seemingly humble style contains a sting against the speculative. On the movement between reason and faith, Johannes Climacus as the author of AUE considers Lessing to show an awareness and acceptance of the limitations, which Schelling would consolidate intellectually while Hegel would solve it methodologically.60

60 "For mig har det Lidet som findes hos Lessing havt sin Betydning. Jeg havde læst »Frygt og Bæven af Johannes de silentio« før end jeg kom til at læse det Bind af Lessing. (The work of Lessing actually refers to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s publication of a conversation with Lessing. The text was only published after Lessing’s death and it
In systematic works on the relation between philosophy, theology and tragedy, the terms tragedy and the tragic often occur indiscriminately. There are usually good reasons behind Kierkegaard’s choice of words, and when he refers to the tragic rather than to tragedy in the essay on the tragic, there is also good reason to attempt a qualification of the choice. Tragedy represents an object. Either as a specific tragedy or as a common denominator when referring to ancient Greek tragedy or the tragedies by Shakespeare. When referring to the tragic, Kierkegaard takes attention away from the object and emphasizes the tragic as a common experience. The distinction between tragedy and the tragic is helpful in underlining the function of the tragic within a wider understanding of experience and reflection as means towards becoming a self and becoming free. As we saw in the prelude, the truly tragic encompasses the dialectics of suffering and action, necessity and force. In the Aesthete’s critique, the modern audience has forgotten the tragic constant of suffering.

In Lessing’s works on tragedy, the inescapable purpose of the tragic is to produce *Mitleid* for the sake of a moral education. The tragic is also significant as it defies the systematic orderliness of scientific observation in his age. For Kierkegaard, the tragic plays a more subtle role in the individual process of becoming a self and as a critique of his age as detached from the tragic. Common for both of them is that the tragic pertains to the passions. By exploring the tragic as the experience and expression of suffering, the passions come to play a significant role as the constant companions of the developing self. The tragic points towards the psychological reevaluation of the self as more complex than a detached intellect, and it complicates the notion of freedom. As a category, the tragic is a constant. Tragedies will change through the ages, while the tragic as a category remains unaltered.

The Aesthete poetically describes the tragic as a constant phenomenon much spurred what would become known as the Pantheismusstreit. ) I hiint Skrift var jeg bleven opmærksom paa, hvorledes Springet efter Forfatterens Mening blev som Afgjørelsen ξαρ' εξοχην netop afgjørende for det Christelige og for enhver dogmatisk Bestemmelse, hvilket ikke lader sig nae hverken ved den schellingske intellectuelle Anskuelse, ei heller ved hvad Hegel, medens han lader haant om det Schellingske, vil sætte isteden: Methoden, fordi Springet netop er den meest afgjørende Protest mod Methodens inverse Gang.” SKS 7, 102-3

"The little that can be found in Lessing has had its importance for me. Before getting a chance to read that volume by Lessing, I had read *Fear and Trembling* by Johannes de Silentio. In that book I had perceived how the leap, according to the author, as the decision ξαρ' εξοχην [par excellence] becomes specifically decisive for what is Christian and for every dogmatic category. This can be achieved neither through Schelling’s intellectual intuition nor through what Hegel, flouting Schelling’s idea, wants to put in its place, the method, because the leap is the most decisive protest against the inverse operation of the method.” KW CUP1, 105
like the natural occurrence of tears. The means for making the audience weep and shudder will change with time. In this sense, we can speak of ancient or modern tragedy, a Sophoclean or a Shakespearean tragedy. The same goes for the comic. We can speak of the particular comedies of an age or author, but the comic as that which makes us laugh will remain a constant category and so will the tragic.

The tragic as a constant represents the relation between the experience and the expression of suffering. This relation between experience and expression goes both ways. On one hand, the expression of the tragic must imitate the tragic experience. This is contained in its mimetic quality. On the other, the expression of the tragic must produce in the audience a similar experience, something felt rather than understood. This is contained in the tragic as pathetic. These distinguishing traits of the tragic are defined by both Lessing and Kierkegaard in dialogue with Aristotle’s Poetics, and tragedy’s nature of imitating life and its purpose in producing fear and sympathy. The tragic as mimetic can express an uncertainty that maintains the synthetic complexity of life rather than ordering it. For Lessing and Kierkegaard, the mimetic nature of the tragic allows it to maintain the complexity of existence, and this ambiguity is central to the Aesthete’s answer to the speculative.

A Mimetic-Pathetic Objection to a Modern Concept of Freedom
In AUE, Johannes Climacus expresses a certain admiration for Lessing. One of the main aspects is Lessing’s inconclusiveness, his lack of result. For Climacus, this proves Lessing to be a subjective and honest thinker. Subjective in the sense that he does not project his own answers on to others in a direct or positive manner, but hides himself behind a fable or a joke.

61 “Advarende mod enhver saadan eensidig Bestræbelse for at adskille maa det ogsaa være, at Æstetikerne endnu bestandigt vende tilbage til de af Aristoteles opstillede Bestemmelser af og Fordringer til det Tragiske som de Begrebet udtømmende; advarende maa det være og det saa meget mere, som det maa gribe Enhver med et vist Veemod, at hvormeget end Verden har forandret sig, saa er dog Forestillingen om det Tragiske endnu væsentlig uforandret, ligesom det, at græde, endnu bestandigt er Mennesket lige naturligt.” SKS 2, 139

62 ”Denne polemiske Tone, der hvert Øieblik har uendelig god Tid til en Vittighed, og det endda i en Gjærings-Periode; thi ifølge en gammel Avis jeg har fundet, skal det dengang akkurat ligesom nu have været en Gjæringsperiode, som Verden aldrig har seet Magen til. Denne stilistiske Sorgløshed, der udfører en Lignelse indtil den mindste Detail, som
Honest in the sense that only the negative thinkers, who admit that their reasoning is limited, can be considered honest. Climacus states:

“De Negative have derfor bestandigt den Fordeel, at de have noget Positivt, dette nemlig, at de ere opmærksomme paa det Negative; de Positive have slet Intet, thi de ere bedragne.” SKS 7, 81

The tragic as a category is connected to subjectivity and negativity by not being directly communicable. This connection is further developed in the second act. The tragic lacks the positive distinctions of objective truth, and this is implied in its mimetic quality. The expression of the tragic remains unexplained and unrationlized, and the audience participates in the suffering on the stage. If the tragic is rationalized, and this is Lessing’s objection to the modern tragedies, it loses the mimetic quality. If we understand and judge the characters rather than partaking in their suffering, then the tragedy has lost its purpose in awakening the passions. The tragic as mimetic stands counter to the speculative, which is also the case on the title page of AUE. There, “Uvidenskabelig” is coupled with the subtitle “Mimisk-pathetisk-dialektisk Sammenskrift”. There is a contrast between the scientific as a positive and objective way of reasoning and the mimetic, pathetic, dialectic as a negative and subjective way. Opposed to the simplifications of a finite perception and expression of a limited truth – the tragic as mimetic holds on to the duplicity and obscurity of experience. In the structure of AUE, there is a movement from mimesis over pathos and into the dialectical. If one zooms out further, a similar movement can be

63 “The negative thinkers therefore always have the advantage that they have something positive, namely this, that they are aware of the negative; the positive have nothing whatever, for they are deluded.” KW CUP1, 81
64 “Unscientific” KW CUP, 1
65 “A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Compilation” KW CUP, 1
traced in the pseudonymous authorship as moving from the expressions of suffering and desire in the first parts of EE to the concluding albeit inconclusive reflections over the pseudonymous authorship in AUE. The mimetic plays a role in portraying phenomena as it appears and allowing it to appear unexplained. With the Aesthete, we could say that we suffer and we cause suffering and we don’t know exactly why. We could call it sin or nature, but that still doesn’t fully explain the enigma. The structure of AUE is divided into the objective and subjective, the objective takes up very little space compared to the second part. The second part begins with the expression of gratitude towards Lessing, and this initial praise revolves around the mimetic as a foundation for the following expositions of the pathetic and the dialectic. The movement through the categories demands a subjective footing, and this Climacus finds in Lessing’s focus on the honest mimetic representation of existence.66

Throughout his writings on the tragic, Lessing shows an awareness of this conflict between the speculative and the mimetic in art. Going against the rule-based and rationalized art-scene of his time, Lessing ridicules the inevitable simplifications that reason imposes upon the intricacies of the passions. In *Laocoon*, Lessing describes the modern tendency to rationalize emotion and to have the tragic characters deliver comprehensible reactions to the dramatic events.

“- Nichts ist betrüglicher als allgemeine Gesetze für unsere Empfindungen. Ihr Gewebe ist so fein und verwickelt, daß es auch der behutsamsten Speculation kaum möglich ist, einen eineln Faden rein aufzufassen und durch alle Kreuzfäden zu verfolgen.” Werke, V-II, 4367

Art that does not contain this mimetic element of uncertain representation becomes theoretically or ideally detached from the original. On this count, Lessing has found the tragedies of Roman antiquity to decline and slip away from the genius of earlier tragedies.68 The later tragedies are not in line with the unexplained, mimetic foundation. Although it is described as a general development, Lessing finds examples of later tragedies reconnecting with the tragic. One example that Lessing often returns to is Shakespeare. Shakespeare is criticized in Germany in this period because his plays do not live up to the standards of moral education. Lessing, in his critical writings

66 A more systematic unfolding of Kierkegaard’s reading of Lessing is found in Michelle Stott and Michelle Stott James, *Behind the Mask: Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymic Treatment of Lessing in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Bucknell University Press, 1993).

67 “Nothing is more likely to mislead, than an attempt to lay down general rules for our emotions. Their texture is so exquisitely fine and so exceedingly complicated, that it is scarcely possible for the most cautious speculator to take up a single filament and trace it through all the ramifications of which it forms a part.” Ross, 47

68 *Laokoon*, erster teil, IV.
on the German stage and its dependence on the French in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, argues a turn towards the English theatre on account of Shakespeare and his ability to mimic the complexity of life within his plots and characters. In 69. Stück, Lessing considers Lope de Vega’s defence for his own style of combining the tragic and the comic, as this is an honest imitation of nature:

“er hat nicht bloß die Fehler seiner Bühne beschönigt; er hat eigentlich erwiesen, daß wenigstens dieser Fehler keiner ist; denn nichts kann ein Fehler sein, was weine Nachahmung der natur ist.” Werke, VI, 528

Lessing then goes on to quote Christoph Martin Wieland, who argues against a criticism that has blamed Shakespeare:

“daß siene Stücke keinen, oder doch nur einen sehr fehlerhaften unregelmäsigen und schlecht ausgesonnenen Plan haben; daß komisches und tragisches darin auf die seltsamste Art durch einander geworfen ist, ... Man tadelt das, und denkt nicht daran, daß seine Stücke eben darin natürliche Abbildungen des menschlichen Lebens sind.” Werke, VI, 528-9

The mimetic quality of the tragic allows for an earnest representation of nature rather than rationalizing and moralizing. For Lessing, the aim of the tragic is also a moral education and a general movement towards goodness. But for him, the path of education goes through sympathy rather than reason – in awakening the passions rather than convincing the intellect. This is near to the role that aesthetics and the passions play in the process becoming a self by losing one self. This process is described in Arne Grøn’s work on subjectivity and negativity, and it is further developed in the second and fourth act. For both Lessing and Kierkegaard, the mimetic quality of the tragic establishes an emotional reaction in the audience when it participates with the suffering on the stage.

This respect for the mimetic quality of art might be part of what Kierkegaard found convincing in Lessing’s writings on tragedy. The emphasis on the mimetic nature of the tragic represents an objection to the speculative philosophy that connected tragedies with world history and all-encompassing systems of thought. Denying the larger schemes, Lessing is a comfort to the poor, privatizing thinker, sitting in his lonely chamber like a

69 “But if it is true Lope has done more than he intended, he has not only glossed over the faults of his stage, he has really proved that these are no faults, for nothing can be a fault that is an imitation of nature.” HD, P. 395

70 “Shakespeare has been blamed that his plays have a very faulty, irregular or badly devised plot; that comic and tragic are thrown together in the strangest manner; ... People blame this and do not consider that just on this account his plays are such natural representations of human life.” HD, P. 396

spider waiting for the storm. This thinker from AUE suspects an error in the foundation of the house he is sitting at the top of. From this suspicion,

"If a poor private thinker, a speculative capricemonger, who, like an indigent lodger, occupied an attic room at the top of a huge building, sat there in his little cubbyhole, held captive in what seemed to him difficult thoughts; if he had a premonitory suspicion that there must be a flaw somewhere or other in the foundations, without discovering more precisely so as to be able to understand how or where; if he, whenever he looked out from his attic window, observed with a shudder the redoubled and rushed efforts to beautify and expand the building, so that after he had seen and shuddered he would lapse into lethargy and feel like a spider that in its hidden corner leads a miserable life since the last housecleaning, anxiously sensing all the while that a storm is brewing; if he, every time he expressed his doubts to someone, found that his manner of speech, because of its deviation from the prevailing fashion of thought, was viewed as the shabby and eccentric dress of a decayed character-if, as I say, such a private thinker and speculative capricemonger suddenly made the acquaintance of a man whose fame was not exactly an outright guarantee to him for the correctness of his thoughts (because the poor lodger was not so objective that he automatically could draw an inference in reverse from fame to truth) but whose fame was nevertheless a smile of fortune to the abandoned one, who found some of those difficult thoughts touched upon by the famous person-ah, what joy, what celebration in the little garret room when that poor lodger consoled himself with the glorious memory of the famous one, while his preoccupation with thought gained bold confidence, and the difficulty assumed shape, and hope was born, the hope of

hope bursts forth, that there is a possibility of eventually understanding oneself. Lessing inspires a bold confidence in the young thinker, to go back to the root of the problem, and even if the problem cannot be solved then at least he has not been deceived. Kierkegaard finds an uninviting secrecy in the texts by Lessing, which denies a reader access to the conclusion. In the same way, the tragic, in order for it to be truly tragic, cannot be reduced to explanations and rationalizations. The tragic can only mimetically present the suffering with aesthetic ambiguity. For both Lessing and Kierkegaard this is not where the tragic ends. It also has a function in producing a responding emotion in the audience and this is where we turn to pathos.

The term pathetic headlines a large part of AUE and it ties the concluding remarks of Climacus to the opening remarks of the Aesthete in Diapsalmata. Pathos represents the emotional aspect of the individual development towards becoming a self. For now, we are looking at the distinctive notion of pathos in relation to the tragic, and how pathos as a category is also used in defining the ancient in contrast to the modern for Lessing and Kierkegaard. The shared component of pathos for Lessing and Kierkegaard, is that it contains an element of suffering, which opposes the empowered activity of the half-gods of modernity. Suffering is situated within the German and Danish terms for the passions: Leidenschaften and Lidenskaber. There, suffering is connected to the passionate experience as Leiden and liden. When our authors stress this suffering aspect of the passions, it can be taken as an objection to the intellectual response to existence. The return to pathos as both the outset and the telos of the tragic goes against the speculative philosophy, and it reflects the gaze of the intellectualizing spectator to reveal that even the desire to know and to control is a passionate response to existence.

For Lessing, pathos is connected to the emotional reaction of the audience. Like tragedy’s mimetic expression of suffering must represent an honest emotion, so the audience must be moved towards an honest reaction in sympathy and not an intellectual response of comprehending the characters. The term that Lessing uses and the term that defines his understanding and understanding himself, that is, first of understanding the difficulty and then perhaps even of surmounting it! What Per Degn improperly wants to have incorporated into the order of ecclesiastical advancement-first the parish clerk holds true with regard to understanding the difficulty: first understand the difficulty, and then one can always proceed to explain it-if one is able.” KW CUP1, 63-64

73 This progression is further developed in the fourth act where we return to the suffering of Philoctetes and the movement towards becoming a self. The role of the passions as opposing the intellect is developed in the third.
production of tragic drama is *Mitleid*.\(^{74}\) To allow the audience to feel and to suffer with the characters on stage is the first and foremost function of tragedies. For Lessing, we could simply state, that if this is not achieved then the tragedy has failed. As we shall soon see, Lessing goes on to criticize the modern rewritings of *Philoctetes* on this point of failing to maintain the suffering aspect of the ancient tragedy. The modern writer concerns the audience with exterior qualms of a superficial love-interest. For Lessing, the tragic is achieved through the portrayal of the hero’s lost capacity for action, when he is finally and utterly powerless and the options for acting are spent, this is where the audience suffers with the tragic hero.

For Climacus in AUE, pathos and the pathetic represent a return to the emotional response to existence. It is expounded in the pathetic lamentations of the Aesthete in *Diapsalmata*, and it remains the final objection against the speculative and the metaphysical throughout AUE, where Climacus revisits the fundamental question on the limits of reason from PS. In EE, the movement towards understanding, in a broad sense, departs from the experience of suffering.\(^{75}\) From this emotional response to existence, the Aesthete begins to develop an understanding of himself in relation to the other. The confrontation between the self and the other remains the focal point for Kierkegaard, as both the other as the neighbor and the Other as the divine are entities outside of the self and hence entities outside the intellectual understanding of the self and outside of what can be controlled. The confrontation with the other and the Other represent the suffering aspect of existence, as the self is confronted with an exteriority both incomprehensible and uncontrollable.

For both Lessing and Kierkegaard there is an educative function in pathos. In relation to tragedy, it moves the audience towards a responsiveness towards the other. When we are defining the distinction between the ancient and the modern, the pathetic aspect of the tragic relates to the audience. The audience has somehow lost its ability to suffer with the characters on stage. This concept of modern audience is also a simplification as the criticism is directed at a philosophical approach to drama rather than at the entirety of the modern population. The Aesthete formulates it in the first few paragraphs of the essay on the tragic, when he describes the modern audience as

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\(^{75}\) This is more fully described in Act II, Historicity, Subjectivity and Educational Suffering.
informed by the critics. These observations on the audience are central to both Lessing and Kierkegaard when forming a criticism of their respective modernities. The critique of the audience is related to the self-sufficiency of their times, which again is connected to the tyrannical rule of the intellect over the passions. The active part that the intellect plays in the simple presentation of freedom as unencumbered activity is contrasted by the suffering aspect of the passions. Submitting the other to the self, molding the external to the will and intellect of the individual is the underlying ideal of modernity. The irony of this, of course, is that the desire to comprehend the self and its surroundings is also a passion and an expression of repressed suffering. The pathetic addition to the modern concept of freedom is that in its original form the passions are suffering – only in modernity has the desire to master existence been perceived as an actual possibility and this is the delusion that detaches the modern audience from the tragic.

When Lessing tackles with Aristotelean Katharsis as the purification of the passions, he does so with the intention of returning to the outset of the emotions. Lessing interprets the construct of the original wording as an objective genitive. To say that the passions are purified through the tragic means that Lessing sees a path through the expression and experience of suffering towards an original emotion. The tragic is a means for purifying what has been polluted by rationalization and indoctrination to a point where it is possible to overlook or be disinterested in the suffering of the other. When this purification of the passions is said to be the aim of the tragic, it corresponds with the general motive found in Kierkegaard, of tearing down the illusions of modernity when it considers itself beyond the substantial

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76 "Paa den anden Side er det neppe undgaaet nogen Iagttagers Opmærksomhed, hvad det læsende og theaterbesøgende Publicum allerede tror sig i hjemlet Besiddelse af som sit Actie-Udbytte af de Kunsterfarnes Bestræbelser, at der er en væsentlig Forskjel mellem den antike og den moderne Tragedie." SKS 2, 139

"On the other hand, it can scarcely have escaped the attention of any observer that there is an essential difference between the tragic, ancient and modern-something that the reading and theater-going public already considers its legal possession as its dividend from the enterprises of the experts in the art.” KW EO1, 139

77 Martinec. “In Aristotle's definition of tragedy's effect, katharsis refers to pathos. The word pathos occurs in a genitive plural. Throughout the history of Aristotle's reception, this genitive has caused much confusion as it can be read in two different ways leading to two different meanings: seen as a subjective genitive it means that the purification or purgation (katharsis) of passions is achieved by eleos and phobos; as opposed to this, the objective genitive means that eleos and phobos are the targets of katharsis, hence they are being purified or purged themselves. Lessing chooses the objective option: 'die Tragödie soll unser Mitleid und unsere Furcht erregen, bloß um diese und dergleichen Leidenschaften, nicht aber alle Leidenschaften ohne Unterschied zu reinigen' (Hamburgische Dramaturgie, in Werke, IV, 591).”
claims that inhibited the individual in antiquity. Having considered these two aspects of the tragic, we will now move on to see a comparative example of how the two authors engage with the tragic and how the ancient tragedies are held up to reflect a tendency which both find to be expressive of their times. The tragic stands as a mimetic-pathetic objection against the speculative approach to philosophy as it cuts to the core of existence as essentially and inescapably tied to suffering. This gives the privatizing thinker hope of going back to the foundation where an error was made. Not in the hope of correcting that error, but the with the hope of at least perceiving the frailty of the structure. The return to the foundation is a return to the aesthetic entry point in the Aesthete’s consideration of his own tumultuous existence. This point is the opening of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship and the point from which the individual begins to make sense of the self in relation to the other.

The Modern Kingdom of Gods
There is a simple and positive statement on freedom in BA: that freedom is not the opposite of necessity. The common dichotomy between freedom and necessity taps into the inexhaustible debate between Augustinian original sin versus the Pelagian freedom. Both are considered as extremities, and with the tragic it is possible to question the absolutes through an emphasis on uncertainty. Through the mimetic-pathetic objection, both Lessing and Kierkegaard can deny the logical absolutes as negating the complexity of existence. Confusing freedom with force is one of the foundational errors that the privatizing thinker has become aware of, and an error that might be solved by allowing for the aesthetic ambiguity of being both bound and free. The tragic is a means of purveying an alternative concept of freedom. A freedom that depends on the passions, on suffering, and on the acceptance of an incapacity for action – a freedom that is somehow born of necessity. The contrast between a tragic freedom and

78 "Naar Friheden opfattes saaledes, har den sin Modsætning i Nødvendigheden, hvilket viser, at man har opfattet Friheden i en Reflexions-Bestemmelse. Nei Frihedens Modsætning er Skyld, og det er det Højeste i Friheden, at den bestandig kun har med sig selv at gjøre, i sin Mulighed projekterer Skylden, og altsaa sætter den ved sig selv, og hvis Skylden bliver sat virkelig, sætter den ved sig selv. Hvis man ikke paaagter dette, har man aandrigt forvexlet Frihed med noget ganske Andet, med Kraft.” SKS 4, 410
"When freedom is apprehended in this way, it has necessity as its opposite, which shows that it has been conceived as a category of reflection. No, the opposite of freedom is guilt, and it is the greatness of freedom that it always has to do only with itself, that in its possibility it projects guilt and accordingly posits it by itself. And if guilt is posited actually, freedom posits it by itself. If this is not kept in mind, freedom is confused in a clever way with something entirely different, with force.” KW CA, 108
freedom as force is evident in the two examples where Lessing and Kierkegaard consider the tragic in its ancient and modern form. This first engagement with a tragic freedom is used to describe a contrast between a the speculative and the tragic perception of freedom. The aesthetic engagement with the concept of freedom points towards the error in the foundation. This is the conflict that the plot seeks to resolve or at least reveal as unresolved.

In the fourth section of Laokoon, Lessing presents a critique of his age through an analysis of two versions of the tragedy, Philoctetes. One is the antique version by Sophocles and the other a modern French rewriting by Chateaubrun from 1756. In the analysis, Lessing describes how the antique version lives up to the standards of mimesis and pathos, of imitating life and producing emotion in the audience, and he describes how the modern French version fails. The story takes place before the fall of Troy. Philoctetes has been left marooned on the island Lemnos because of an infected wound. After ten years, the Greeks learn in a prophecy that the bow of Philoctetes is needed to breach the walls of Troy. Odysseus is charged with the task of bringing him or at least his bow back to Troy for the fulfilment of the prophecy. To achieve this, Odysseus brings with him Neoptolemus, son of the late Achilles, and uses his youthful and honourable nature to lure Philoctetes into parting with his bow.

There are three major conflicting points in the development of the plot in the modern rewriting of the tragedy. First is the reason for suffering: The infected wound in Sophocles’ version is divinely ordained. Chateaubrun invents a poisoned, Trojan, dart. Here Lessing wonders at the modern need for explanation. Evidently, Chateaubrun cannot accept the foundation of an unexplained and divinely ordained suffering, so he invents a more comprehensible causality. The second point is the motivation of the young Neoptolemus for engaging with Philoctetes. In Sophocles version, the focus is on the bond of friendship that quickly evolves between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. This friendship is founded on sympathy, as the young Neoptolemus engages with the suffering and isolation of Philoctetes. In the modern version, Chateaubrun gives Philoctetes a daughter in his isolation. Neoptolemus (called Pirrhus in Chateaubrun’s rendition) falls in love with the princess, and this explains the bond between the two men. The third point is the final scene and the crescendo of the story. In the ancient tragedy, fear and sympathy is awoken at the prospect of Philoctetes losing his bow. Already a cripple and humbled by ten years of unexplained and unjustified suffering, the hero faces the final loss of agency, his last shred of capability and means of sustenance. The fate of Philoctetes engages the sympathy of Neoptolemus and that of the audience exactly at this point, where he
embodies the combination of unexplained suffering with the lost possibility of action represented in the bow. This is the sympathy and the fear that Sophocles evokes – human suffering reaching the point of despair, beyond hope, when the possibility of action is finally spent. In the modern French version, the significance of the bow is forgotten, and instead the audience is moved by the fear of Philoctetes losing his daughter.

Suffering and the expression of suffering is not only passive in Lessing’s interpretation of the ancient version. The suffering of Philoctetes evokes the sympathy of Neoptolemus, and this in turn brings about the bond of friendship that changes both the characters and the plot. In the tragedy by Sophocles, the expression of suffering allows the imagination of Neoptolemus to engage with Philoctetes and this element of sympathy alters the play of events. There is an awareness of the impact of the other on the self on an emotional level. The moderns – and here we return to the ironic remark on their semi-divine abilities of self-control and emotional mastery – are considered as detached from the sufferings of others on account of being attributed with rational control. The modern audience would not sympathise with Sophocles’ Philoctetes and would not accept or comprehend the motive force of sympathy. In this view of the modern audience, Lessing understands why Chateaubrun had to invent a princess.

Herein lies the critique of Lessing’s contemporaries as unable to fathom the tragic element of suffering. When each individual is considered a free agent, and freedom considered as mastery of the exterior through clear understanding and force, the essence of the tragic in sympathy is lost. Suffering and the expression of suffering remain central to the portrayal of freedom as they establish an awareness of the other, and this awareness in turn allows for alternative action.

In the essay on the tragic in EE, the Aesthete engages with Sophocles’ tragedy, Antigone. Doing so, he considers modernity in its conflict with the truly tragic and this conflict is centred on the understanding of the individual as free in the sense of being empowered. The aesthetical or tragic critique of this freedom is founded upon the misconception of freedom as opposed to necessity and suffering. In Sophocles narrative, Antigone is portrayed as the strong-willed daughter of Oedipus. She is a young woman who chooses to die rather than submit to the rule of Creon, as he denies her brother grave and burial rites. Incensed at the injustice to her family and the divine laws, Antigone takes it upon herself to openly transgress against Creon and through transgression she forces her own tragic end as well as that of Creon. Antigone in this narrative is both suffering in the fate of her family and active in her own part in it, and so she is representative of the truly tragic.
In A’s rewritten narrative, the plot is no longer centered on external events. The reader is aware of the prehistory of Oedipus and his family, but within the tragedy, only Antigone knows the secret of her family’s past. This secret has become the center of her being, and her pride and solitary sorrow revolve around the secret. The tragic knot is tied in the additional condition of her being mortally in love. The plot is internalized, from the external events of the antique tragedy towards a wholly inner drama in A’s version. The conflict is within Antigone. Her entire being is bound to the secret but her heart, her longing and desire, is tied to her lover. This conflict can only have one outcome – she must die. Only in death will she be released from her secret and only in dying can she give herself to her lover. The rewritten Antigone is a return to suffering. It is no longer exterior means of suffering but an internalized suffering. By internalizing suffering, the Aesthete manages to petrify the heroine, and her activity turns to suffering.

The modern receiver is considered as the audience, and the Aesthete refers to it on several occasions. The modern receivers cannot digest the antique version of Antigone because they cannot accept its foundation of necessity and suffering – the modern audience simply yells towards the stage – Help yourself and the heavens will help you!79 The modern Antigone has to be given external freedom, a freedom in the simple sense of force, while necessity and suffering is maintained on the internal level. To clarify, the Aesthete also describes this distinctive difference between the Greek and the modern tragedy with reference to Sophocles’ Philoctetes. Philoctetes is particularly Greek in his outwardness, his expressiveness, which is comprehensible for the Greek audience, while the modern audience has become detached from suffering since suffering at some level must be self-imposed. The point is that even though the suffering is seemingly self-imposed, the individual is never free in an absolute sense.

In the distinction between the ancient and the modern tragic, the Aesthete refers to Hegel and the distinctions between substantiality and subjectivity in his lectures on aesthetics. On one side, the Aesthete goes against the understanding of the liberated subject as an aspect of modernity. In

79 “Ogsaa den i strengere Forstand lidende Tragedie har egentlig tabt sin tragiske Interesse, thi den Magt, hvorfra Lidelsen kommer, har tabt sin Betydning, og Tilskuereen raaber: hjælp Dig selv, og Himlen skal hjælpe Dig; med andre Ord: Tilskuereen har tabt Medlidenheden, men Medlidenhed er saavel i subjectiv som objectiv Forstand det egentlige Udtryk for det Tragiske.” SKS 2, 148

"Furthermore, suffering tragedy in the stricter sense has essentially lost its tragic interest, for the power that is the source of the suffering has lost its meaning, and the spectator shouts: Help yourself, and heaven will help you—in other words, the spectator has lost compassion, but in a subjective and also in an objective sense compassion is the authentic expression of the tragic.” KW EO1, 149
Sophocles’ tragedy, Antigone and Creon act as subjects and are not just representing substantial claims. They are tragic characters because they contain both the subjective and the substantial – an element of suffering and an element of action. On the other side, the Aesthete also questions the idea that the subject is ‘free’ in modernity. The rewritten Antigone is internally torn and there is no correct course of action. The concept of freedom as force depends on a clear understanding, and the rewritten tragedy maintains this as impossible. There is no complete understanding of the self – it will always be infinitely complicated and conflicted, and so there are no entirely free actions. The modern kingdom of gods is an ironic depiction of the age as conceited in thinking itself above the psychological depths of a limited understanding. With the return to the tragic, the Aesthete points towards the limits of speculative knowledge, which is most clearly seen in this internal conflict in Antigone. Freedom after this aesthetical or tragic critique has to be understood as something else. The Aesthete in this way opens the authorship for an alternative approach to the speculative, because the absolutes of abstract thought fail to contain the complexity of life. In this view, the mimetic quality of the tragic comes closer to the truth although the truth is still only obtainable by degrees.

The reflection over the times in connection within the tragic is used to present an incongruence by both Lessing and Kierkegaard. The form of aesthetics that Kierkegaard takes over from Lessing is aimed at society at large. From that perspective, art and art criticism poses questions that are not readily answered by the stricter disciplines of the speculative philosophy, and this movement also opens the path for a subtle philosophy that knows its limitations. It is a subtle philosophy that operates in guerrilla warfare against the dominant sciences, and its survival depends on taking the battles into difficult terrain with multiple exits.
Act II:
The Tragic as a Category

Aristotle famously formalized the scientific exploration of nature by dissecting small animals and he applied a similar method on tragedy. The purpose of opening the animals was to find out what made them live. The purpose of applying similar procedures on poetry, epic and tragedy was to come to an understanding of the principles and the particulars that made them function. Opposed to an objectifying analysis of tragedy as the cold slap of meat on the dissection table, we will look at how Kierkegaard explored the tragic as the sum of its components. This perspective is developed in relation to Lessing’s take on aesthetics and tragedy, as an individualistic outset. In the second act, we move into the more technical arena of the relation between tragedy and philosophy. We could call it character development as the terms and interrelations now are given more detailed attention. We consider their past and consider what is at stake when they are put into the conflict, which was hinted at in the first act. For Kierkegaard, the Aesthete and the aesthetic essays and aphorisms carry their own meaning and their own objections against his times, but they also contribute to the whole. When we now look at the role that the tragic plays by considering it as a category in its own right and in relation to imagination and negative philosophy.

Once again, we depart again from the connection between Lessing and Kierkegaard. The reason for coupling the two and describing compatibilities and incompatibilities with regard to the tragic, is that many aspects overlap. This is both in a systematical sense, where the tragic plays a role within their philosophy, and on a poetical level, where irony, fables, witticisms, and a general collage of styles are used to challenge the authority of a clear expression of ideas. The philosophical aspect of the tragic is connected to a negative philosophy, which points towards the limits of what we can know with certainty. The tragic representation contains a possibility of expression not bound by the constricting chains of cause and effect, and on this poetical level, the tragic allows for opacity and an associative terminology. Tragedies are written in a language aimed at the heart and the passions. The language of the tragic takes into account the emotional and sensitive aspects of existence without classifying them within stricter categories. This view of the tragic positions Lessing and Kierkegaard in relation to their times. The main distinction between the two and their times lies in the subjective perspective on the function of the tragic. There is both before and after Lessing and Kierkegaard a tendency to generalize and objectify the tragic and to interpret and utilize examples of tragedies as means to a different end. For Lessing and Kierkegaard, the tragic is directed at the individual, and this
is what we will attempt to draw out in the following, where we will question the distinctive aspects of the tragic in relation to their philosophies and their times.

Maintaining the Subjective Outset in the Tragic

We are now fast forwarding into the 20th century for the sake of illustrating the continued movement of the ideas surrounding the tragic in relation to philosophy. The cut scene only takes us so far, as part of the argument is that the perspectives on the tragic and tragedies after Kierkegaard returned to the super individual categories of historical process. The tragic and tragedy once again became objects of research rather than methods of reasoning. To emphasize this point, we will address two 20th century excursions into the tragic and tragedy made by Walter Benjamin and Karl Jaspers. With them, the scientific exploration of the tragic moves away from what is particular to Lessing and Kierkegaard on the tragic as directed at the individual and what happens in the moment between text and reader and between the stage and the audience. The focus on the tragic and tragedy returns to a Hegelian historicity, where the tragic is seen as representative of a relative age rather than being fundamental for each individual in the process towards becoming a reflected self.

We will consider the cross roads in the early 20th century as the point where the subjective aspect of the tragic seems to have taken the back seat again and given way for more objective observations and generalizations. This is not to say that the tragic before was generally considered from a subjective point of view. Both Lessing and Kierkegaard were in opposition to their times and this was and remains the focal point of their objection – that the tragic must is an expression of the suffering of the individual and it is directed at the individual. The function of the tragic as the medium between the self and other is developed in the fourth act, where we will also look closer at the distinction between observation and participation. For now, we are qualifying the tragic as a category with the intention of relating it to the wider authorship of Kierkegaard. The early 20th century is a point where we can trace the departure from the subjective obscurity, which is again explained or translated into descriptive language and positive philosophy. We return to Benjamin and Jasper in this case, for the sake of understanding the distinctive function of the tragic and also the role of the Aesthete within Kierkegaard’s perception of the movement towards becoming a reflected self and arriving at the possibility of freedom.

In Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels, Walter Benjamin refers to Trauerspiel (mourning-play) rather than to Tragödie as a means of distinguishing between a general and specific expression. He engages with
the German, baroque Trauerspiel in its historical context, and seeks to withdraw it from the extraneous interpretive methods forced upon it as a subcategory of tragedy. Benjamin defines his position as a more detailed investigation respectful to the particularities of the individual objects of research. He does it very well and elegantly in connecting the specific aspects of the Trauerspiel with a general cultural analysis. Benjamin’s clearest explanation of his own method is defined in opposition against Johannes Volkelt’s Ästhetik des Tragisches from 1906 in a critique the presumptuous endeavor of generalizing the emotional life of humans past and present:

“>>>So muß die moderne Weltanschauung den auch über den tragischen Helden, dessen Schicksale von den wunderbaren Eingrifen einer transzendenten Macht abhängen, urteilen, daß er in eine unhaltbare, einer geläuterten Einsicht nicht standhaltende Weltsicht hineingestellt ist, und daß die von ihm dargestellte Menschlichkeit den Charakter des Eingeengten, Belasteten, Unfreien an sich trägt.<< Diese so ganz vergebliche Bemühung, das Tragische als allgemeinmenschlichen Gehalt zu vergegenwärtigen erklärt zur Not, wie seiner Analyse mit Vorbedacht der Eindruck kann zugrunde gelegt werden, >>den wir moderne Menschen empfangen, wenn wir die Gestalten, die alte Völker und vergangene Zeiten dem tragischen Schicksal in ihren Dichtungen gegeben haben, künstlerisch auf uns wirken lassen<<.”

Ursprung, 81-82

This quote fits within a larger argument against simplifications and generalizations when working with tragedies. The overall mistake of Volkelt, according to Benjamin, lies in a superficial analysis, which fails to include the particularities of the singular tragedies being examined. Benjamin’s solution is an in-depth analysis of the specifics of German baroque Trauerspiel. The charge against Volkelt is, admittedly, a good argument against using the tragic as a systematic category and against attempts at a generalized philosophy of the tragic. A philosophy of the tragic would be problematical considered as a generalized understanding of the tragic as an object. But it might still be possible to consider it as a form of

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80 Walter Benjamin and Rolf Tiedemann, ‘Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels.’, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 225 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).

“‘And so the modern world-view must also judge that the tragic hero, whose destiny depends on the miraculous intervention of a transcendental power, is placed in an order of things which will not bear intelligent examination, and that the humanity, of which he is an embodiment, is restricted, oppressed, and unfree in character.’ This thoroughly vain attempt to present the tragic as something universally human just about explains how the analysis of it can quite deliberately be based on the impressions ‘which we modern men feel when we expose ourselves to the artistic effects of the forms with which ancient peoples and past ages endowed tragic fates in their literatures.’ ”Walter Benjamin and John Osbourne, The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Trans. John Osbourne) (New York: Verso, 1998). P.101.
representation that can achieve something similar to philosophy, and Benjamin is open to this junction between philosophy and the tragic.\textsuperscript{81} If we were to return to the skepticism in Lessing and Kierkegaard, we could formulate a critique of Benjamin’s approach as an attempt to return to the ideal of objective certainty. In a simplified version, his argument states, that if we cannot express anything conclusive on the whole then we should limit our analysis to the particular and not venture beyond it.

In Benjamin’s work, truth is relative to method, and the philosopher must show an awareness of representation: “Es ist dem philosophischen Schriftum eigen, mit jeder Wendung von neuem vor der Frage der Darstellung zu stehen.”\textsuperscript{82} Considering the tragic as a category in light of these observations, it is worth noting that the tragic as a form of representation walks the thin line between the poetic and the philosophical. In contrast to Benjamin’s devotion to the baroque \textit{Trauerspiel} as a detached and singular object of research, our focus is on the unifying aspects of the tragic in its ancient and modern forms as something that points towards a universal aspect of existence. It could well be judged a vain attempt at presenting the tragic as a universal human experience. Benjamin departs from the specifics of baroque \textit{Trauerspiel} to say a great deal about general matters of science and philosophy.\textsuperscript{83} Once we have structured a foundation for the argument, we

\textsuperscript{81} “Ist Übung im beschreibenden Entwurfe der Ideenwelt, dergestalt, daß die emperische von selber in sie eingeht und in ihr sich löst, die Aufgabe des Philosophen, so gewinnt er die erhobne Mitte zwischen dem Forscher und dem Künstler. Der letztere entwirft ein Bildschen der Ideenwelt und eben darum, weil er es als Gleichnis entwirt, in jeder Gegenwart ein endgültiges. Der Forscher disponiert die Welt zu der Zerstreuung im Bereiche der Idee, indem er sie von innen im Begriffe aufteilt. Ihn verbindet mit dem Philosophen Interesse am Verlöschen bloßer Empirie, den Künstler die Aufgabe der Darstellung.” Ursprung, 14

“If it is the task of the philosopher to practice the kind of description of the world of ideas which automatically includes and absorbs the empirical world, then he occupies an elevated position between that of the scientist and the artist. The latter sketches a restricted image of the world of ideas, which, because it is conceived as a metaphor is at all times definitive. The scientist arranges the world with a view to its dispersal in the realm of ideas, by dividing it from within into concepts. He shares the philosopher's interest in the elimination of the merely empirical; while the artist shares with the philosopher the task of representation.” Benjamin and Osbourne. P.32.

\textsuperscript{82} Ursprung, P. 9.

“It is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation.” Benjamin and Osbourne.P.27

\textsuperscript{83} Benjamin also uses the \textit{Trauerspiel} as a representation for a general objection against a scientific method and against a specific historicity. In the text, \textit{Idee der Naturgeschichte} (T. Adorno, „Die Idee Der Naturgeschichte “, u Rolf Tiedemann, et al.(Ur.). Gesammelte Schriften., 2004.), Adorno takes up Benjamin’s considerations over the \textit{Trauerspiel} and the philosophical implications dealing the with the relation between nature and history.
will depart from the engagement with three tragic figures in Sophocles versions of *Antigone* and *Philoctetes* and in Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*, for the sake of arriving at a reflection that takes the complexity of speaking from within existence into the equation. The present considerations on the tragic as a category will be tested in the concrete examples and reflect back towards this consideration of the tragic and its function within Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy. The distinctive point of difference when we consider Benjamin’s work on the Trauerspiel, is that he returns to the objective method of perceiving the tragic from the outside. Where Lessing and Kierkegaard imaginatively place themselves and their readers inside the fiction, Benjamin considers the fiction as a fortified whole that represents a particular historical situation. The intention here, is not to state that this approach is wrong, only that there is a different result from this method. With Pattison’s expression from the Prelude, we could say, that Benjamin returns to the original set of rules, that Kierkegaard had changed to fit his purpose.

In *Von der Wahrheit* \(^{84}\)– *Über das Tragische*, Karl Jaspers considers the tragic in relation to truth. As the title indicates, Jaspers’ work is directed at an understanding of truth, and the tragic is considered as one possible representation of truth. Jaspers gives thought to the distinction between tragedy and the tragic, and refers to the tragic as a general subcategory in the universal pursuit of truth. The tragic as a category is lined up along with myth, religion and systematic philosophy as variations of method, which all aim at answering the universal human questions of existence and meaning. \(^{85}\)

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“Systematic philosophy is a leap forward. But this leap does not invalidate man's earlier awareness of truth. For this awareness contains those original visions that from the beginning of time have prompted man to hand down truth in the form of images. ritual,
There are allegorical implications in this perception, which seem problematical. The problem is, that the tragic becomes a vehicle for a more fundamental truth, which might have been expressed in other forms if a proper vocabulary had been available:

“Die Fragen – schon philosophisch und doch noch ganz in anschaulichen Gestalten, daher noch nicht philosophisch im methodisch rationale Sinn.” VdW, 922

This perception of the tragic as one form of representation of a universal truth can be explained from two perspectives. Firstly, that he focuses on the tragic as a form of expression of a general truth. Jaspers perspective is historical rather than individual, objective rather than subjective. The tragic takes part in the general movement towards understanding. This movement is a collective and cumulative process. Secondly, that Jaspers analysis is aimed at a general confrontation of the German guilt following WWII. There is a contrast in the perspective on the tragic compared to what we have found to be central in the works of Lessing and Kierkegaard. There, the focus is directed at the individual, and the tragic does not relate an objective truth to be communicated and understood. The tragic is a representation of the recurring experience of suffering, and this is not seen as a part of a historical awareness.

The overall aim of coming to grasps with the tragic for Jaspers is directed at transcending the tragic as collective suffering. His analysis of the tragic point towards a historical overcoming of the tragic and a movement beyond it. The tragic is central in relation to the post war guilt, as it moves humanity towards awareness of guilt but also towards action and atonement. The tragic becomes a reminder of responsibility but also a condition that can be overcome. Overcoming the tragic becomes the existential task of humanity,

and legends. At this stage, the power of myth, the authority of revelation, and the disciplined conduct of life are realities.“ Jaspers.P.23.

86 “The questions of tragedy are already philosophical in substance, but they are still formulated in visual, dramatic terms. They have not yet reached the rational method of philosophy.” Karl Jaspers, Tragedy Is Not Enough (Archon Books, 1952).P.35

87 “Das Tragische steht vor der Anschauung al sein Geschehen, das das Grausenerregende des Daseins zeigt, aber des menschlichen Daseins, under dieses in den Verstrickungen aus dem Umgreifenden des Menschseins. Die Anschauung des Tragischen aber vollzieht durch sich eine Befreiung vom Tragischen, eine Weise der Reinigung und Erlösung.” VdW 925

“The tragic looms before us as an event that shows the terrifying aspects of existence, but an existence that is still human. It reveals its entanglement with the uncharted background of man's humanity. Paradoxically, however, when man faces the tragic, he liberates himself from it.” Jaspers, Tragedy Is Not Enough.P.41.

“Die Ausgleichung aber die aus der Tiefe liebenden Kampfes sich vollziehende Kommunikation der Menschen und ihre dadurch geschehende Verbindung, so ist das keine Illusion, sonder existentielle Aufgabe des Menschseins in der Überwindung des
but humanity as a whole and not on the individual level. The historical finality of the tragic becomes central for Jaspers and this is where his view departs from what we have highlighted in Lessing and Kierkegaard. For Lessing and Kierkegaard there is an end to tragedy and there is a movement towards becoming a reflected self and becoming free, but this can only be arrived at on the individual level. Jasper’s perspective contains a naivety in the aim of historically overcoming suffering as something finite. This is the point, where the tragic for Jaspers becomes historical rather than individual, where it becomes objective rather than subjective. The problem is not that the tragic leads to action and movement, this is also the case for Kierkegaard, but that the tragic can be overcome. Like anxiety, tragic suffering is a constant condition for Kierkegaard, as we can never know with certainty whether we are acting freely. Throughout his text on the tragic in relation to truth, Jaspers is at odds to prove the tragic as pointing towards its own dissolution, he refuses it as a final condition, and he focuses on the awareness that leads to action.

“In the present project, we are aiming at this narrow pseudo-insight and looking for what might be called fundamentally and universally tragic. This does not lead to the claim that the ground of all being is only tragic, but rather that the process of becoming a self and becoming free goes through the stages of the tragic. The experience of suffering is necessary to move beyond the limited perspective of the “I”. The tragic awareness of the self in relation to the other is dependent upon suffering. The existential aspect of suffering stands in contrast to the speculative or metaphysical and is also taken out of the historical context. Like Haufniensis states on the meaning of Adam in Tragischen. Nur auf diesem Grund sind die metaphysischen Überwindungen des Tragischen ohne Selbsttäuschung erfaßbar.” VdW 951

“By equitable settlement, however, we can also mean that living communication between human beings which arises in the depth of their struggles from their continuing love for each other, and the mutual bonds which it creates. Far from being an illusion, such solidarity is the existential task of human life. Through it, man overcomes the tragic. Only from this basis can we understand, without self-deception, man's metaphysical conquests over tragedy.” Jaspers, Tragedy Is Not Enough. P.87.

88 “To say that the ground of all Being is tragic, however, seems absurd. Instead of actually transcending our world, this narrow pseudo-insight merely absolutizes one of its aspects. Tragedy resides only in the phenomena of this world. For through the tragic, something different speaks to us, something that is no longer tragic.” Jaspers, Tragedy Is Not Enough. P.94.
relation to sin in the individual, it is not the historical Adam as the first sinner that defines sin. This would be a quantitative sin. It is the Adam in all of us, the first transgression as sin and the following guilt in each of us, and this makes it a qualitative sin. In the same way the tragic is not overcome collectively but individually and the hope of becoming free is not achieved at the level of a generation. Instead of the historical perspective of a finite suffering, Kierkegaard spies a possibility within the tragic of moving the individual towards actions. This is contained in the prophetic ‘thou’ of the tragic that is addressed at the heart of the receiver. There is a call to action and to authenticity and awareness in the tragic, and this is also the end goal for Kierkegaard, though his understanding of the possibility of movement and action is less grand in its individual and internalized expression.

Historicity, Subjectivity and Educational Suffering
The individual is also at the center, when we now turn our attention towards the alternative perception of history found in Kierkegaard’s writings and particularly in AUE. Climacus is at odds to define himself in opposition to Hegelian historicity and rather leans towards Lessing. In BA and AUE as well as the first part of EE, historicity and collectivity is confronted with outset in the individual. This confrontation can be seen as an attempt to turn the attention away from the objective approach in a positive philosophy and move it towards the subjective outset for a negative philosophy. Historicity is at the center of the critique, and aesthetics and the tragic contains a possibility of expressing the turn towards the individual outset. In the following, we will trace an argument on why it makes sense to look at Kierkegaard’s claim against Hegelian historicity in connection with Lessing. The individual here becomes the cardinal point of both philosophy and history. Rather than considering the individual as the loose flotsam in the river of time, history becomes relative to the individual and is only flowing in relation to the perspective of the individual.

In AUE, Climacus scorns the world historical organization of knowledge. The world historical focus is criticized for overlooking the

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89 Climacus continually ironizes over Hegelian historicity as an aspect of the speculative and objectifying philosophy. This also connects to Lessing as he is concerned with the individual rather than the collective: “at han religieuest sluttede sig af i Subjektivitetens Isolation, at han i religieus Henseende ikke lod sig narre til at blive verdenshistorisk eller systematisk, men forstod og forstod at fastholde, at det Religieuse angik Lessing, Lessing alene, som det paa samme Maade angaaer ethvert Menneske, forstod at han uendeligt havde med Gud at gjøre, men ligefrem Intet, Intet med noget Menneske.” SKS 7, 67
individual. It overlooks the distance between the self and the other, as it attempts a general explanation of past and present. This is what Lessing in AUE is praised for having understood in contrast to the collective world historical progress in Hegel. By looking at the relation between Lessing and Kierkegaard on individuality and history, we arrive at two distinctive correlations. Firstly, that the individual is the telos of history. Secondly, it is not only reason that drives the individual towards awareness, freedom and salvation. It is a combination of external and internal factors, where suffering plays an important role.

In the essay on the tragic in EE, the tragic is maintained to be on the individual level, and yet, the meaning of the tragic is explained by the Aesthete in the movement from the ancient to the modern. The movement from Greek tragedy to modern tragedy runs parallel to the movement from the personal experience of youth to the more mature reflection. In EE, the aesthetical beauty of ancient tragedy corresponds to the emotional outset for A’s notes in Diapsalmata. There is a correlation between individual development and cultural progress, between the self and history, the personal experience and the collective memory. This duplicity of observation between the individual and humanity at large, is repeated in the structure of BA, where the qualitative and quantitative fall from grace is both a personal and universal moment. This might be considered an internalization of cultural history and/or the projection of the self into world history. In either case, it connects the understanding of the self through the world with the interpretation of the world through the lens of the self. Greek antiquity, in this image, runs parallel to passionate youth and this double meaning is key when we turn to the gap between the ancient and modern tragic and to reflection as the prism between the two in the third act.

In Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts, Lessing considers the movement from antiquity towards modernity in the God-relation. The ancient Israelites were the chosen children of revelation. Revelation was submitted to reason and through the following phases of exile and the culmination in Christianity, the chosen people become aware of the divine claim on the individual that lies within the concept of eternity. The title in Lessing’s Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts refers to the relation between historicity and subjectivity, as the education of the human race corresponds to the education of the individual. There is a strange twist to the discussion of the immortality of the soul in the paragraphs 90-100. Here, Lessing opens up to the possibility of the soul being reborn in different lives. The historicity of the

alone, just as it pertains to every human being in the same way, understood that he had infinitely to do with God, but nothing, nothing to do directly with any human being.” KW CUP, P65
salvific progress serves the purpose of the individual and vice versa. This twist places the individual at the center of history as the smaller wheel turning within the larger wheels of history and the human race. This image poses a question both flattering and frightening: what if the world actually does revolve around you? The question relates to the awareness of eternity and the immortality of the soul first arrived at in revelation and confirmed by the suspicions of reason. In Climacus’ critique in AUE, Hegelian history moves with the aim of dissolving the individual in the state, while history for Lessing aims at a reconciliation between the individual and God. Reason comes after revelation and it serves the purpose of revelation as revealing the path towards individual salvation. The first step towards the fulfillment of history for Lessing is not necessarily tied to reason as education takes many forms. For Kierkegaard in both EE and AUE, education also has more aspects than the intellectual, and suffering in particular plays a role within this education.

In EE, the Aesthete draws a line between the cultural development from antiquity to modernity and the individual progress from childhood to maturity. Greek antiquity stands parallel to the youth of the individual. He alludes to it in Diapsalmata and it becomes clearer in Det antike Tragiskes reflex I det moderne Tragiske. The structure of EE can be seen as a parallel

90 Lessing poses the question differently in the text, but the meaning remains that the possibility of eternity and immortality is centered on the individual, and accepting this dogma also places the subject as the center of history. §92: “Du hast auf deinem ewigen Wege so viel mitzunehmen! so viel Seitenschritte zu tun!—Und wie? wenn es nun gar so gut als ausgemacht wäre, daß das große langsamer Rad, welches das Geschlecht seiner Vollkommenheit näher bringt, nur durch kleinere schnellere Räder in Bewegung gesetzt würde, deren jedes sein Einzelnes eben dahin liefert?” Werke, X, 98
“You have so much to take with you on your eternal way! So many diversions to make! And what if it were as good as certain that the great, slow-moving wheel which brings the [human] race closer to its perfection is only set in motion by smaller, faster wheels, each of which makes its own contribution to this end?” Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings, ed. & trans. by H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511810138>, P.239.
§100: “Oder, weil so zu viel Zeit für mich verloren gehen würde?—Verloren? —Und was habe ich denn zu versäumen? Ist nicht die ganze Ewigkeit mein?” Werke, X, 99
“Or am I not to return because too much time would be lost in so doing? – Lost? – And what exactly do I have to lose? Is not the whole of eternity mine?” Lessing, Lessing., P. 240

91 The relation of the pre-Christian Greek culture and the impact of Christ both with regards to history and individual is central to Caput III of Begrebet Angst, where Haufnienssis introduces the moment as the point where the finitude touches eternity. Øjeblikket is the point where the subject becomes aware of itself in its own historicity. Where Caput I and II is mainly concerned with the individual aspect of sin and guilt,
to the turn towards a subjective outset for philosophy. The self-centered sorrows of the poet in Diapsalmata captures this move away from the certainty of a speculative philosophy and into the perspective of the consciousness from which the ordering of the world begins. If we consider EE as a whole, then the structure, which begins in Diapsalmata, is also worthy of notice. By beginning with the aphoristic, fragmentary expressions of suffering and contemplated suicide, Kierkegaard declares a new outset for philosophy: the suffering subject. The twist is that the objectivity of philosophy and science is questioned through the outlook of the ‘I’. This ‘I’ begins its education before reason as it is thrown into existence before awareness. The outset in the childish awareness and the ancient tragic becomes the foundation for understanding the self in history. The first impressions from childhood are passionate responses to experience and the tragic relates the experiences of suffering. This also connects the essay to the image of sufferings as teachers in AUE, where Johannes Climacus boldly claims this as a new outset for philosophy, him being a devil of a philosopher:

"At jeg selv skal sige det: jeg er Intet mindre end en Satans Karl i Philosophien, kaldet til at skabe en ny Retning; jeg er et stakkels enkelt existirende Menneske med sunde, naturlige Evner, ikke uden en vis dialektisk Færdighed og heller ei ganske blottet for Studium. Men jeg er forsøgt i Livets casibus, og beraaber mig trostigt paa mine Lidelser, ikke i apostolisk Forstand som en Æressag, thi de have kun altfor ofte været selvforskyldte Straffe, men dog beraaber jeg mig paa dem, som paa mine Læremestere, og med mere Pathos end naar Stygotius beraaber sig paa alle de Universiteter, ved hvilke han har studeret og disputeret." SKS 7, 564

Caput III places eternity, historicity and the other within the individual. Øjeblikket is described as the awareness of the other within the self, of history within the individual. The connection between time and sight contained in the Danish expression Øjeblikket, is developed by Niels Nymann Eriksen in an exposition of an example used in BA, where the moment is described through the look of Ingeborg in the tale of Ingeborg and Fritjoff. (Niels Nymann Eriksen, Kierkegaard’s Category of Repetition: A Reconstruction, Kierkegaard Studies, 5 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000).) A similar flux between self and other is at stake in G, where the repetition is the movement by which the subject becomes active in relation to the other. The movement is explored in more detail in the third and fourth act.

92 A similar focus on the radicality of the shift in focus with regard to Kierkegaard’s addition to philosophy and aesthetics is noted by Leonardo Lisi. Leonardo F. Lisi, Marginal Modernity: The Aesthetics of Dependency from Kierkegaard to Joyce, 1st ed (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). P.23. “The dominance of the aesthetics of autonomy and the avant-gardes is due not least to the dominance of a certain conception of truth and experience. And it is only by understanding Kierkegaard’s challenge to that conception that the aesthetic implications of his reconsideration of the nature of truth and experience become apparent.”

93 “I am anything but a devil of a fellow in philosophy, called to create a new trend. I am a poor individual existing human being with sound natural capacities, not without a certain dialectical competence and not entirely devoid of study either. But I am tried and
The tone of the expression makes it difficult to weather an intention behind the statement, but with possibilities of ironic distance both in the direction of overstating his importance but also undermining himself. Deeming himself to be no less than a devil of a philosopher is in any case a bold statement. It is backed up in *En første og sidste Forklaring* in AUE, where Kierkegaard unveils the unity of his pseudonymous writings. This connects Climacus’ voice to the persistent flow of publications throughout the authorship beginning with the Aesthete’s suffering. It also underlines the weight of the claim when he considers himself to be called to shape a new direction in philosophy. Climacus describes himself as a poor individual existing human being. That is the outset and what is common for one and all. What Climacus adds are sound natural capacities, a certain dialectical competence and study. This combination of being part of what is inescapably human and being gifted with intellect and study has made Climacus aware of his isolation as an individual, but it is his sufferings that have taught him this first and essential lesson in existential philosophy. The opening of EE is no less radical in laying claim to a new approach to philosophy. It begins with the sufferings of the poet. The Aesthete also alludes to the beginning of education as suffering in the second aphorism in *Diapsalmata*:

“Det første Spørgsmaal i den første, den mest compendieuse Undervisning, hvori et Barn oplæres, er som bekjendt dette: hvad skal Barnet have. Svaret er: Da-da. Og med saadanke Betragtninger begynder Livet, og dog neger man Arvesynden. Og hvem har dog Barnet de første Prygl at takke for, hvem Andre end Forældrene.” SKS 2, 27

Suffering is the beginning of education and in this perspective the tragic is a common experience in the process of becoming a reflected self. Beyond the world historical and cumulative perception of knowledge as growing and building, the existential philosophy departs from the suffering of the individual. This makes the individual almost ahistorical in its formation and only after awareness comes an understanding of the self within time. The initial steps are taken in darkness and only through this personal confrontation with uncertainty do we begin to bring order back into the world. There is an almost Cartesian chronology to the development, except that the initial cogito is replaced by the isolated suffering of the individual.

tested in the casibus of life, and trustingly appeal to my sufferings, not in the apostolic sense as a matter of honor, because all too often they have been self-incurred punishments, but still I appeal to them (my sufferings) as my teachers, and with more pathos than Stygotius appeals to all the universities at which he had studied and debated.” KW, CUP, P.621.

94 “It is common knowledge that the first question in the first and most compendious instruction given to a child is this: What does baby want? The answer is: Da-da. And with such observations life begins, and yet we deny hereditary sin. And yet whom does the child have to thank for his first thrashings, whom else but his parents.” KW EO1, P.19.
The imagery of suffering from the beginning of EE points towards the self in the process of becoming aware of itself in relation to the other and in relation to time. This is termed Øjeblikket in BA. Haufniensis considers Øjeblikket as the moment where finitude meets eternity. In history, this moment is Christ and the eternity of God taking the mortal, timely human shape. Within the individual, Øjeblikket is the same touching point of finitude and eternity, where the subject understands itself through history and understands history through its own eternal perspective. This moment of coming to an eternal awareness is also described in PS, where Christianity is considered the only historical phenomenon leading towards this awareness.95 PS departs from a question contained in Lessing’s image of the garstige breite Graben from the text Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft. The question is reformulated by Kierkegaard, but both emphasize the radicality of the event of Christ within history.96 The moment in BA, can be likened to Lessing’s description of the impact of Christianity in history in Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts, only he uses the term Unsterblichkeit, immortality, rather than eternity.97 For Lessing, the awareness of immortality is the essential difference from the Greek and Hebrew culture to the Christian. In the education of the individual, the awareness of its immortality is also what makes it aware of its responsibility towards the other and towards eternity. Lessing’s focus on immortality has a likeness to Kierkegaard’s use of eternity as the point outside of history that gives the individual its historical perspective.

The tragic points towards this moment of the self discovering itself between subjectivity and historicity. The educational suffering points towards an awareness of being both bound and free, and this is what

95 “Dog hvilket det følgende Afsnits historiske Costume vil blive, er ikke vanskelig at indsee. Som bekjendt er nemlig Christendommen det eneste historiske Phænomen, der uagtet det Historiske, ja netop ved det Historiske, har villet være den Enkelte Udgangspunkt for hans evige Bevidsthed, har villet interessere ham anderledes end blot historisk, har villet begrunde ham hans Salighed paa hans Forhold til noget Historisk.” SKS 4, 305. ”Yet it is not difficult to perceive what the historical costume of the next section will be. As is well known, Christianity is the only historical phenomenon that despite the historical indeed, precisely by means of the historical-has wanted to be the single individual's point of departure for his eternal consciousness, has wanted to interest him otherwise than - merely historically, has wanted to base his happiness on his relation to something historical.” KW PF. P.109.
97 Kierkegaard also refers to a text by Lessing in Caput III of BA, but this is a reference to an essay entitled Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet. The text seems only superficially related to the topics in Caput III.
distinguishes humanity in contrast to the rest of creation. The tragic remains related to antiquity and to the more immediate level of the individual’s journey towards self-awareness, but every individual goes through the immediate stages. The point of bringing the tragic into the discussion is that the later stage of modernity or maturity is based on the earlier stages of antiquity and immaturity. The tragic represents a necessary movement that leads the individual towards maturity, and it represents the movement that makes the subject aware of its own historicity, its eternal or immortal nature as well as its mortal and timely nature. By returning to suffering as the outset for the acquisition of knowledge in *Diapsalmata*, the Aesthete forces the attention back towards the individual. This reflection on the self as relative to the other and as relative to exterior factors is part of the foundation for the ethical claim on the individual that is addressed in the final act. The notion of history as relative to subjectivity and not the other way around can be considered a reaction against Kierkegaard’s understanding of Hegel’s world historical system. Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegelian progress is based on the role of the individual, which in every age is at the center of its own awareness and not just representative of a relative period. The individual does not act as the small and insignificant cog within the greater wheel of world history. Rather, Kierkegaard turns to Lessing’s demonstratively odd notion of history as turning upon the smaller wheel of the individual. This turn towards the individual is at the center of the negative philosophy, that Lessing is praised for having accepted as a condition. We continue in this direction in the following when we try to further map out the possibilities of the tragic as a path towards a negative philosophy.

The Tragic and Negative Philosophy

When we now turn to the concept of negative philosophy, it is still with the connection between Lessing and Kierkegaard in mind. Negativity in relation of the process of becoming a self is further developed in the fourth act, and for now, the intention is to establish a foundation for connecting the aesthetic reflections over the tragic with a negative philosophy. It is described in the passages of AUE referring to Lessing, and here we find an imaginative disillusionment contained in the negative philosophy that ties it together with the function of aesthetics in EE and G. In AUE, Climacus defines the distinction between the positive and the negative:

"Alt dette Positive udtrykker nemlig ikke det erkjendende Subjekts Tilstand i Existentens, det angaar derfor et fingeret objektivt Subjekt, og at forvexle sig selv med et saadant er at blive og at være narret. Ethvert Subjekt er et existerende Subjekt, og derfor maa dette væsentligen udtrykke sig i al hans Erkjendend og udtrykke sig som forhindrende den i illusorisk Afslutning i Sandse-Vished, i historisk Viden, i illusorisk Resultat. I historisk Viden faaar han en Mængde at vide om Verden, Intet om sig selv,
bevæger sig bestandigt i Approximations-Videns Sphære, medens han med sin
formeentlige Positivitet bilder sig ind at have Visheden, som dog kun haves i
Uendeligheden, i hvilken han dog som existerende ikke kan være, men bestandigt
ankomme. Intet Historisk kan blive mig uendelig vist, undtagen dette, at jeg er til
(hvilket igjen ikke kan blive uendelig vist for noget andet Individ, der atter kun
saaledes er uendeligt vidende om sin egen Tilværelse), hvilket ikke er noget Historisk.
Det speculativt Resultat er forsaaavidt Illusion, som det existerende Subjekt vil
tænkende abstrahere fra, at det er existerende og være sub specie æterni. De Negative
have derfor bestandigt den Fordeel, at de have noget Positivt, dette nemlig, at de ere
opmærksomme på det Negative; de Positive have slet Intet, thi de ere bedragne. Netop
fordi det Negative er tilstede i Tilværelsen og er overalt tilstede (thi Tilværelse,
Existents er bestandig i Vorden), derfor gjelder det som den eneste Frelse derimod at
blive bestandigt opmærksom derpaa. Ved at blive positivt betrygget er Subjektet netop
narret. SKS 7,81

The long quote contains a dense accusation against the Hegelian climate, that
Kierkegaard was writing against, and it contains numerous elements that
show how Climacus defines his own work to be distinctively different from
Hegel’s. Firstly, the positive thinker cannot describe the thinking subject in
existence in a positive manner. The subject becomes objectified in the
positive approach. This first objection is seemingly simple but there is a
radicality to the claim against generalizations over subjectivity. The positive
thinkers make objects out of subjects, as they attempt to describe existence
from without. For Climacus, this would basically mean describing the self
from the perspective of eternity, which is an impossibility. There is a

98 “That is, all of this positive fails to express the state of the knowing subject in existence;
therefore it pertains to a fictive objective subject, and to mistake oneself for such a subject is
to be fooled and to remain fooled. Every subject is an existing subject, and therefore this
must be essentially expressed in all of his knowing and must be expressed by keeping his
knowing from an illusory termination in sensate certainty, in historical knowledge, in
illusory results. In historical knowledge, he comes to know much about the world, nothing
about himself; he is continually moving in the sphere of approximation-knowledge, while
with his presumed positivity he fancies himself to have a certainty that can be had only
in infinitude, in which, however, he cannot be as an existing person but at which he is
continually arriving. Nothing historical can become infinitely certain to me except this:
that I exist in turn cannot become infinitely certain to any other individual, who in turn is
only in the same way infinitely cognizant of his own existence), which is not something
historical. The speculative result is an illusion insofar as the existing subject, thinking,
wants to abstract from his existing and wants to be sub specie aeterni [under the aspect
of eternity]. The negative thinkers therefore always have the advantage that they have
something positive, namely this, that they are aware of the negative; the positive thinkers
have nothing whatever, for they are deluded. Precisely because the negative is present in
existence [Tilværelse] and present everywhere (because being there, existence v existent],
is continually in the process of becoming), the only deliverance from it is to become
continually aware of it. By being positively secured, the subject is indeed fooled.” KW
CUP, 81
reference to Lessing’s great ugly ditch. The historical knowledge that could not be bridged with the imperative of faith, is radicalized in the sense that the only historical certainty is the fact of one’s own existence. All other claims of eternal certainty are considered as illusions, as they fail to incorporate this outset in uncertainty. It is only possible to describe the self from within existence. In that matter, Kierkegaard is consistent as he begins his authorship in the sufferings of the Aesthete in *Diapsalmata*. The positive thinkers begin from outside of existence and therefore they arrive at an objectified and manipulated (*fingeret*) subject. Lessing is considered as a negative thinker as he abstains from certainty and result, and this makes him a more honest thinker.

In spite of the impossibility of result, Kierkegaard is consistently concerned with the notion of self and subjectivity and he attempts to express it in numerous ways. In the article, *Imagination and Subjectivity*, Arne Grøn assesses the concept of imagination in AUE and SD. Departing from an analysis of the anthropological outset in the synthesis, imagination takes on a key role as relating the individual to eternity. Imagination qualifies the capacities of feeling, knowing and willing. Grøn considers Kierkegaard’s anthropology, where humanity is perceived as synthesis, which can only reflect upon itself in the world through imagination:

“In this double movement of human synthesis imagination is crucial. But how? According to Kierkegaard, imagination is ‘the medium for the process of infinitizing’ and as such ‘the capacity *instar omnium*’. It is not a capacity, as are feeling, knowing, and willing. It is ‘the capacity *instar omnium*’ in that it qualifies these other capacities. It does so in the sense that a person can have imaginary feeling, knowing and willing. However, this is only the negative example of the basic qualification of feeling, knowing, and willing: ‘When all is said and done, whatever feeling, knowing, and willing a person has depends upon what imagination he has, upon how that person reflects himself - that is, upon imagination’.”

The self is understood in the process of becoming, where the self reflects upon itself. While the positive philosophy places the subject outside of the objective world being described, the imaginative places the self within as reflecting upon itself. Arne Grøn has provided the theoretical foundation for the connection between the self as always in the process of becoming and the negative philosophy as chronic condition of uncertainty. Where the historical outset for an infinitizing knowledge failed in the positive philosophy, *Anticlimacus* espies a possibility through imagination, and Grøn connects this with negativity. The imaginative negation of the self contains the possibility of reflecting upon the self, that the positive philosophy lacks. Following this train of thought, the tragic and art in general as mimetic

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representations contain the possibility of circumventing a positive philosophy, which fails to incorporate the self into the equation. Rather than turning the subject into the object of research, the imaginative negation of the self accomplishes the aim of describing the self through its reflection in fiction. This is the aesthetic entry into the field of subjectivity, where the category of the tragic combines with negativity and imagination to form a possibility for iterating the concepts of self and freedom from within existence.

The terminology found in Kierkegaard’s various works to express and bridge the incongruence of philosophy and existence, is not present in the works of Lessing. Yet, Kierkegaard refers to Lessing as a pioneering figure. To understand the connection with Lessing, we have to move into the sphere of negative philosophy and imagination. Lessing’s movement towards a negative philosophy comes from a consequential thinking, which points towards its own limitations. Kierkegaard refers to these musings over the nature of truth and the comprehension of the divine in his journals. He also


“Not the truth which someone possesses or believes he possesses, but the honest effort he has made to get at the truth, constitutes a human being’s worth. For it is not through the possession of truth, but through its pursuit, that his powers are enlarged, and it is in this alone that his ever-growing perfection lies. Possession makes us inactive, lazy, and proud – If God held fast in his right hand the whole of truth and in his left hand only the ever-active quest for truth, albeit with the proviso that I should constantly and eternally err, and said to me: ‘Choose!’ I would humbly fall upon his left hand and say: ‘Father, give! For pure truth is for you alone!’” Lessing, Lessing., P.98.

101 ”Noget Lignende var vistnok Lessings Mening med de Ord: at han vilde vælge den venstre Haand, den bestandige Stræben. Men Uret havde han dog, forsaavidt det er lidt for erotik, og smager lidt for meget af det, ogsaa i Forhold til Sandhed, at ville ansee Prisen for mere værd end Sandheden. Men dette er egl. en Art Selviskhed, og kan let blive en farlig, ja en formastelig Afvei.” SKS NB11: 176

“Lessing no doubt had something similar in mind when he said that he would choose the left hand, everlasting striving. But all the same, he was wrong inasmuch as it sounds a bit too erotic and, in relation to truth, it seems a little bit too much as if he thought the price itself as worth more than the truth. But this is rly a form of selfishness and can easily become dangerous, a presumptuous wrong turn.” KJN, Vol. 6
describes the limits of reason in PS, which departs from Lessing’s question on the gap between historical knowledge and eternal awareness from Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft. In PS, Climacus’ focus is on the gap between rational thought and the movement towards faith. For Lessing, the gap represents the irreconcilable distance between historical knowledge and logical certainties. He was writing against a tendency to combine reason with historical witnesses, taking ancient chronicles as axiomatic evidence enabling further exploration. The focus is somewhat different between the two, as Climacus in PS is aiming at the incompatible gap between reason and the eternal object in the movement towards faith.

"Forstandens paradoxe Lidenskab støder da bestandig an mod dette Ubekjendte, som vel er til, men ogsaa ubekjendt, og forsaaavidt ikke er til. Videre kommer Forstanden ikke, dog kan den ikke i sin Paradox i lade være at komme dertil og at beskæftige sig dermed; thi at ville udtrykke sit Forhold til det saaledes, at hiint Ubekjendte ikke er til, gaaer ikke an, da dette Udsagn netop involverer et Forhold. Men hvad er da dette Ubekjendte; thi at det er Guden betyder os jo kun, at det er det Ubekjendte? Ved at udside om det, at det er det Ubekjendte, da man ikke kan kjende det, og hvis man endog kunde kjende det, ikke kunde udsige det, tilfredsstilles ikke Lidenskaben, uagtet den rigtigt har opfattet det Ubekjendte som Grændse, men Grændse er netop Lidenskabens Qval, om end tillige dens Incitament.” SKS 4, 249

The paradoxical passion of reason, forstandens paradoxe lidenskab, is in itself an image of the conflict internal to philosophy. Philosophy seeks to describe what is outside of it, but if it remains positive, it can only relate that, which is inherently and undeniably true – it can only speak in certainties. In this sense, the positive philosophy points towards its own frontiers. The brief and direct statements from PS are taken up in the more longwinded AUE and it is in that later work as well as in SD that we find the development of the negative philosophy and a fuller explanation of the impact of Lessing on this development. A large portion of AUE is dedicated to the concept taken up in PS on the historical outset for an eternal awareness. The development of the Lessingian gap in AUE, shows that there is more to Kierkegaard’s reading of Lessing. The incessant argumentation and the ironical distance between

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102 "The paradoxical passion of the understanding is, then, continually colliding with this unknown, which certainly does exist but is also unknown and to that extent does not exist. The understanding does not go beyond this; yet in its paradoxicality the understanding cannot stop reaching it and being engaged with it, because wanting to express its relation to it by saying that this unknown does not exist will not do, since just saying that involves a relation. But what, then, is this unknown, for does not its being the god merely signify to us that it is the unknown? To declare that it is the unknown because we cannot know it, and that even if we could know it we could not express it, does not satisfy the passion, although it has correctly perceived the unknown as frontier. But a frontier is expressly the passion's torment, even though it is also its incentive. And yet it can go no further, whether it risks a sortie through via negationis [the way of negation] or via eminentiae [the way of idealization]” KW, PF. P.44.
Lessing and his intellectual adversaries is given a philosophical weight by Climacus, as something more than stylistic differences of taste. Climacus considers Lessing to express a radical critique of his counterparts as conceited by the illusions of certainty, and this, for Climacus, grants Lessing the often unappreciated laurel of the negative philosopher.

In *Subjektivitet og Negativitet*, Arne Grøn develops the concept of negativity as it comes out in SD and AUE. With reference to the famous quote on the wound of negativity in SD, Grøn emphasizes that existence lies in becoming rather than in perfection, and that negativity is necessary:

"Hos såvel Climacus som Anti-Climacus bruges negativitet altså til at fastholde den afgørende indsigt: at den eksisterende er i vorden, og at det derfor gælder om at holde negativitetens sår åbent; at fortvivlelsen er en negativitet, uvidenheden om den en ny negativitet, og at man skal igennem enhver negativitet for at nå sandheden."103

Truth and subjectivity are always moving, always becoming. Perfection lies outside of the self and outside of history. Though more explicit in Kierkegaard, the perspective is comparable to the understanding of truth in Lessing as something drawing but intangible. In spite of the awareness of limitations, both Lessing and Kierkegaard are concerned with the possibilities of expression, and, in this pursuit, the imaginative represents a possibility of overcoming the logical gaps of a positive philosophy. The tragic lies within the realm of the imaginative, where the self is reimagined within fiction and, through fiction and imagination, the self is altered as it goes further in understanding itself. As Grøn states in the article on imagination and subjectivity, imagination is the capacity instar omnium, that qualifies the capacities of feeling, knowing, and willing. This space of possibility is connected to the turning point of reflection. There, the self is seen through the mirror of imagination that allows the self to observe itself through the other. The process of imaginatively becoming a reflected self is developed in the third and fourth acts in relation to the Sophoclean characters, Antigone and Philoctetes. These tragic characters are imagined at the point of losing their identities and their bonds with the exterior world. Through engagement with the suffering characters, the reader or audience is confronted with the image of isolation but also with the possibility of bridging isolated suffering in the shared condition of existence. The

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103 Grøn, A., 1997. *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal. P.98. "For Climacus as well as for Anti-Climacus, negativity is used to maintain the crucial insight: that the existing self is in becoming, and therefor it is necessary to keep open the wound of negativity; that despair is a negativity, ignorance of despair is a new negativity, and that one must go through every negativity to reach the truth.” My translation.
imaginative engagement with the other becomes the fragile foundation upon which we can begin to consider the self in relation to the other.

The Speculative and the Tragic - Observation and Participation
Both Lessing and Kierkegaard define their philosophies in contrast to the speculative. The speculative for Kierkegaard refers to the simplified Hegelian historicity and a positive philosophy turned in on itself. For Lessing, the speculative refers to a rationalistic approach to Christianity. The rationalization of Christianity is both a philosophical clarification of faith and dogma, and a systematization of the various elements making them internally coherent. The problem for Lessing is that the internal coherency and outward clarity of a polished Christianity undermines the individual aspect of faith. The path now trodden leads us towards a qualification of the tragic as a move away from descriptive philosophy that unintentionally assumes a detached subject. Where the speculative maintains the qualitative distance between perceiver and perceived, the tragic blurs this line, as the self is placed within the observed. Going back to the first act, this participation is described in the passionate response to the tragic, where the receiving individual places itself within the fiction and suffers with the tragic characters. In this perspective, the distinction between the speculative and the tragic can be described as the distinction between observation and participation.

The speculative as a term is etymologically connected to observation. It comes from the proto-indo-european ‘spec’ which is contained in the Latin ‘specere’ and present in English perspectives and aspects as points of view. In observation lies a gap between observer and observed. The speculative as observing leaves the subject outside of the object. Lessing and Kierkegaard are in opposition to a philosophy that only observes. The tragic can be said to represent the opposition to the speculative as it depends on imaginative participation rather than an understanding of the object. We place ourselves in fiction and we experience the tragic, while the speculative attempts to consider the world from the outside.

Lessing’s perspective on the limits of the speculative is most clearly expressed in connection with the publication of his deceased friend, Reimarus’ writings on rational Christianity. When published, these fragments stirred a heated debate in the 1770’ies. The fragment-controversy would last for years and shape the opposition in Lessing against the established intellectual circles. In his editorial comments to the fragments, Lessing portrays the clash between reason and faith, and ironically displays the speculative attempt to patch together these different sizes:

In the editorial comments, Lessing points to the mixed categories within a rationalized faith, where reason and revelation become means for a common end. He also points to the underlying structure of appropriating the external – making it comprehensible and controllable through interpretation. Tragedy for Lessing opposes the speculative observations and systematic ordering. Unlike the speculative, the tragic is immersive and participating. From his first definitions of the tragic in Briefwechsel Über das Trauerspiel to his later reflections in Hamburgische Dramaturgie, Lessing maintains that the passions are central to the tragic and that the inescapable purpose of the tragic is to awaken the passions of the audience through Mitleid. In the tragic, there is an interplay between author, actors and audience, which places the receiver inside the object. The self is considered as partaking in the action, as the movement on the scene is mimicked in the receiver. Unlike the ordering aspect of the speculative, where an internal logic is key, the tragic maintains lucidity in its mimetic form.

For Kierkegaard the speculative is both derived from and developed in opposition to the Hegelian use. In SD, Anticlimacus refers to Hegel in relation to the shortcomings of a philosophy, which fails to maintain room for the philosopher, and goes so far as to place the world historical philosopher in the dog house:


104 “Faith has become reason reinforced by miracles and portents, and reason has become faith reinforced by rational thought. The whole of revealed religion is nothing but an additional endorsement of the religion of reason. It either contains no mysteries at all, or if there are any, it is immaterial whether the Christian associates them with this or that concept or with no concept at all.” Lessing, Lessing., P.65
105 The passage most commonly referred to is from Briefwechsel Über das Trauerspiel. Brief an Nicolai, November 1756: “Die Tragödie soll Leidenschaften erregen.” Werke, IV, 161
106 “A thinker erects a huge building, a system, a system embracing the whole of existence, world history, etc., and if his personal life is considered, to our amazement the appalling and ludicrous discovery is made that he himself does not personally live in this
The speculative is a caricature of Anticlimacus’ consequential endpoint of a metaphysical system of thought. The text in SD mimics the absurd organizing impulse of the speculative philosophy as Anticlimacus incessantly organizes his paragraphs in a’s and b’s and α’s and β’s. The problem, which the quote above indicates, is that the philosopher thinks himself out of his system and ends up outside the building that is being constructed. The subject becomes a part of the structure approached from the outside and so it is objectified. This speculative pitfall is also connected to observation, as the observing philosopher more or less consciously leaves his own self outside of the observation. The speculative stands opposite to the tragic, as the tragic places both the author and the receiver inside the events on an emotional level. In Diapsalmata, the Aesthete departs from the passionate response to existence as the only certainty upon which we can begin to make sense of an existence in which we are inescapably taking part. As a first philosophy, the tragic is the opening point of an awareness of isolated suffering and the experience of being throw into existence. As a term, the tragic does not play the same continuous role in the authorship, but as a starting point it serves as a battering ram against the fortress of speculative philosophy.

The Tragic as Category
From the development so far, the intent is to argue that meaning is always constructed upon the passionate response to existence. That the building stones of philosophy are the emotions and language taken over from the older siblings of song and tragedy, and that science and speculative knowledge continually needs to be confronted by the black goat of the family. The tragic as a philosophical category contains a critique of a generalized historicity and an observing philosophy. It is a negative philosophy in the sense that it points towards its own limitations, but still within this scope constructive as it develops a vocabulary for the obscurity of the shared experience of suffering. This movement back towards obscurity is connected to the conflict with the speculative as detached observations. Within the wider scope of Kierkegaard’s anthropology and theology, the tragic is linked to the process of becoming a self and becoming free.

As a category and a concept, we have tried to frame the tragic within the wider authorship of Kierkegaard and to make out the tragic connection with Lessing. They differ from the Aristotelian approach to the tragic as an object huge, domed palace but in a shed alongside it, or in a doghouse, or at best in the janitor's quarters. Were he to be reminded of this contradiction by a single word, he would be insulted. For he does not fear to be in error if he can only complete the system—with the help of being in error.” KW SUD, 43-44
of research, and rather attempt to imaginatively engage with the tragic as a method for iterating the complexity of existence from within. This could be termed an aesthetic entry or an existential turn, but it would be going too far to claim the distinction to be revolutionary. It is an attempt at bringing out some of the subtle difficulties when writing about selfhood and it is mainly aimed against the quest for certainty, and in this the Aristotelian approach is seen as reflected in the objectification and historization of a Hegelian approach. The tragic in the Lessingian and Kierkegaardian context aims at a return to the suffering subject as the outset. This return to the suffering self as the outset and endpoint of reflection is far from the jubilant overcoming of the tragic as a personal accomplishment or attainment of authenticity. It’s a solitary, grumpy sort of existentialism, and one that refuses comforting illusions and persistently doubts its own worth.
Act III: Antigone
Overstepping the Lines of Modernity

"That which, generally speaking, should be the content of this little exploration will not be so much the relation between the tragic in ancient and in modern drama as it will be an attempt to show how the characteristic feature of the tragic in ancient drama is incorporated in the tragic in modern drama in such a way that what is truly tragic will become apparent.” SKS 2, 140

In the essay on the tragic, the Aesthete turns his attention towards a single individual. Antigone becomes the center of the argument as she is perceived in her ancient and modern form. Again, we are employing the developed perspectives on the tragic, as we abdicate from grand deductions and focus on a single tragic individual. Through this approach we also arrive at a different Antigone from the Hegelian perspective. The Antigone figure is often viewed in relation of the Hegelian analysis of the distinction between antiquity and modernity. This is considered in George Steiner’s Antigones. There, the Aesthete’s description of Sophocles’ Antigone is described in light of the Hegelian analysis of the distinctive traits of antiquity. This reading is also taken up and developed by Jon Stewart, as he considers the reimagined version of Antigone to be dependent upon Hegel’s definition of a modern tragedy. The difference between the Lessingian and the Hegelian approach, lies in the individual perspective that transcends the epochal distinctions. Antigone is more than an ancient character. As the Aesthete places himself within her narrative, she also becomes a modern character. Beyond the objectivity of the drama as a text written by Sophocles in a certain period, there is a subjective approach to the character that comes alive in the reading. The Aesthete takes us through the process of waking her to life in a modern context. This process happens in the imaginative

107 "That which, generally speaking, should be the content of this little exploration will not be so much the relation between the tragic in ancient and in modern drama as it will be an attempt to show how the characteristic feature of the tragic in ancient drama is incorporated in the tragic in modern drama in such a way that what is truly tragic will become apparent.” KW EO, 140

108 Stewart. P.218: “I would like to support Steiner’s general thesis that much of Kierkegaard’s Antigone interpretation is derived from Hegel’s. I would, however, like to develop Steiner’s claim somewhat and argue that Kierkegaard took to heart Hegel’s analysis of the distinction between ancient and modern tragedy and applied Hegel’s characterization of the modern notion of tragedy to the story of Antigone. In this way he modifies the story by Sophocles in order to make it into a modern tragedy. His entire analysis, although original in its development, is thus informed and motivated by Hegel’s characterization of the nature of modern tragedy.”
engagement with the text, where the receiver via negation allows the receiving self to take part in the tragedy.

Throughout this act, I will argue that the tragic objection to Hegel underlines the unity of the truly tragic as a constant that transcends the binary concepts of free and determined, substantial and subjective, suffering and acting, and finally also the binary contained in the title, the ancient and the modern. Antigone is the vessel for the argument, and she will be our guide, our Beatrice, when traversing these existential middle-grounds on the lines between the abstract concepts. Etymologically, transgression is derived from the act of stepping over or crossing lines. Antigone in her ancient form embodies this act of transgression. She openly defies the law put down by her king, Creon, as she buries her brother and she willingly suffers the punishment. Antigone oversteps the rule of law and she oversteps the later Hegelian distinctions between the ancient and the modern expression of the tragic. She is the central character in the essay on tragic, as she brings to light the truly tragic, which transcends the epochal categories. The confusing aspect of the essay in EE is that it aims both at making the distinction between the ancient and the modern tragic and to consolidate them in the truly tragic. In this act, we will focus on the unifying aspects of the tragic, as the reflected suffering that bridges the gap between antiquity and modernity as well as the long list of binary concepts that decorate A’s description of the tragic.¹⁰⁹ Through the tragic figure of Antigone in Sophocles’ and in the Aesthete’s own reimagined narrative, we will see how the tragic heroine oversteps these lines and challenges the concept of modernity through her own ambiguity. This does not entail that there is no distinction between the ancient and the modern, but shifting the focus towards the truly tragic softens the hard distinctions and allows for an alternative reading that comes closer to the focus on the individual. This turn towards the individual is underlined by the Aesthete’s analysis of a single tragic individual rather than antiquity as a whole.

If we return to the previously considered parallel between antiquity and modernity and the existential focus on the individual, there is both a gap and a connection between the immaturity of youth and the reflection of maturity. The point may be that reflection is already present at an early stage – even

¹⁰⁹ The tendency towards a binary structure when describing tragedy can still be seen, as is also noted by Eagleton. Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003). P.21: “The traditionalist conception of tragedy turns on a number of distinctions – between fate and chance, free will and destiny, inner flaw and outer circumstance, the noble and the ignoble, blindness and insight, historical and universal, the alterable and the inevitable, the truly tragic and the merely piteous, heroic defiance and ignominious inertia – which for the most part no longer have much force for us.”
in the child there is a sense of responsibility and guilt. The Aesthete finds examples of a reflected self in the tragedies of antiquity, and by claiming modernity to be qualitatively different, we might be doing antiquity an injustice. When we state that there is a connecting aspect in the truly tragic, the Aesthete claims that the extremes of the distinction are rarely present as more than abstract ideas. By allowing antiquity to become a mere abstract idea that mainly functions as a negation of the modern reality, modernity is losing sight of its origin and its present position as dependent upon the prior.

We have already been acquainted with Antigone in the first act and considered the external conditions of her narrative. In this act, we focus on the internal revolution expressed in the term reflection. Reflection is considered as the prism between the ancient and the modern as well as within the individual movement from immediacy towards maturity. The truly tragic always contains a level of reflection. Reflection covers a range of meaning in Kierkegaard but in the present case, we can take it to describe the awareness of the self in relation to the other. If the tragic hero was unreflected and if there was no question of guilt or personal responsibility for the suffering, it would not take part in the truly tragic. The act stands as an example of the possibilities that the Aesthete explores in the analysis a single tragic individual in order to arrive at a more nuanced perspective upon both antiquity and modernity.

The Fellowship of the Dying – Identifying with Antigone

“Ogsaa hun tilhører ikke den Verden, hvori hun lever, om end blomstrende og sund er dog hendes egentlige Liv et forborgent, ogsaa hun er, skjøndt levende, i en anden Forstand afdød, stille er dette Liv og skjult, Verden hører end ikke et Suk; thi hendes Suk er skjult i hendes Sjæls Løndom.” SKS 2, 155

When the Aesthete imagines his new heroine, the Antigone figure is described as existing somewhere between the living and the dead. In Sophocles’ version this state of being in between is expressed in her exclamation of sorrow on her way to the tomb where she will be buried alive. The Aesthete includes this cry of despair within his narrative around the reimagined Antigone. The modern Antigone is imprisoned by her secret

110 “She, too, does not belong to the world in which she lives; although healthy and flourishing, her real life is nevertheless hidden. She, too, although alive, is in another sense dead; her life is quiet and concealed. The world does not hear even a sigh, for her sighing is concealed in the secrecy of her soul.” KW EO, 157

111 *(850) ἵνα δοῦς θανὸς,
οὕτ' ἐν βροτοῖς οὕτ' ἐν νεκροῖς
μέτοικος, οὐ ζῶσιν, οὐ θανοῦσιν*)

(844). O weh Unselige!
which she cannot part from nor live with. The image of the grave and the prison in the ancient version is paralleled in the isolated suffering of the modern Antigone. Both the ancient and the modern version of Antigone are defined by their unbelonging – their homelessness among the living and the dead. The Symparanekromenoi as the fellowship which the lecture is addressed to, is also defined by their unbelonging. Symparanekromenoi is a word invented from two prepositions and the noun for a corpse or dead person, νεκρός, made into a verb in present participle form. Sym and para, indicate a shared movement towards the participle form of nekros indicating a durative process of dying. Through the emphasis of Antigone as living but bound by death and the curiously invented word of the Symparanekromenoi, there is a connecting line between the modern audience of the lecture and the ancient character. Antigone belongs in the grave and already in antiquity she is isolated from the living and the dead. The salutation to the dying draws attention towards the isolation of the ancient Antigone. In spite of the substantial claims of family and state, she is alone in her grave and she cries out in despair at her loneliness and at being bound between the living and the dead. The Aesthete identifies with her isolated suffering, and also invites his modern audience to identify. This unity in isolation points beyond the individual to the point, where isolation becomes a unifying factor. Loneliness and isolation are basic human experiences, and in addressing the fellowship, the Aesthete transcends his own isolation and connects with the lonely souls in the Symparanekromenoi.

When qualifying the distinction between the ancient and the modern, the Aesthete refers briefly to Philoctetes and his Greek desire to be heard. This is represented as opposed to the internalized suffering of the modern Antigone. Where Philoctetes is physically isolated from the other and his screams never reach the ears of a listener, the modern Antigone is psychologically isolated and her screams are of a silent kind. “Hun er Taushed netop fordi hun er hemmelighedsfuld, men denne Tilbagevenden i sig selv, som ligger i Taushed, giver hende en overnaturlig Holdning.” SKS 2, 156. And yet, Antigone is also heard and her despairing cry finds a receiving vessel in the Aesthete and his listeners. The cry can be seen in connection with the foreword to EE1, where the conquering hermit considers

Nicht unter Menschen, nicht unter Todten, Im Leben nicht heimisch noch im Tode!” SKS 2, 155
[alive to the place of corpses, an alien still, never at home with the living nor with the dead],” KW EO, 159

112 “Precisely because she is secretive, she is silence, but this turning back into oneself implicit in silence gives her a preternatural bearing.” KW EO, 158.
the distinction between the inner and the outer. He claims that hearing has become his preferred sense:

“Efterhaanden blev da Hørelsen mig den kjæreste Sands; thi ligesom Stemmen er Aabenbarelsen af den for det Ydre incommensurable Inderlighed, saaledes er Øret det Redskab, ved hvilket denne Inderlighed opfattes, Hørelsen den Sands, ved hvilken den tilegnes.” SKS 2, 11

Opposed to the visual outwardness of the speculative, the voice can reveal an inwardness. The inwardness alludes to the secretive and incommunicable condition that cannot be described in positive terms. The rewritten Antigone’s secret is voiced in the despairing cry of the ancient Antigone. In the foreword, this inwardness is described in the narrative of how Victor Eremita came to possess the papers of A and B. They were found in an old Secretair (a writing desk). ”Den var ikke af moderne Arbeide, temmelig brugt, og dog fængslede den mig.” SKS 2, 12 The secret compartment of the Secretair is revealed when Victor in a fit of passion attacks the furniture with an axe. The Secretary was found to contain the conflicting papers that Victor then attempts to put into order. Through the passionate approach to the secretive piece of unmodern furniture, a measure of insight is revealed. In like manner, the unexplained and despairing cry of the ancient Antigone can communicate the internalized secret of the modern Antigone. Even if the modern Antigone silently voices her secret, she is also the scream with which the isolated individuals of modernity desire to be heard. In the essay on the tragic, there is an immediate identification between the speaker, the listeners and the modern Antigone. She too does not belong in the world and in a sense is already dying, and so she gives voice to the existential dread of the modern audience. Being isolated in the grave and being entombed in silence rings a note of suffering connecting both to BA and SD, and the Aesthete manages to iterate an important aspect of this demonic and despairing suffering through the simply staged concept of the ancient voice of the tragic as transcending the isolation of modernity.

Transgressing on Modernity

From Descartes over Kant and into the 20th century phenomenology, discourse theory, deconstruction, and the concepts of self and authenticity, it seems to be fundamentally accepted, that existence somehow changes in modernity with the breakdown of first superstition and later religion, and with the turn towards political and ideological democratization. Through the

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113 “Gradually, then, hearing became my most cherished sense, for just as the voice is the disclosure of inwardness incommensurable with the exterior, so the ear is the instrument that apprehends this inwardness, hearing the sense by which it is appropriated.” KW EO1, 3
return to antiquity in the Aesthete’s essay and with the focus on isolated suffering as a constant of human existence across history, we are invited to doubt the concept of modernity as defining the individual. The Aesthete compares the ancient and the modern tragic and brings them together in the truly tragic. Antigone transcends the concepts of antiquity and modernity as she is representative of the truly tragic. She oversteps the lines of the historical distinctions, as we saw above, in the simple fact of being relatable for the Aesthete and his modern listeners, if we perceive her as an individual and not as the artistic expression of an archaic worldview. Through the transgression, the Antigone figure is used to indicate the weakness of a hard concept of modernity as describing a mode of existence qualitatively different from the ancient. We open this notion of transgression with the opening words from the essay on the tragic, where the Aesthete invites his listeners to question the lines of modernity for the sake of finding the truly tragic. Rather than looking for what distinguishes the ancient and the modern tragic, the Aesthete is guiding the gaze of his listeners towards the unifying aspect of the truly tragic:

"Dersom Een vilde sige: det Tragiske bliver dog altid det Tragiske, saa vilde jeg ikke have saa meget at erindre derimod, forsaavind som dog enhver historisk Udvikling bestandig ligger indenfor Begrebet Omfang. Under den Forudsættning nemlig, at der skalde være Mening i hans Ord, og det to Gange forekommende Ord: Tragisk, ikke skalde antages at danne det betydningsløse Parentheses-Tegn om et indholdsloset Intet, maatte hans Mening vel være denne, at Begrebetts Indhold ikke dethroniserede Begrebet, men berigede det. Paa den anden Side er det neppe undgaaet nogen Iagttagers Opmærksomhed, hvad det læsende og theaterbesøgende Publicum allerede troer sig i hjemlet Besiddelse af som sit Actie-Udbytte af de Kunsterfarnes Bestrebelser, at der er en væsentlig Forskjer mellem den antike og den moderne Tragedie. Vilde nu Een atter her gjøre Forskellen absolut gjældende, ved Hjælp af den først lumskelig og siden maaskee med Magt trænge sig ind mellem det Antik- og Modern-Tragiske, saa vilde hans Adfærd være ikke mindre urimelig end hin Førstes, idet han vilde, at det Fodfæste, der var ham selv nødvendigt, var det Tragiske selv, og at dette atter var saa langt fra at kunne adskille, at det netop forbandt det antike og det moderne Tragiske."114 SKS 2, 139

114 "If someone were to say: The tragic, after all, is always the tragic, I would not have very much to urge to the contrary, inasmuch as every historical development always lies within the sphere of the concept. On the assumption that his words have meaning and that the twice-repeated word "tragic" is not intended to form meaningless parentheses around an empty nothing, then his meaning might very well be that the content of the concept did not dethrone the concept but enriched it. On the other hand, it can scarcely have escaped the attention of any observer that there is an essential difference between the tragic, ancient and modern-something that the reading and theater-going public already considers its legal possession as its dividend from the enterprises of the experts in the art. But if, in turn, someone were to affirm the distinction absolutely and, on the basis of it, at first slyly and later perhaps forcibly press this distinction between the tragic in ancient
The opening lines of the essay on the tragic contain both an eloquent description of the purpose as well as an elegantly interwoven reflection on theory regarding tragedy and the tragic. The first issue is the relation between tragedy and history, where the Aesthete maintains that the truly tragic can fathom the historical development as it represents a meaningful constant. The truly tragic runs as an undercurrent beneath the descriptive efforts. The Aesthete then refers to the observers and to the followers of these observers. Hegel, of course, is the first someone, who attempts first by deceit and then by force to wring the modern apart from the ancient. The accusation is that Hegel by any means wishes to force the tragic into the shape of his own system. His behavior is not so different from the first person, that would be Aristotle, who also forcibly categorizes tragedy into an unflattering but practical shape.

By turning to follow Antigone along the lines of modernity we arrive at the truly tragic as the constant that transcends the speculative categories of detached observation. In this endeavor, the Aesthete plays an important role as the voice of criticism, a voice which disregards the constructions of history and closed logical systems, and may through his particular perspective employ an alternative interpretation of existence – one that challenges the super-individual system via the truly tragic as the shared experience of isolated suffering. The modern audience of the dying is invited to reflect themselves in the ancient version of Antigone. By engaging with her cry of isolated despair on a passionate level rather than speculatively interpreting her character, the modern audience might see within Antigone an ancient representation of their own experience of unbelonging.

The Passionate Path towards Reflection

"Er da Fornuften alene døbt,
ere Lidenskaberne Hedninger?
Young” SKS 2, 9

On the title page of the first part of EE, we find a brief reference to the English poet Edward Young’s *Night-Thoughts*. The title page of the second part of EE also contains an allusion to the passions as it is adorned with a
quote from François-René de Chateaubrun: "Les grandes passions sont solitaires, et les transporter au désert, c'est les rendre à leur empire." The doorposts of both parts of EE are decorated with reference to the passions. The line between passion and reason is questioned in the quote from Young, and in its simple form, the question rings a note that carries on throughout the first part of EE. By returning to the question here in connection with the essay on the ancient and modern tragic and in connection with the tragic figure of Antigone, it is with the hope of bridging the gap or transgressing on the borderline that detaches passion and reason.

Reflection begins in the passionate response to existence, and this movement is necessary for the individual to come an understanding of the self in relation to the other. Contained in the Aesthete’s line of questioning, is a critique of his age and the adoption of cool reason as an inadequate response to the chaos of existence. The theoretical mastering of the world and the self which is at the Aesthete’s disposal is questioned as an incomplete answer. In the following, we will investigate the tragic as an attempt to incorporate the passions into the interpretation of the Antigone figure, who is also balanced on the edge between the rational and the passionate. Compositlonally, she is placed between the immediacy of the emotions in Diapsalmata and the Don Juan figure in De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier eller det Musikalsk-Erotiske on the one side of the essay on the tragic and the deviously reflected figure of the Seducer on the other. The question of reflection is placed between the two forms of seduction, and this will come to play a significant role once we reach the fifth act and the qualification of a tragic freedom.

In The Heart of Knowledge: Kierkegaard on Passion and Understanding, Rick Anthony Furtak develops the role of passion in Kierkegaard’s thought. Furtak stresses the impossibility of detaching understanding from the passionate response to existence. He finds the ideal of objective thought to be criticized throughout Kierkegaard’s works as a method forgetful of the thinking subject. If one does not include the passions into the psychological and philosophical equations, the result will simply be lacking in complexity. Furtak considers Kierkegaard return to the passions as a part of a polemical campaign against “the preponderance of “objective thinking”.

\[\text{116} \] Chateaubrun: “The great passions are solitary, and to take them into the desert is to give them to their empire.” KW EO2,

which fails to take account of the thinker as a person involved in living a human life.”  

The passions in this context are considered as valid objections against the simplifications of the dispassionate interpretation of existence. Understanding is not the issue, but what we could call the sterilization of understanding through a singular emphasis on objectivity and certainty. Furtak compares the charge against the objectivity of truth to the opening passage in KG, where those are considered conceited who are so afraid of being deceived that they dare not believe in love.  

Returning to the essay on the tragic, the Antigone figure in both her ancient and modern form is presented as a passionate young woman, but also an individual who comes to terms with her passions and understands herself well enough to be at peace with her tragic fate. This is a point where Kierkegaard departs from the Hegelian interpretation of Antigone, and adopts a perspective that contains more of a challenge than would appear at first sight. Based on the more detailed comparisons of the Hegelian and the Kierkegaardian analysis of Antigone discussed previously, the distinguishing perspective on the tragic and the tragic figure of Antigone lies in the qualification of the terms ancient and modern and the internal logic of their distinction. On the role of the passions, Pattison expresses the point clearly, when he states that Kierkegaard wholly changes the game and that Hegel would blush at some of the implications of Kierkegaard’s rather radical reinterpretation of both antiquity and modernity as well as the Antigone figure.  

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118 Furtak. P.114.  
119 Furtak. P.120: “The kind of conviction to which he refers is not akin to a belief formed based on the outcome of a proof, and this is why Kierkegaard suggests that we cannot simply reason ourselves into such a feeling of belief. Far from being irrational, however, it does have a “logic” of its own, as evidenced by the fact that it is a conviction, a passionate disposition that enables us to know significant truths that would otherwise be inaccessible. As Kierkegaard states early in Works of Love, we can be deceived by not believing what is true; in other words, if our passionate attunement is too guarded or distrustful, then some things will remain beyond the reach of our awareness.”  
120 “Med den Dybde, hendes Sjæl har, maa hun nødvendig elske med en overordentlig Lidenskab, naar hun bliver forelsket.” SKS 2, 160  
121 Pattison, Georg, 2013. Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism: Selected Essays. OUP Oxford. P. 156: “If Kierkegaard’s essayist has therefore found a ‘solution’ to a Hegelian dilemma, it is only by virtue of having changed the rules of the game.” And P.161: “The Sickness unto Death contains some of Kierkegaard’s most abstract formulations, as in the definition of the self in Section I A.a, where he uses the Hegelian categories with an abandonment that might have brought Hegel himself to blush.”
rules in Kierkegaard’s philosophy is connected to the passions, which are incorporated into his epistemology and into the durative process of becoming a self and becoming free. The passionate response to existence in both laughter and tears are necessary means to becoming reflected and in this context the reinterpretation of Antigone adds another layer of opacity. Rather than the explanatory approach of mapping out her motives in the ancient representation, the emphasis on the passionate aspect of her character makes her less comprehensible from a speculative perspective but also more identifiable as a complex individual because the receiver relates to her suffering.

The passionate response to existence is also crucial to the Aesthete as he is presented in EE. This character, who is at once at the mercy of his passions but also poetically responsive, reappears in other texts and passages, and Furtak finds another example in the young man from G, who is compared to the poet as he is receptive to the passions. In this perspective, the suffering of the Antigone figure also stands parallel to the poetic suffering of the Aesthete and the young man from G, and we will return to this passionate young man again in the fourth act, where we consider the description of his suffering in relation to that of Philoctetes and Job. The result of Furtak’s investigation of the role of the passions in moving the individual towards a fuller understanding only partially covers the gap between passion and reason. The frame of the article is adjusted to the main aim of portraying the educative aspects of emotion, and so Furtak is concerned with the vaguer term understanding rather than reason. This does smooth out some of the difficulties, but perhaps at the expense of reason, the function of which is not pursued. There is then, still reason to examine this relation between the passions and reason further and to question the incorporation of the quote from Edward Young on the title page. The educative aspect of the passions connects with the previously developed considerations from AUE, where Climacus hails his sufferings as his teachers in the critique of the positive philosophy. This does not exclude reason as irrelevant, but denies its supremacy, and looks rather to the complexity of the interrelation. On this point stands Antigone, as the image of the tragic reflection over the self as

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122 Furtak. P. 116 “He credits the “poets” with recognizing that it is rare to cultivate one’s own loving subjectivity (or one’s passionate outlook) rather than divesting oneself of this in order to become “objective” (JP § 4537); and in Repetition, the “young man” is described by Constantin Constantius as “a poet” because he is especially receptive to significant passionate impressions (R 1946, 159).6 In each of these cases, the sort of insight associated with poetry or poets offers us a glimpse of some truth about the world or about human existence; yet this mode of reason differs from logical calculation that is relatively neutral, without either musical resonance or personal meaning.”
both passionate and rational, as both the victim of fate and the rational agent. In her reimagined form, her judgement is not clouded by her passions, and she perceives both her familial claim and her heart’s desire, and yet she has no clear course to steer. Her position questions the ruling capacity of reason and through her dilemma, the claim that freedom as dependent reason is depicted as incomplete.

The Epic Suffering in Everyday Existence
In a short and compelling book on Kierkegaard’s connection with Shakespeare, Johannes Sløk emphasizes the role of the passions. Sløk explains Kierkegaard’s responsiveness to Shakespeare as a consequence of Kierkegaard’s eye for the significance of the passions. Sløk regards passionate life as mainly belonging to the extraordinary, maintaining that a normal life in the ordered world would be considered a life under the guidance of reason. Antigone, in Sløk’s analysis, is an example of the extraordinary, and like the tragic figures in Shakespeare, her emotional life carries within it an understanding of her own grandeur as the final descendant of Oedipus, and in the reimagined version by the Aesthete, as the last keeper of the odious secret. This is the immediate and dramatic aspect of the Antigone figure, the daughter of kings and the combatant of fate and filial duty. But this only makes her character epic. There is also another aspect to her, one that attention already has been drawn towards, as she is also a reflection of Kierkegaard in his all too ordinary state of broken heartedness. Ordinariness is also projected on to the passionate heroine, and though

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123 Johannes Sløk, Shakespeare og Kierkegaard, Berlingske leksikonbibliotek, 60 (Berlingske, 1972). P121:”Det er altså ideen om lidenskabens fundamentale rolle i menneskelivet, Kierkegaard har fået øje på hos Shakespeare og har tilsluttet sig.”

“It is the idea of the fundamental role played by the passions in human life, which Kierkegaard has spotted in Shakespeare and adopted.” My translation

124 Sløk. P122: ”Det er lidenskaben, der kan forlede et menneske til at bryde ud af den givne orden, begå fundamentalforbrydelsen; men det er også lidenskaben, der kan drive et menneske til at gennemføre den store renselsesprocess og i den gerning bringe sig selv som sonoffer. Men lidenskaben er ikke det ordinære, der må kræves af enhver. Livet i den ordnede verden er et liv ud af fornuftens vejledning.”

"It is passion, which can lead a person to break out of the established order, to commit the fundamental transgression; but it is also passion, which can lead one to accomplish the great process of restoration and in that process offer up oneself as sacrifice. But the passionate life is not ordinary and it does not befall everyone. Life in the ordered world is a life guided by reason.” My translation.

125 ”Hidtil er hun kun en episk Figur, og det Tragiske i hende har kun episk Interesse.” SKS 2, 160

"Hitherto she has been only an epic character, and the tragic in her has had only epic interest.” KW EO1, 162
powerful flow of emotion is more befitting an epic character with external reasons for suffering, she is also representative of the most mundane and commonplace of internalized suffering.

In this context, we could question the monopoly of reason in the ordinary life that Sløk underlined. The suffering of the Aesthete is not epic material and yet he voices the passionate response to existence beautifully and in unabashed identification with epic characters like Antigone and Philoctetes. Sløk’s distinction between the passionate and the rational as opposite variations of existence overlooks the ordinariness of the Aesthete. The placement of the Antigone figure within the first part of EE is also indicative of a reflection on the relation between the strong representation of emotion in fiction and the mundane suffering of everyday existence. The tragic heroine only comes to life by the identifiable pain invested in her by the poet or playwright. The audience is not moved and does not weep for her on account of her nobility but because her suffering is relatable. The clash then, between the passions and reason, is fascinating because it is present within the ordinary as well as the extraordinary. The inherent doubt connected to the balance is a fundamental and universal concern, and not a conflict that can be once and for all resolved. This quick remark on the tragic and the passionate mode of existence as a common denominator points towards the role of the passions within each individual’s movement towards reflection.

The Moment of Reflection
Compositionally, the essay on the tragic is situated between the immediate stages of the erotic explored by the Aesthete in *De umiddelbare erotiske Stadier eller det Musikalsk-Erotiske* and the consideration of three famous victims of seduction in *Skyggerids*. Later follows also the seducer’s diary, and a seduction that even the Aesthete detaches himself from and condemns. There is a progression from the immediate, passionate erotic desire of Don Juan towards the premeditated deception of the Seducer, and this movement goes through the tragic. Parallel to this movement, the tragic stands as the turning point for the individual. This moment of reflection is where the self sees itself reflected in the suffering of the other. The moment of reflection is both an instant and a recurring movement as the tragic reoccurs repeatedly and the individual is continuously confronted with the other. It is within this representation of reflection, we will move on to consider Lessing’s tragedy *Emilia Galotti*, where we also find a seducer passing over the border between immediacy and reflection at the tragic event of Emilia’s death. First though, we will have a look at how the movement from the immediate to the reflected is portrayed in EE.
The Aesthete finds a profound progression in the distinction between Mozart’s *Don Juan* and Goethe’s *Faust* in the movement from an unreflected seducer of many to the reflected seduction of a single woman, which is later performed by Johannes the Seducer. Both forms of seduction are related to the passionate impulse to conquer the object of desire but the deceit in the first contains an element of innocence which the latter lacks. The tragic detaches the post-tragic seduction from the purely sensual expressed in the Don Juan figure. The question here, is what the tragic entails in this movement in the passions from the immediate towards the reflected.

"Dette er den egentlige Forfører, den æsthetiske Interesse er her ogsaa en anden, nemlig: hvorledes, Methoden. Derfor ligger der noget meget Dybsindigt i, hvad der maasker er undgaaet de Flestes Opmærksomhed, at Faust, der reproducerer Don Juan, kun forfører 1 Pige, medens Don Juan i hundredivisi; men denne ene Pige er da ogsaa i intensiv Forstand ganske anderledes forført og tilintetgjort end alle de; Don Juan har bedraget; netop fordi Faust som Reproduktion har Aandens Bestemmelse i sig. En saadan Forførers Kraft er Talen, det vil sige Løgner. Jeg hørte for nogle Dage siden en Landsoldat tale med en Tredie om en Anden om en Tredie, der havde bedraget en Pige; han gav ikke nogen vidtfløjtig Beskrivelse, og dog var hans Udtryk ganske fortræffeligt: »han kunde saadan med Løgn og saadan.< En slig Forfører af en ganske anden Art end Don Juan, er væsentlig forskellig fra ham, som man og kan see deraf, at han og hans Virksomhed er i høi Grad umusikalsk og i æsthetisk Henseende ligger indenfor Bestemmelsen af det Interessante. Gjenstanden for hans Attraa er derfor ogsaa, naar man tænker ham æsthetisk rigtig, noget Mere end det blot Sandelige.” SKS 2, 103

126 The image of Don Juan as an unreflected seducer is also found in an article in Fædrelandet by Kierkegaard: "Det er let nok at give Don Juan lidt Reflexion, i Operaen er det netop Konsten at holde den borte, for at Don Juan ikke med lidt Reflexion skal blive en maadelig Figur og Operaen mislykket i Constructionen." Artikel i fædrelandet, *En Flygtig Bemærkning betreffende en enkelthed i Don Juan.*

"It is easy to endow Don Giovanni with a little reflection, but in the opera the art is precisely to keep it out so that Don Giovanni does not become an ordinary character and the opera structurally flawed.” KW, The Corsair Affair, 35

127 "Therefore there is something very profound (perhaps most people have not noticed it) in the fact that Faust, who reproduces Don Juan, seduces only one girl, whereas Don Giovanni seduces by the hundreds; but in intensity this one girl is seduced and destroyed in an entirely different way than all those Don Giovanni deceived—precisely because Faust as a reproduction has an intellectual-spiritual quality. The power of a seducer like that is speech: that is, the lie. A few days ago, I heard a soldier speaking with another soldier about a third one who had deceived a girl; he did not describe it in detail, and yet his expression was excellent: 'He knew how to do it with lies and all that.' Such a seducer is of a kind entirely different from Don Giovanni, differs from him essentially, which can also be seen in this, that he and his activities are extremely unmusical and aesthetically fall within the category of the interesting. Therefore, from the properly esthetic point of view, the object of his desire is also something more than the merely sensuous.” KW EO1, 99-100.
The image of the two forms of seduction related in the quote concerns the method of seduction of Don Juan and that of Faust. The distinction, the Aesthete claims, relies on the representation of Faust having an intellectual-spiritual quality unlike the more musical Don Juan. For the Aesthete, this changes the second type of seducer as the object of seduction no longer is purely sensual. The question is now, when does the object of seduction change from being purely sensual to containing an intellectual-spiritual quality? And when does seduction fall under the category of the interesting?

When coming to terms with the modern tragic in the essay, the Aesthete considers anxiety as reflection and he describes anxiety in the terms of erotic love. Anxiety is considered as different from the sorrow connected to the ancient tragic, but anxiety as reflection carries the element of sorrow within it. The movement from sorrow to anxiety becomes the moment of interest:


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There is an element of the sensual in reflection, seeing that anxiety desires sorrow passionately and erotically. The modern version of the Antigone figure is attached to her sorrow in this sense – she is the bride of sorrow and she brings the dowry of pain. The interplay between terms sorrow, pain and anxiety on one side and the bride, the erotic and passionate, and the desiring gaze establishes a parallel between the existential condition of the individual and the erotic as the encounter with the other. The former are related to the self as descriptive of the sense of unbelonging. The latter are connected to the other as external to the self. Here the opposite to the self-centered anxiety is found in love’s preoccupation with the beloved object. The collision between the two are represented in Antigone who as at once secluded by her secret and passionately in love. In the image of the arrow piercing her heart, the Aesthete expresses the collision that is not instant like the arrow but

128 "Here at once I have a definition of the tragic in modern times, for an anxiety is a reflection and in that respect is essentially different from sorrow. Anxiety is the vehicle by which the subject appropriates sorrow and assimilates it. Anxiety is the motive power by which sorrow penetrates a person's heart. But the movement is not swift like that of an arrow; it is consecutive; it is not once and for all, but it is continually becoming. As a passionately erotic glance craves its object, so anxiety looks craveingly upon sorrow. Just as the quiet, incorruptible eye of love is preoccupied with the beloved object, so anxiety's self-preoccupation is with sorrow." KW EO1, 154-55
successive, durative. The moment of vision consolidates the before and after and contains both. Anxiety is the moving force, which sorrow penetrates into the heart. The image of the arrow is taken up again in the final paragraph of the essay, when the rewritten Antigone’s secret is compared to the arrow which pierced the heart of Epaminondas. There is a finality to the arrow in the heart, but it is the durative finality of the dying rather than the perfective sense of an ending.

The moment of vision as related to anxiety is developed in Niels Nymann Eriksen’s doctoral thesis. When describing the moment of vision in BA, Haufniensis makes a reference to the glance of Ingeborg, which makes little sense in its context, but as Eriksen reveals, the reference is formidable for the purpose of describing Øjeblikket. He explains the narrative referring to Ingeborg in Esaias Tegner’s Frithiof’s Saga, where two ill-fated lovers lose each other. Ingeborg is the daughter of a king and she grows up with Frithiof, and though he is not of royal birth they fall in love. When he asks for her hand, he is sent off to the Orkneys as punishment and Ingeborg must marry another. As Frithiof leaves on his ship, he believes that they can overcome adversity. Though Ingeborg has given up hope, she pretends to believe as well as they part. The moment of vision refers to Ingeborg as she is standing by the ocean for years on end gazing out across the ocean that her lover crossed, but it also refers to the specific moment when they said goodbye. In that moment, Ingeborg alone knew that they would never see each other again, but she could not tell her lover for fear he would revolt and thereby lose his life. In that moment, she had already lost him, though he was standing in front of her. In that moment of vision, she was already gazing at an empty ocean and she was already lost to the present. This image of the moment containing the past and the future corresponds to the moment depicted by the Aesthete as the turning point of the subjective reflection. At this point, in the moment of vision as the turning point of reflection, the tragic plays a significant role as the prism between passionate immediacy and reflected awareness within the individual. After the moment of coming to a tragic awareness, the unreflected, substantial anxiety of Don Juan is no longer possible.

129 Eriksen. P.69-76.
130 “Der er en Angst i hiint Blink, det er som om det i det dybe Mørke fødtes i Angst – saaledes er Don Juans Liv. Der er en Angst i ham, men denne Angst er hans Energi. Det er ikke en i ham subjectivt reflekteret Angst, det er en substantiel Angst.” SKS 2, 131
“There is an anxiety in that flash; it is as if in that deep darkness it were born in anxiety—just so is Don Giovanni’s life. There is an anxiety in him, but this anxiety is his energy. In him, it is not a subjectively reflected anxiety; it is a substantial anxiety.” KW EO1, 129
Just as the first part of EE departs from the internalized suffering of the Aesthete, the development of anxiety and reflection pertains to the individual rather than a cultural progression. When the Aesthete addresses the ancient and modern tragic, it has less to do with the abstract notion of antique perceptions of fate and free will and more to do with the individual’s continual movement towards reflection. After the tragic awareness of the other, the sensually passionate is no longer an option, and what was sensually demonic in the Don Juan figure, becomes spiritually reflected in the Faust figure:

“Don Juan er altsaa Udtrykket for det Dæmoniske, bestemmet som det Sandselige, Faust er Udtrykket for det Dæmoniske, bestemmet som det Aandelige, den christelige Aand udelukker.” SKS 2, 95

The idea then of addressing the essay on the tragic within the frames of passion and reason is to come to this point of the tragic. Compositionally the tragic is connected to the moment of vision, where the individual becomes spiritually reflected. The movement towards becoming a self contains this awareness, which is not particular to any age, but a universal transition pertaining to the individual. In a jesting and ironizing manner, the Aesthete with his particular perspective on art and the artistic expression of the condition of existence, mocks the speculative philosophers in their attempt to detach modernity from antiquity, when they describe the modern age as reflected. In the same way, the Aesthete mocks the idea of a morally developed individual that is beyond throes of passion. The turning point between immediacy and reflection is found to be durative, and so the gap between antiquity and modernity becomes a relative question. The critique of the concept of modernity is based on this successive aspect of reflection as always moving. The Aesthete establishes this critique on the basis of the existential journey towards the self as never ending, and part of this critique is aimed at the optimistic notion of being in control of oneself. It relates back to the Howitz-question on accountability, and so questions both the individual and the age as to its maturity. The parallel between the individual movement and the cultural movement undermines the positive expectations for a modernity that overcomes the wrongs of the past. It is a pessimistic view of the present, but Kierkegaard’s present being past, it would now seem safe to conclude that that particular present had not seen the worst of it yet.

131 “Don Juan, then, is the expression for the demonic qualified as the sensuous; Faust is the expression for the demonic qualified as the spiritual that the Christian spirit excludes.” KW EO1, 90
Antigone’s Alternative Claim
The third act can be seen as the final setup of the pieces before the unfolding of the conflict, where we will explore the possibilities of engaging with the concepts of self and freedom through the characteristics of two tragic figures. The Aesthete has outlined an alternative method in the essay on the tragic. He turns the focus away from the grand deductions of the speculative philosopher towards the single tragic individual represented in the Antigone figure in her ancient and modern representation. The panoptic gaze of the philosopher is challenged by the narrow focus of the Aesthete. By developing his argument in an interaction with aesthetic reflections, the Aesthete arrives at an alternative interpretation of his age and brings into question the entire concept of modernity.

The Aesthete uses Antigone as the vessel to convey the complexity and the ambiguity of existence. He departs from an identification with the individual rather than fitting the individual into the preconceived shape of antiquity and modernity. This departure reflects a possibility in the Aesthete’s work of opening another door into philosophy through the imaginative engagement with the other. The method is depends on the listeners identifying with the fictional characters of Don Juan, Faust, and Antigone. Through identification with the characters and by reimagining them in new situations, the Aesthete invites the listeners to question the general assumptions on modernity both as an age and as an image of the mature individual. The argument is not driven by logic in a strict sense, but by the imaginative engagement of placing the self within the fiction.

The result of this reading of the Antigone figure and the focus on the truly tragic rather than the epochal distinctions, goes against the concept of modernity on both the individual and the cultural level. There is a disillusionment in the Aesthete’s engagement with the tragic that undermines the individual claim of reflection as well as the historical. The moment of reflection is considered in the individual, where the movement is perceived as gradual, successive opposed the lightning strike of revelation. Blurring the lines between immediacy and maturity in the individual achieves a similar effect when applied to cultural history. The concept of modernity rests on the assumption of having reached a state of reflection that allows us to perceive ourselves and our age clearly. The Aesthete challenges this view through the tragic return to obscurity and uncertainty in the reimagined Antigone.
Act IV: Philoctetes
The Tragic Movement towards the Self

In the fourth act, we are reacquainted with Sophocles’ Philoctetes, whom we have already met in the first act. In this act, the goal is through his character and the tragedy by Sophocles, to develop the implications of isolated suffering in the process of becoming a self. The tragic character will be confronted with the more modern renditions of the tragedy and also with his religious counterpart in Job in a dialogue with the aesthetical reflections on the self as developed by the Aesthete in EE and Constantin Constantius in G. G famously opens with Diogenes, who in a simple display proves the possibility of movement by walking back and forth on a stage. For Constantin, the stage itself becomes the setting for his interest in the self and the possibility of movement. The theatre is where identities shift and where the onlooker is allowed to reimagine the self. Constantin’s engagement with the theatre provides the background for developing the tragic notion of selfhood. This development is connected to Arne Grøn’s consideration of negativity in SD, where the path through negation of the self is the path towards becoming a self. Constantin brings the notion of selfhood into the imaginary sphere of the theatre, where the self via negation places itself within the other. The theatre is a reflection of the spectacle of everyday life. It blurs the lines between fiction and actuality, as the mimetic nature of drama makes the play a representation of both the grand narratives and the most relatable of the passions. When we now focus on Philoctetes, the main interest is the representation of his isolation. His loneliness is both monstrous in its duration and combined with the physical pain, but it is also relatable as a representation of the unbridgeable gap between the self and the other. Every individual in its thrownness is confronted with the strangeness of everything outside of the self, and this is also part of the tragic condition. In her introduction to Rethinking Tragedy, Rita Felski describes part of the fascination with the tragic in recent years as connected to Shiller’s schism between the individual and the world within which it is stranded:

"To become one self, one must through the negativity of not being oneself. That was the thesis discussed in Chapter 3. Everything depended on what we understood by not being oneself.” My translation
“Friedrich von Schiller is often hailed as one of the most influential architects of the view that human existence is essentially tragic, epitomizing a painful an irrevocable schism between the individual and the world in which he finds himself stranded.”

This schism is usually attributed to the modern condition of existential homelessness. We have already considered the ancient Antigone’s cry of despair as an expression of unbelonging, and as we now consider the expression of isolated suffering in Philoctetes and compare it to that in the Book of Job, it would appear that this feeling of isolation is not only particular to modernity. Isolation is considered a universal aspect of existence irrespective of the age, but the expression of isolation also points beyond itself exactly in this point of the unifying factor of isolation. The idea of a detached self implies a central core of the self. The tragic approach to the self allows us to question this static center of the self, because it does not account for movement and development. There is a movement in Sophocles’ version of Philoctetes, that goes beyond the perception of the subject or self as a detached and static entity, but the movement remains in the shadows of the aesthetic ambiguity. What Constantin does very elegantly is to integrate these aesthetic observations on selfhood into a nuanced reflection over subjectivity as a constant theme in both the ancient tragedy by Sophocles and the religious narrative of Job. These stories confront both the passionate response to alienation and isolation as well as the desire to overcome the gap between the self and the other.

Sophocles’ Philoctetes
Lessing and Kierkegaard both make use of Sophocles’ Philoctetes in coming to terms with the tragic as a representation of human suffering. We return to Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos, where he has suffered in anguish and isolation for ten years. Philoctetes expresses his suffering in the continued questioning of the justice of gods and cruel fate. Through the years of isolated suffering, his questioning has left him close to a monomaniacal madness. His resentment and obsession with revenge over those who wronged him seems just, but in the end, when hope finally arrives, he refuses to accept wisdom from anyone else. Only by the divine interference of Herakles in the end of the play is he brought back to sanity. There is little action in the tragedy and what movement takes place in the drama lies within the three characters’ development. Philoctetes and Neoptolemus both rectify their initial positions – they develop a further layer of understanding through the events and through the interaction with the other characters. Odysseus, as contrast, does not change his position or develop through engagement with the others – his position remains a constant. Movement in the tragedy

133 Felski. P. 2.
becomes possible through engagement with the other. This movement is depicted in the developing characters as they are confronted with each other and forced to reconsider their positions.

**Philoctetes – Isolated Suffering**

Philoctetes carries the burden of both title and plot, and there are references to his earlier exploitations within the narrative: How he came to own the mighty bow of Herakles after helping him escape his mortal suffering and become a fully divine being, and how this gift has brought ten years divinely ordained suffering upon him. The mortal man was brought to ruin through external events and, in the narrative, fate reaches out for him through Odysseus, who needs the man that was left for dead on Lemnos. In the opening dialogue, we learn that Philoctetes and the bow of Herakles have been prophesied to be the only means for breaching the walls of Troy. The banished hero is once again needed and he is found marooned on the island where Odysseus left him ten years prior.

The static starting point of the drama is the involuntary isolation of Philoctetes. After being punished by the gods with his festering wound, the hero was abandoned by his fellow men to survive by his own means in the wilderness. Isolation is at the center of the tragedy and also in the comments on Philoctetes in the essay on the tragic in EE, where his involuntary isolation stands in opposition to the internalized suffering of the Aesthete’s rewritten Antigone. The solitary existence of Philoctetes is emphasized by all the voices in the drama, and it stands equal to the excruciating pain, when the chorus or Neoptolemus express their pity, and when Philoctetes himself laments his fate. In the opening words, Odysseus describes the scene where the tragedy unfolds:

“This is Lemnos, the sea surrounds it. No man lives here – even steps here.” (3-6) \(^{134}\)

As the tragedy begins, so Philoctetes begins his development from the state of isolation. He broods his revenge, but finds no response other than the echoes of his own misery. The physical isolation of the island underlines his psychological alienation. Being deprived of human company, Philoctetes has come closer to the wild animals. The chorus pities him for his sorry state of living, exposed to the weather and dependent upon whatever beast he can

bring down with his arrows. There is a loss of culture in his isolation, which takes with it a part of his humanity. In the wilderness he has grown wild – and much of the pity is based on this degradation of the former hero:

“This man may well be no inferior in birth to the best-born, yet he lies alone, apart from all others, except the spotted and hairy beasts – pitiable in his hunger, in his sufferings, his miseries without cure.” (185-188)

Another aspect of his loneliness, and one crucial to the depiction of his character, is the maddening effect of isolation. The echoes of his own misery come back to him distorted in his loneliness. Madness comes upon Philoctetes as a consequence of his isolation and his physical pain. The detachment from the other and the lack of sympathy and participation drives him to insanity – he loses his mind. He loses his sense of self when he is bereft of reflection in the other. Initially, Philoctetes is found in this state of isolation and madness – pitiable, but at the verge of losing his humanity. This state changes when he meets Neoptolemus and he finds a sympathetic receptacle for his suffering. In this, the young Neoptolemus was a necessary tool for Odysseus. It is tempting already to point out the likeness between the youth of Neoptolemus and the young man in G. In both cases, youth or immaturity represents an openness towards the other and a possibility for movement. For this reason, Neoptolemus is needed by Odysseus in his plan. Odysseus needs the innocent youth to draw Philoctetes out of his violent madness. Chronologically, Ajax was already dead, and in that narrative by Sophocles, Odysseus was unable to draw him out of his madness.

There is a movement in Philoctetes at the moment when he engages with Neoptolemus. At first, this movement is only on the side of Philoctetes, as Neoptolemus is still acting on the orders of Odysseus and playing his part in the scheme to lure Philoctetes into parting with his bow. This first movement is a step back towards sanity. After his isolation, Philoctetes now longs for a change and a return to a life in community with others. A level of hope is

135 “And babbling Echo, appearing in the distance, merely throws back to him his pitiable complaints.” (189-90)
“and often the mountain of Hermes sent back to me in answer my own voice echoing, groaning, as I weathered the storm.” (1655-60)
restored to Philoctetes by the young Neoptolemus. In his isolation, Philoctetes is trapped but through interaction, movement is possible. This movement of the self depends on the other as outside of the self. As a tragic character, this is the interest that both Lessing and Kierkegaard point towards in Philoctetes. In the fourth section of *Laokoon*, Lessing is curious as to the relation between the suffering of Philoctetes and the sympathy that his expression of pain induces in Neoptolemus. Within the narrative, there is an effect of *Mitleid* through suffering, and the ethical development of the individual is achieved through the expression of suffering. For Kierkegaard, the interest is divided. In the context of EE, the suffering of Philoctetes is opposed to that of Antigone and the contrast lies in the involuntary isolation in Philoctetes vs. the proud, intentional isolation of the rewritten Antigone. The contrast is that the ancient sorrow desires a listener while the modern pain desires solitude. The Aesthete doesn’t acknowledge that the proud isolation of Antigone is also present in Sophocles’ Philoctetes, when he would rather suffer and die than bargain with those who caused his long suffering. In the context of *G*, the contrast lies between the suffering of Philoctetes and that of Job. Here isolation also plays a role, and perhaps it can be used to clarify the use of Philoctetes in EE. The suffering of Philoctetes is dependent upon expression. His suffering is truly Greek as it has to be expressed and heard by others.\textsuperscript{136} The suffering of Job is also expressed, but his friends never accept his innocence in suffering. The suffering remains a conflict between Job and God, and so the expression of suffering becomes internalized. The gap between the aesthetic and religious suffering, which the Aesthete does not cross, is crossed by the young man in *G*. There is a movement from the aesthetical and tragic towards the religious. There is a development towards Jobs suffering in the young man, and in this light, the tragic suffering is seen as a step in the movement towards a religious suffering as shall be considered when we return to the comparison of Philoctetes and Job.

After this point, Philoctetes gains more trust in Neoptolemus and returns to his humanity. The opening of the self towards the other is represented in the scene where Philoctetes offers Neoptolemus to handle his bow. In the Greek text there is a play on words between bow and life,\textsuperscript{137} and the moment when Philoctetes hands Neoptolemus his bow, he places his life in the hands of the other. In Lessing’s argument, this is the moment where Philoctetes gives up his agency for the sake of company – and this is the moment where,

\textsuperscript{136} This is taken up below, in *Aesthetic Suffering and the Call to the Other*.
\textsuperscript{137} As noted in the foreword to the English translation: “He lives by his bow, and the association of bow (biós) and life (biós) is latent in Sophocles’ Greek.” Clay, D., 2003. *Philoctetes*. Oxford University Press. P. 8.
being offered the responsibility of the other, Neoptolemus becomes aware of his duty towards the other. At this point in the narrative only one character has changed. Philoctetes has moved towards the other and has come out of isolation by placing his life in the hands of Neoptolemus. At this stage, Neoptolemus is still playing out his part in the plans of Odysseus, but the trust that Philoctetes has shown him is beginning to make him question his role. When Philoctetes later learns of Odysseus’ plan and the role that Neoptolemus plays in it, he despairs, realizing that he has been tricked and has voluntarily given up both his means for survival and his hope for revenge. With this realization, his existence becomes meaningless, and in his speech to Neoptolemus he accuses him of stealing his life:

“In seizing my bow, you have snatched, too, my life.
Give it to me—I beg you—give it back—
please—
By the gods of your fathers, do not rob me of my life” (995-96)

For Lessing this is the point where the audience is moved by the utter helplessness of Philoctetes. He has lost all agency and is at the mercy of the other characters. He returns to his madness and the phantasies of revenge, and he threatens to take his own life for the sake of thwarting Odysseus’ plan of bringing him to Troy by force. Even when Neoptolemus returns his bow, Philoctetes remains trapped in his madness and it is only with the appearance of Herakles, that he is brought back to his senses. The movement of Philoctetes goes from his isolated obsession with revenge, over the minor return to trust in the other, into despair and finally to understanding of his role in the greater scheme. The general depiction of his isolation implies that there is a loss of the self in the alienation from human company. There is not a static core of the self that endures without community, and there is a part of the self than can be irretrievably lost though one might later find oneself in company once more.

Neoptolemus – Moved by Pity
For Neoptolemus, the movement begins with doubt. In the opening scene, he is a young man sure of himself and of his loyalties. He knows of Philoctetes and his isolated suffering but he is not moved to pity by the story, since he accepts the authority of the gods. But there is a duplicity to him as he also understands himself through Achilles, the father that he has never met. When Odysseus primes him for his task of convincing Philoctetes to part with his bow, Neoptolemmus considers trickery shameful and unsuited for his lineage: “I wasn’t born to act by deception, nor, so they say, was my father before me.”(98-99) Odysseus convinces him of the necessity of acting by
deception and to put shame aside for the sake of proving himself both brave and wise. Neoptolemus, in the beginning, acts on this advice and he hides his motivation from Philoctetes. But pity gets the better of him and his certainty begins to waver in the face of Philoctetes’ sufferings. Doubt plays a significant role in this movement found in the young Neoptolemus. In the opening dialogue between him and Odysseus, his words are spoken with a calm certainty in his duty towards his king, and there is also a certainty in his trusting the justice of the gods. When discussing the fate of Philoctetes with the chorus, Neoptolemus shows a haughty certainty against the pity of the chorus:

“None of this surprises me. For, as I understand it, these sufferings are the will of the gods,” (191-92)

On this point, the chorus acts as the conscience of Neoptolemus making him aware of the other and making him doubt whether the suffering is just. The movement in Neoptolemus is sparked by the interaction with Philoctetes. Through sympathy the young man comes to doubt his role in the flattering prophecy that has him fated to finally sack Troy. He understands his ancestral heritage to be in conflict with the actions expected of him by Odysseus and, as this confusion grows, he falls away from the initial certainty. The creeping doubt is seen in his dialogue with Philoctetes, when he describes the calling that brought him to Troy after his father’s death. ‘They’ are Odysseus and Phoinix, who came for Neoptolemus, and in relaying the story of how he was brought to Troy he begins to doubt the honesty of Odysseus:

“They said – the truth, or not, who knows? – that it was not the gods’ will, now that my father had died,” (344-46)

This emerging doubt takes hold of the young man, and brings him to question his own part in the larger scheme. The honorable nature of Philoctetes and the trust he shows Neoptolemus when he offers him his bow, sparks the sense of responsibility and a duty both towards his father’s memory and towards the fallen hero in his pitiable state. Philoctetes trusts Neoptolemus on account of a kindness. The symbolic action of laying his life in the hands of another is founded on little more than an intuition based on a kindness.138 This

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138 “Be confident – you may touch it, then give it back to me, and boast that to you, of all mortals, because of your
intuition was expected by sly Odysseus, as he suspected the honorable nature of Neoptolemus would be key to luring the deadly bow out of the hands of Philoctetes. Odysseus did not take into account however, that Neoptolemus would place honor and friendship above the commands of the king and the promise of eternal glory in being instrumental to the sacking of Troy. This is the first movement of Neoptolemus – his sympathy is woken by the sufferings of the honorable Philoctetes, and through participation with the suffering he comes to doubt himself and his role in the events. Doubt begins to fill the young man and he draws away from the choices he must make, and he opens up his questioning looking for certainty in the highest authority:

“O Zeus, what shall I do?
Am I to be found evil on two counts—
hid[ing] that which I ought not to,
and saying what is most shameful?” (964-67)

Though he doubts himself and no answers are sent from above, action is demanded and he returns to his orders and his old certainty in the justice of the gods: “That isn’t possible. Both justice and expediency force me to obey those in command.” (989). After this statement, Neoptolemus fades out of the action for a long time. He questions himself and he questions the chorus: “What shall I do?” (1053) and repeats “Men, what shall I do?—” (1062). The chorus again plays the part of his conscience. As he and Odysseus leaves Philoctetes, a group of Neoptolemus’ men, the chorus, stays with him. In his absence, Neoptolemus comes to a new certainty: that he has acted dishonorably and that he must correct the wrongs he has committed. There is a movement in the young man from certainty through doubt towards a new certainty. The doubt was brought about by the pity towards Philoctetes and through pity he has come to a new understanding of his part in the scheme of Odysseus. He refuses this part and attempts to make amends for the wrong that he did: “The wrong of obeying you [Odysseus] and all of the Greek army.”(1349) Participation with the suffering of Philoctetes brings about a movement in Neoptolemus. Through pity and participation, he is moved beyond the doubt of negativity towards a new understanding and finally to action, when he gives Philoctetes back his bow and offers him his friendship without the veil of deception. Through the tragic movement, Neoptolemus participates in the suffering of Philoctetes and comes to take responsibility

touch it.
For I myself first acquired it by doing a kindness.” (685-89)
of his own actions. Pity in this sense, alters the outcome of the confrontation between Philoctetes and Odysseus.

Odysseus – Intellectual Isolation
Opposed to Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, Odysseus remains unmoved throughout the narrative. He is the man with the plan, and the other characters are considered as objects within his scheme. He also understands himself as an object in the larger plan and his own actions as determined by the rulers he is under. This certainty is never shaken, and Odysseus is never moved by the suffering of Philoctetes or the honorable nature of Neoptolemus. From the first, he explains his actions as orders of higher authority. There is an Eichmannish thoughtlessness to his justifications that would not impress Hannah Arendt. Beginning in the first dialogue he explains his leaving Philoctetes on the orders of higher command: “it’s in this place that, at the command of those in charge, I left the Malian, the son of Poias,” (8-9). When he is confronted with his evil deeds by Philoctetes he denies responsibility through the highest authority:

“It is Zeus – if you must know -
Zeus, the ruler of this land,
by Zeus himself that these things have been
determined—
I merely serve him.” (1082-85)

In the face of the changed Neoptolemus after he has come to take responsibility for his actions, Odysseus mocks the nobility of the young man as vanity. He explains his own position as the one needed to fulfill the divine plan. Here, Odysseus embodies an intellectual projection of responsibility opposed to the emotional acceptance of responsibility in Neoptolemus.

“where a man is needed, of whatever kind, I am such a man;
if the time called for just and upright men,
you would find no one more noble than myself.
However, I was born desiring absolute victory—" (1167-70)

From beginning to end, Odysseus understands himself in this way. His character is static and stands still opposed to the dynamics of both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. Being unmoved and unmoving in the face of suffering, Odysseus returns to the certainties of hierarchy for balance. The simple understanding of fate and necessity for Odysseus becomes a shield against responsibility. Necessity guards Odysseus from developing his
understanding of the gods and fate, and there is an elliptical vector in his hubris pointing towards his future suffering described in the Homeric tale. The movement doesn’t take place within Odysseus in Sophocles’ play. The audience might have known that Odysseus’ trials eventually will make him aware of the other and through his own sufferings he will come to a fuller understanding of fate and action. Within the Philoctetes narrative however, Odysseus is still not taking responsibility. Philoctetes, after having lost his bow, when he is confronted with the plot to bring him to Troy, voices his scorn for Odysseus:

“Hateful one, what lies you’ve found to say. You put the gods before you like a shield, and in so doing, you make of the gods liars.” (1086-88)

The accusation implies that Odysseus makes objects of both the gods and his fellow men. That he utilizes them to serve his own intentions. This form of detachment from the other is different from Philoctetes’ own physical isolation and somehow worse, as it is connected to an intellectual reification of the other. Through this image of the two kinds of isolation, Philoctetes’ physical and Odysseus’ intellectual, an interesting idea reflects back upon Constantin Constantius. There are several parallels between Odysseus the Sophoclean character and Constantin, the pseudonymous author of \textit{G}. There is a stubborn lack of movement in Odysseus and his objectification of the other characters as means to his end. The lack of movement and general objectification is also notable in Constantin throughout \textit{G}, and it seems likely that his name also reflects a certain stubbornness of character. Both are depicted in their relation to a passionate young man and both represent a coolness in their relation to others. Constantin is amused and intrigued by the young man and the honest spectacle of his falling in and out of love. Odysseus utilizes the honest emotion of his young man for the sake of achieving his ambition of sacking troy.

The scheming of Odysseus also has a counterpart in the planning of Constantin. When the young man in \textit{G} must break away from the object of his faded love, Constantin devises a plot to elegantly pull him out. The plan entails a one-year contract with a pretty, young women with whom the young man must regularly meet to foster a slander that will eventually reach the intended recipient, who will have to despise the young man and thus be set free without losing her capacity for love. The whole plan, as well as the genuine interest of Constantin, comes across as well intended and considerate up until this point, where the orchestration reveals a surprising coolness in the detached maestro. Constantin is capable of comprehending
the young man and his love, he considers the position of the young woman and he calculates the optimal course of action. In so doing, he comes across as incapable of an emotional engagement with the others as they appear to him as pawns in a game of chess. Both Odysseus and Constantin are described as clever and cunning, but also as lacking a general engagement with the suffering of the other characters. Neoptolemus immediately takes the suffering of Philoctetes upon himself. He suffers with the other in the tragic fate of the former hero. The young man in \( G \) is unable to continue with Constantin’s plan and leaves Copenhagen as an emotional mess never to be seen by Constantin again. The curious connection between Constantin and Odysseus is that they are intellectually capable but emotionally disconnected from others.

This distance might be explained from the perspective of the terminology developed on observation and participation in the second act. The observing or speculative intellect can fail to engage on an emotional level. This form of passionate engagement with the other lies outside the teachings of reason. This is not to say that reason or intellect excludes the possessor from participation, but rather that intellect does not necessarily conduit a full understanding and reflection. The reflection that Odysseus lacks, and which prevents him from foreseeing the positive outcome of the story, is connected to his lack of understanding the emotional connection between the two passionate men who immediately participate within the narratives of one another. Odysseus understands the ambition of Neoptolemus and he understands the thirst for revenge in Philoctetes. Odysseus does not foresee however, that pity and honor take priority in Neoptolemus after meeting Philoctetes. In the argument for a tragic education through sufferings, the narrative underlines a very Lessingian point on the complexity and the unpredictability of the passions that exclude a speculative intellect from

139 “Han var villig og bifaldt ganske min Plan. I en Modeboutique fandt jeg, hvad jeg søgte, en ung ret smuk Pige, hvis Fremtid jeg loveved at forsørge, mod at hun gik ind i min Plan. Med hende skulde han vise sig paa offentlige Steder, hende skulde han besøge paa Tider, at der ingen Tvivl var om, at han levede i en Forstaaelse. Til den Ende fik jeg hende anviist Bolig i et Huus med Gjennemgang til to Gader, saa at han blot behøvede at gaae igjennem Huset sildig om Aftenen, og derved give Tjenestepiger o. s. v. Vished, og sætte Snakken i Bevægelse.” SKS 4, 21

“He was willing and fully approved of my plan. In a fashion boutique I found what I was looking for, a very attractive girl, for whom I promised to provide in return for her going along with my plan. He was supposed to appear with her in public places, visit her at times, so there would be no doubt that he had an understanding with her. With that in mind, I got an apartment assigned to her in a building with hallway exits on two streets so that he needed only to walk through the building late in the evening and thereby give the maidservants etc. proof and set gossip in motion.” KW FT, 144
perceiving the movement in and between individuals. This is the reason, why
Lessing would frown upon his contemporaries’ intellectualized and
moralized narratives that could excite the intellect but failed to arouse the
passions. *Mitleid* in the sense of pity plays a prominent role in *Philoctetes* as
the moving force of the play. Pity and kindness have little appeal for the
plebian crowds of his modernity and hence they are replaced. This motive
force of the emotions is maintained but simplified in the modern rendition
by Chateaubrun which will be taken up again further down.

Words, Actions and the Benefits of Doubt
Beyond the characters we will touch upon two central themes in Sophocles’
play, which in their coupled form carry considerable weight in connection to
the tragic and an analysis directed at the possibility of movement. The first
theme is words opposed to action. Both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus are
men of action, while Odysseus is a man of words. Within the play, words
carry a double meaning; they can be used for deceitful purposes, they cost
nothing and they prove nothing. Actions, on the other hand, seem more
reliable. Odysseus is the master of words and consider words the true motive
force, while actions seem brute and simple. Opposed to this, the two other
characters express themselves in deeds. Philoctetes allows Neoptolemus to
handle his bow and later Neoptolemus returns the bow to Philoctetes. In the
emotional bond between the two honorable men and their ritual passing of
the divine gift between them, the tragedy maintains the uncertainty of the
unexplained action. The other theme is understanding through doubt. As we
have seen, both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus move from certainty through
doubt into a new understanding. Odysseus never moves beyond his
intellectual certainty, he never doubts his position, and, within the play, he
never comes to a new understanding of himself and his role in the
divine plan. Doubt and uncertainty become consequential factors in the process of
coming to an understanding of the other and of one self within the greater
scheme.

Beginning with the first theme, words are considered to be dubious at best.
They are potentially only costless tools for the clever to manipulate others.
Odysseus embodies cleverness in the play and his opening instructions to
Neoptolemus he opens the theme of words as instruments: “With your words,
capture the mind—the very soul—of Philoctetes.” (62-3). Clever Odysseus
guides the young man on how to achieve his ambitions by utilizing his words
to imprison the other. This image of capturing the mind and soul of the fallen
hero, casts a shadow on the cunning master of words, and the connection
between Odysseus and words continue. Shortly after and still addressed to
Neoptolemus, Odysseus boasts of the superiority of words to actions
“You’re the son of a noble father.  
I myself, when I was younger, had an idle tongue,  
and a working hand.  
But now that it comes to the test,  
I see that it’s the tongue, and not deeds,  
that commands all things for mortals.” (105-10)

The theme of words and actions touches upon the notion of nobility. Nobility is connected to honesty and integrity. Odysseus scorns these virtues as fruitless gestures. As we saw above, he could have been noble if the times had needed it, but he was born into an age demanding total victory. In order to move the world, words are needed and when words are turned into tools, they become a measure of power. The tongue commands all things – the tongue moves all things. In this perspective, movement is caused in others through words while Odysseus himself remains unmoved. Odysseus in this perspective on words and action embodies language in its abstract form that is not aimed at understanding but controlling the other.

The other theme is that of doubt. We have had a quick look at how doubt begins to fill the mind of Neoptolemus as he begins to question his role in Odysseus’ plan. A similar doubt is expressed by Philoctetes, when Neoptolemus attempts to reason with him after giving back his bow. From the position of being once again empowered and capable of sending of his arrows with unavoidable precision, Philoctetes is nevertheless torn by doubt. His doubt is expressed in the open questions at the world in general – rhetorical questions, that no one can answer.

“Hateful Life,  
why do you still hold me alive  
and seeing?  
Why won’t you let me go to Hades?  
What shall I do? How  
not to believe the words of this man  
who has advised me with my best interests in mind?  
Am I to yield, then?  
But, in doing so, how shall I  
in my misfortune come into the light?  
Who will speak to me?” (1511-21)

Philoctetes’ questions echo those of Neoptolemus earlier. For both characters, doubt and uncertainty is connected to darkness, but this darkness proves fruitful as it brings a clearer understanding of their own part in the greater scheme. The movement into darkness is a painful process for both characters and it leads them towards an understanding of the divine plan.
Neoptolemus moves towards understanding through his dialogue with the choir. By questioning his role in the events, he comes to regard his own path as clear in light of the understanding he arrived at through doubt. For Philoctetes the movement isn’t possible by his own means, and only when Herakles appears and informs him of the plan, does he accept the superior wisdom.

If we consider the tragic to be present in the form of negativity, then the uncertainty of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus is the fruitful aesthetic ambiguity that allows them to reach outside of themselves for answers. Doubt is represented as a healthy uncertainty in the face of the crushing complexity of existence. Doubt is the beginning of a movement that can lead towards a fuller understanding. In the Kierkegaardian sense, doubt is part of the continual movement of the reflected self. This movement is pictured in the young Neoptolemus as a coming of age-storyline, where doubt and ensuing understanding frees his actions from authority and deception. In Anticlimacus’ words from SD we could say that through negativity the magic spell is broken.140 It is depicted in Philoctetes as a release from his

140 "Den Fortvivlede der er uvidende om, at han er fortvivlet, er, sammenlignet med Den som er sig dette bevidst, blot et Negativt længere borte fra Sandheden og Frelsen. Fortvivelsen selv er en Negativitet, Uvidenheden om den en ny Negativitet. Men for at naae Sandheden maa man igjennem enhver Negativitet; thi det gjælder her hvad Folkesagnet fortæller om, at hæve en vis Trolddom: Stykket maa spilles heelt igjenne baglænds, ellers hæves Trolddommen ikke. Dog er det kun i een Forstand, i reen dialektisk Forstand, at den om sin Fortvivelse Uvidende er fjernere fra Sandheden og det Frelsende end den Vidende, som dog bliver i Fortvivelsen; thi i en anden Forstand, ethisk-dialektisk, er den bevidst i Fortvivelsen blivende Fortvivlede fjernere fra Frelsen, da hans Fortvivlelse er intensivere. Men Uvidenheden er saa langt fra at hæve Fortvivelsen eller at gjøre Fortvivelse til Ikke-Fortvivlelse, at den tværtimod kan være den farligste Form af Fortvivlelse. 48 I Uvidenheden er den Fortvivlede, men til sin egen Fordærvelse, paa en Maade sikkret mod at blive opmærksom, det er, han er ganske sikker i Fortvivlelsens Vold.” SKS 11, 159

"Compared with the person who is conscious of his despair, the despairing individual who is ignorant of his despair is simply a negativity further away from the truth and deliverance. Despair itself is a negativity; ignorance of it, a new negativity. However, to reach the truth, one must go through every negativity, for the old legend about breaking a certain magic spell is true: the piece has to be played through backwards or the spell is not broken. However, it is in only one sense, in a purely dialectic sense, that the individual who is ignorant of his despair is further from the truth and deliverance than one who knows it and yet remains in despair, for in another sense, an ethical-dialectical sense, the person who is conscious of his despair and remains in it is further from deliverance, because his despair is more intensive. Yet ignorance is so far from breaking the despair or changing despair to non-despair that it can in fact be the most dangerous form of despair. To his own demoralization, the individual who in ignorance is in despair
madness in isolation and the obsession with revenge. The tragic plays a role in this becoming, as it is Philoctetes’ expression of suffering and his own experience of suffering through pity that moves Neoptolemus towards doubt. The possibility of movement points towards the tragic concept of freedom. A similar point is made by Leonardo Lisi in *Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or*, where he reflects over the particular sense of subjectivity and freedom: “But in Kierkegaard freedom and subjectivity are not tied to rationality, and possibility is therefore instead linked to the condition of change and differentiation.”\(^{141}\) Both subjectivity and freedom are seen as connected to the possibility of movement, and it is this possibility of movement that Constantin espies in the theatre general and in *Philoctetes* and the Book of Job, as will be related soon. The curious twist is that doubt and uncertainty are also brought about by words in the play, just like a negative philosophy is still caught within the confines of a positive language. As the Aesthete notes on the fragmentary style in the essay on the tragic, it only seems to appear but actually is not revolutionary. Words in this sense also have a liberating possibility of moving towards doubt, just like reading the lamentations of Philoctetes or Job can move the reader with pity for another. Words in this perspective, also have the power of disillusionment, and of bringing the receiver towards the fruitful position of doubt.

The Motive Force of Pity

As sketched out above, pity moves Neoptolemus when he encounters Philoctetes. Pity undermines the admonitions of Odysseus and overpowers the ambition of Achilles’ son. In the original Greek, two different terms are used to describe pity, *eleos* and *oiktos*. Both terms can be traced back to Homeric epic and they connect with notions of activity and passivity. In the article, *The Language of Pity: Eleos and Oiktos in Sophocles’ Philoctetes*, Lucia Prauscello comments on the two different terms and their usage and meaning. In Homeric verse, there is a distinctive difference in the meaning, as *eleos* indicates a movement towards action, while *oiktos* is a passive emotion. This distinction dissolves over time, and when we reach Sophocles, both terms can describe a compassionate impulse to act. And yet, Sophocles seemingly does make a distinction, as the term *oiktos* is used by Neoptolemus and the chorus, while only Philoctetes uses the term *eleos*.\(^{142}\)

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\(^{141}\) Lisi, ‘Tragedy, History, and the Form of Philosophy in Either/Or’.

\(^{142}\) Prauscello, L., 2010. The Language of Pity: eleos and oiktos in Sophocles’ Philoctetes. *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 56, pp.199-212.: “Be that as it may, what has passed largely unnoticed, with reference to the Philoctetes, is that all five occurrences of eleos-
This could relay the meaning that Philoctetes is hopeful that the pity awoken by his fate and sad appearance will move Neoptolemus towards action. In any case, the attention that Sophocles gives to this expression of pity and its connotation of moving towards action, indicates that this term has a central meaning in the relation between the developing characters.

Within the drama, we have noted the movement within the two characters, Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, and how pity towards the suffering Philoctetes is the first instigation towards doubt. In Laokoon, Lessing describes this movement through Mitleid as the driving force behind the plot. The young man is ethically challenged by the conflict between his duty towards authority and his duty towards the suffering Philoctetes. At first, the duty towards authority holds privilege. This duty, of course, is also related to selfish motives of winning reputation in the sacking of Troy. His ambition has been stirred by Odysseus and he is focused on the fame he will win by acting on the orders of Odysseus and the kings. At first, this ambition makes him blind to the suffering of Philoctetes. But the expressions of physical pain and the horror of seeing a noble man humbled by such affliction move Neoptolemus through pity towards the second duty towards the other. Within the narrative, there is a question as to what goodness is. From Odysseus’ perspective, goodness is defined by his age as victory over Troy. This is also the initial perception of Neoptolemus and the one he moves away from. The second perspective is that goodness is connected to kindness. It was an act of kindness, when Philoctetes helped Herakles shed his human form in the pyre, and it was kindness when Neoptolemus willingly gave Philoctetes back his bow. The second perspective is connected to pity and an overstepping of the boundaries of the self. If we consider the play as a process of becoming a reflected self, then Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are in movement through their passionate connectivity, while Odysseus remains passive in his rational detachment.

Pity is the turning point between the static existence of Philoctetes and the possibility of change and movement through the encounter with Neoptolemus. Pity is the prism through which action becomes possible. Activity and passivity are also questioned through Odysseus, who at a glance would appear uninhibitedly active unlike the other two characters, who are both caught in the wake of their passions and not in rational control of themselves or the events. Through pity, the intellectual activity of Odysseus is also reconsidered as a static, unmoving capacity for action and not connected to movement proper. Neoptolemus is able to act according to plan related words are uttered by a single character, Philoctetes himself. Or, to express it another way, eleos formations, verbal or nominal, are never found in the words of either the Chorus or Neoptolemus.”
and aiming at his ambition. In this sense, he is active, but movement only comes about through the evocation of pity and the passivity in doubt, where he calls to the choir and the winds for guidance. Activity in the form of the self acting freely and uninhibitedly becomes an expression of a passivity, where the self is caught within the self and remains static. The tragic as an emotional education in suffering represents a possibility of reaching outside of the self towards the suffering of the other and through this movement the self breaches its isolation. Returning to G, this can also be considered to be the distinction between Constantin and the young man. Constantin is the man with the plan and the intellectual capacity to foresee the reactions of the minor characters of his schemes, but he is also the passive onlooker of life. He sits in the theatre and observes the play as he observes the spectacle of life passing by. The young man engages passionately with the other, and though he causes heartache and suffering, he does not detach himself but remains active and moving.

The active form of pity, eleos, is a passionate response to the suffering of another. The passionate response in pity stands opposite the cool intellect of Odysseus and Constantin as an openness towards the other. This opposition resembles the distinction made in the second act on observation and participation. The speculative intellect maintains the grammatical distance between subject and object, while the tragic is an aspect of negativity and hence outside of the categorical distinction between the self and the other. From this perspective, Sophocles’ tragedy depicts the revolved notion of activity, where suffering and the engagement with suffering brings about the possibility of action and the possibility of movement of the self. Going back to the third act and the subchapter on the passions in Antigone, this notion of suffering and passivity as contained within the passions, points beyond itself as the motive force that brings about the movement of the self.

Lessing and the Modern Reflections of Philoctetes

In the fourth section of his Laokoon, Lessing addresses the role of passion and reason in two modern renditions of the Philoctetes narrative. In the first act we considered the changes made in Chateaubrun’s rewritten Philoctete. One observation was, that the passionate expressions of kindness and pity are replaced by the love affair between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes’ daughter. Also in the fourth section of Laokoon, Lessing considers the popular novel Robinson Crusoe to be connected with the Philoctetes narrative. In contrast to Philoctetes, Crusoe almost enjoys his isolation and through his intellectual mastering of the elements and his new environment, his experience of isolation proves to be a possibility for thriving and personal development. These distinctions between the ancient version and the modern
remakes allow Lessing to comment on his modernity. Following Lessing’s double analysis of the two modern versions, we will have a look at how an even more updated version might look, when we conclude with a similar analysis of the portrayal of isolation and agency in the 2015 film, The Martian.

According to Lessing, pity and kindness are lost in the two modern depictions of isolation that are referred to in *Laokoon*. Chateaubrun’s version from 1756 bears the same title as Sophocles’ version but the storyline is adapted by the playwright. In the rewritten form by Chateaubrun, Neoptolemus’ motivation is no longer kindness but love for Philoctetes’ daughter. The other narrative, Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, first published in 1719, is not directly connected to Sophocles’ Philoctetes, but Lessing finds grounds for comparison in the extended isolation and its psychological effects. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the isolated individual has all the means necessary for thriving on his lonely island where he is marooned for 28 years, two months and 19 days. Crusoe masters the elements in his new setting, and after taking inventory of his limited resources, he calculates his options and proceeds with all calmness to act out his planning.

In relation to the concept of the self, we have seen that isolation plays a significant role in Sophocles’ version. There Philoctetes becomes like an animal in the wilderness, when he is not heard by others and only answered by babbling echo. He loses his identity in isolation and his sanity is only fully restored through divine intervention. This could be one of the reasons why Kierkegaard in his notes deems Sophocles’ Philoctetes to be curiously modern. He is curiously modern in the sense of facing the isolation from the Hegelian definition of the modern subject as disconnected from the substantial claims that defined the ancient individual. The sense of isolation also resonates within the despairing sigh of Antigone on the way to her tomb, the sigh that expresses the feeling of unbelonging and of being detached from the worlds of both the living and the dead. The sigh that the Aesthete takes to heart and finds to air his own despair as well as those of his listeners, the *symparaneukromenoi*, that share his feelings of isolation. The expressions of isolation in Philoctetes and Antigone testify to the expressive strength of Sophocles, but they also testify to the universality of the feeling of isolation. Isolation, it would seem, is not particular to modernity. The experience of isolated suffering is represented as the loss of the self in Philoctetes. This notion of the self as only existing though the interaction with the other is underlined in Lessing’s analysis of pity in the modern reflections of the narrative. The analysis acts as a critique of the modern perception of the self as self-contained and self-sufficient. Sophocles’ expression of isolation maintains the dependency on the other. Without the other, the self becomes
unhinged. Words without receivers become senseless babbling and mad echoes. When Lessing turns to the modern representations of isolation, this point seems to be lost. In Chateaubrun’s version, Philoctetes is not alone on Lemnos. His daughter and her caretaker are there with him. In Robinson Crusoe, the isolation is hardly an annoyance and the self-sufficient self manages loneliness as a minor inconvenience. In both cases, isolation becomes an exterior condition for the narrative, while for Sophocles, isolation is the driving emotion in the poetics of the play and in the expressions of doubt and uncertainty. In this light of isolation and of the self at the very edge of destruction, pity and kindness play such pivotal roles. This, naturally, is lost in the modern renditions when isolation is less central.

Where the modern rewritings neglect the motive force of kindness and pity, they place more emphasis on ambition. The French and the English represent the ambitions of the passions and the intellect respectively. In Chateaubrun’s version, the passion for Philoctetes’ daughter becomes the prime motivator. In Robinson Crusoe, securing the self against the exterior threats of hunger and hostile strangers motivate the efforts of cultivating edibles while establishing a hidden fortress. In this perspective, the self in the modern versions becomes the object of ambition. Within Sophocles’ narrative, kindness overcomes ambition through pity. In Lessing’s perspective, this shows a greater depth of understanding of the ethical enigma of existence. There is a doubt in Sophocles’ Philoctetes between two forms of goodness, the good for one self, including glory and honor, and the good for the other, which might compromise one self. In Sophocles’ narrative there is a clear depiction of the second good to be connected with nobility, but the nagging doubt is maintained in the characters. In the two modern versions, there is a certainty in the perspective of goodness, that doesn’t change within the narratives or the characters. The truly tragic maintains the duplicity of doubt, the aesthetic ambiguity, since it is through uncertainty that the moving characters come to an understanding of themselves in relation to the other.

History, it would seem, changes the scope and aim of the various renditions of the Philoctetes narrative – but do they alter because of their times or are they simply individual perspectives not directly or solely dependent on the culture surrounding them? Just as the first act implies, the historical aspect functions as a critique directed at the contemporaries of Lessing and Kierkegaard rather than a historical investigation of the past. The distinction between the ancient and the modern acts as a means for portraying a certain perception of the self in modernity in contrast to another example from Attic tragedy. This of course doesn’t imply that all ancient perceptions of the self were similar to Sophocles’ and that he is an example
of a tendency. Likewise, the idealist notion of subjectivity does not represent the post cartesian population in toto. The examples are nothing more than examples and little can be concluded via induction, but Sophocles’ plays are seen as possibilities for expressing an uncertainty in opposition to the more boisterous scientific and world historical results of the speculative philosophy.

Thinking along with Lessing and the idea of the self in isolation in the different versions, we might, for the sake of curiosity, try our own hands at a more updated representation of isolation. The object of comparison is the film, The Martian from 2015. The film is an adaptation of a novel with the same name written and published by Adam Weir in the 2011. In the film, the character Mark Watney, played by Matt Damon, is on a mission to Mars, where he and his crew are taking samples to bring back to earth. During a storm, the commander decides to abort the mission and evacuate Mars. In the process of leaving the base, Watney is caught in the chest by flying debris pulling him into the darkness of the storm. Both his geolocation and life signals are ruined in the accident so the crew has no means to tell if he is alive or to find him. Consequently, he is thought to be dead and is accidentally left alone on Mars, where he ends up spending 560 sols equaling 577 days in isolation. The development of the plot and the main character is reminiscent of Robinson Crusoe. Watney is quick to assess his options and act in accordance with his plan to survive for as long as possible with the shallow hope of being found by the next mission to Mars. He displays intelligence, commitment and good humor in his endeavors, and he is quickly rewarded for his efforts. Watney is educated as a botanist, and this experience and knowledge enables him to begin a process of potato cultivation in a closed system fertilized with human excrement that he found in vacuum bagged portions in the base’s garbage system. Science and the intellectual achievements of humanity are the vaunted heroes of the film. Watney is not a religious man, he is a man of science. The distinction between the religious and the scientific approach is underlined in the scene where Watney needs to start a fire for his water production. For the sake of avoiding accidents, NASA has stripped the equipment of anything flammable. Luckily though, among the personal items of his crewmates, Watney finds a wooden crucifix. This crucifix is chipped into woodcuttings, and these are used to start the fire, which will sustain Watney’s life. In this symbolic counter-ritual, faith is sacrificed on the altar of science. A similar departure from the insecurity of faith towards the safe haven of science is spoken directly by Watney, when the difficulty and improbability of success strikes him: ”So, in the face of overwhelming odds, I am left with one option: I am going to have to science the shit out of it.”
During his time as a lonely potato farmer on Mars, Watney establishes means for communicating with NASA, and his old crew is made aware of him being alive, though critically so, after an airlock accident has ruined his improvised farm. The clock starts running, and the crew aboard the spaceship makes a hazardous dash back to Mars, where they manage to catch Watney who has launched himself into space in the stripped and open-air nose of a rocket conveniently left on Mars by an earlier expedition.

Extraordinary feats aside, the depiction of isolation on Mars also stands in contrast to the Sophoclean despair of losing one’s mind and identity without the company of others. Isolation does have an effect on Mark Watney, but this psychological hazard is also objectively perceived and managed along with the rest of the conditional issues of surviving only by means of his own efforts. In The Martian, expressions of despair mainly appear at failure. When Watney miscalculates an action that nearly becomes fatal as he accidentally blows himself up trying to establish a heating and moisture system for his potatoes, he judgingly admonishes himself for his mistaken calculations that failed to take his own breathing into account. Opposed to this, he also derives great pleasure from success, and jubilantly triumphs with sportsmanlike gestures when he accomplishes his aims. In his ability to control his new environment, there is a parallel to the intellectual mastering of the exterior from Robinson Crusoe. The passionate responses are mostly limited to reactions to failure and success. In this sense, we are closer to the ‘modern’ depiction of value in connection with ambition. Kindness and pity do not play into the narrative – there might be an unmoving ‘oiktos’ back on earth and in the spaceship that left him for dead, but activity is on the side of the main character. Sympathy is only evoked through his success at reaching out to the other, and this sympathy is never enough to liberate Watney from the necessity to act on his own behalf. The incapacity for action and the immobility of ancient Philoctetes is not mirrored in the industrious Watney, and though help does come from above in the end, he had to call in the cavalry and make the effort and take the risk of launching himself into space.

To sum up on the Lessingian critique of the modern misconceptions of the tragic notions of isolation and pity, the three examples do not allow either to play a role as motive forces. There is no suffering, there is only responsibility, only success and failure. In Aristotelian terms, the emotion awoken in the modern representations of isolation in Robinson Crusoe and The Martian is admiration. Again, this does not stand as evidence against an age, but there is a curious connection and disconnection between the depictions of the self in isolation and the ability to ignore and overcome the universal aspect of isolation.
Aesthetic and Religious Suffering in Philoctetes and Job

Suffering is not only related to pain. It can be an experience of pain but there is also the aspect of passivity. Suffering can be the experience of losing power and being unable to act. Suffering is a passivity in the face of being overpowered, but suffering is not equal to failure because there is no possibility of success. Suffering is the universally human experience of being thrown into existence with very little instruction and not feeling, from beginning to end, entirely on top of what goes on. In G, the young man compares the suffering of Job with that of Philoctetes. He does so in the process of coming to terms with the nature of his own suffering. He who has fallen in love with a young woman and found his love to be selfish and the object of his love to be a mere catalyst for him to discover his poetic and melancholic nature. The suffering, which ensues, is both poetical and tragic. As an outside observer, Constantin cannot help but be drawn in by the affectation of the young man. But there is a movement in the young man from his poetic awakening towards a religious mood.

The young man’s movement is described by Constantin who in the beginning is fascinated by the young man’s poetic nature and in his final address to the reader of the text, takes responsibility for giving birth to the young man. Constantin has attempted to move that in the young man, which is not mobile within Constantin himself, because he no longer has a poetic nature. Beyond the poetic, the young man also touches upon a religious attitude, as Constantin observes from his letters. In the end, Constantin still doubts whether the young man will find rest in the religious. The young man’s suffering that is formative in moving him towards his poetic nature, is also connected to pity.  

143 “Hans dithyrambiske Glæde i det sidste Brev er et Exempel herpaa; thi denne Glæde er upaatvivlelig funderet i en religieus Stemning, hvilken dog forbliver en Inderlighed. Han beholder en religieus Stemning som en Hemmelighed, han ikke kan forklare, meden denne Hemmelighed hjælper ham til digterisk at forklare Virkeligheden.” SKS 4, 94

This movement from the aesthetic towards the religious is also noted in Rocca, E., 2016. Kierkegaard. Gyldendal A/S. P176: “Man gennemgår to stadier, som begge er æstetiske (vedrørendes det andet stadie henviser Kierkegaard til ”Vekseldriften” i Enten-Eller), og når frem til et tredje, som er en ”religios Bevægelse”. Kierkegaard fastslår, at punkt ”c” behandles i G med fortællingen om den unge mand.”

“One passes through two stages that are both aesthetic (concerning the second stage, Kierkegaard refers to the phrase ‘rotation of the crops’ from Either/Or. Kierkegaard concludes, that a stage ‘C’ is considered in The Repitition with the story of the young man.” My translation.
Pity with the young woman he has unintentionally deceived through his poetic love that only needed her as an instigation and not as its true object. His suffering then, is connected with the suffering of his loved one.

"Han har, hvad der tilhører væsentlig en Digter, havt en Forelskelse; men denne er aldeles tvetydig: lykkelig, ulykkelig, komisk, tragisk. I Retning af Pigen kan Alt blive komisk, thi da han fornemlig var sympathetisk afficeret, saa har hans Liden for en stor Deel ligget i, at den Elskede leed. Var han i denne Henseende i en Feiltagelse, saa bliver det Komiske det Fremtrædende. Seer han paa sig selv, da tilbyder det Tragiske sig, ligesom ogsaa naar han i en anden Forstand tænker den Elskede ideelt.” SKS 4.1, 94-95

In Constantin’s psychological diagnosis of the young man, the enamourment is a symptom of his poetic nature. Beyond being poetic, the young man is also sympathetic and his suffering reflects the suffering he has caused in the young woman. There is both a selfish and an unselfish side to the young man’s passions, and this duality gives him the double possibility of becoming comic or tragic. If the young woman had not suffered, then his suffering would have been comic. If we focused solely on the young man, then his suffering would be tragic. In combination and in light of his sympathetic and poetic nature, the suffering contains elements of both. It is pathetic and comic in its disproportionate grandeur – the amount of feeling connected to a simple heartache. On the other hand, it is true and tragic on the individual level of opening his awareness towards the responsibility he has had in the suffering of another and in the isolation that follows. In this sense, the suffering of the young man also represents the aesthetic ambiguity that opens the individual up towards doubt.

When describing his own suffering in his letters to Constantin, the young man turns to the Book of Job. He compares the biblical expression of suffering to the Greek expression of Philoctetes’s suffering:

“Hvad er Philoktet med sine Klager, der dog bestandig blive ved Jorden, og ikke forfærde Guderne. Hvad er Situationen i Philoktet, naar den sammenlignes med Jobs, hvor Ideen stedse er i Bevægelse.” G SKS 4.1, 72-73

The questioning quote opens a variety of new questions. For how can the lamentations of Philoctetes be said to remain by the ground and not to terrify the gods when so much of his anguish is directed at the heavens? How is

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144 “He has had what belongs essentially to a poet, a love affair, but a very ambivalent one: happy, unhappy, comic, tragic. With respect to the girl, everything may be construed as comic, for inasmuch as he was moved primarily by sympathy, his suffering was to a great extent a consequence of the beloved's suffering. If on that point he was mistaken, the comic becomes pronounced. If he looks to himself, then the tragic emerges, just as when he in another sense regards the beloved ideally.” KW FT, 229

145 “What are Philoctetes and his laments, which remain continually earthbound and do not terrify the gods. What is Philoctetes' situation compared with Job's, where the idea is constantly in motion.” KW FT, 204
Job’s situation connected to the idea being continually in motion? Why the
double emphasis on duration in bestandig and stedse? The expression of
suffering in Philoctetes and Job is certainly comparable and looking more
closely at the two texts, we find more likenesses than contrasts in their
lamentations. This makes the task of bringing out the distinction from the
quote more difficult but it also makes the result more curious. The contrast,
according to the young man, lies in Philoctetes’ suffering moans remaining
by the ground while in Job’s situation, the idea is in movement. We can
try to deduce the meaning of this through the distinction between the aesthetic
and the religious suffering, where the defining difference is an abstaining
from understanding. Firstly though, we must make up the grounds for
correlation.

The Sufferings of Philoctetes and Job
The sufferings of Philoctetes and Job can be compared on several points and
also their own expressive form. The lamentations take up large parts of both
texts, and the exclamations of despair and isolation have many traits in
common. We have already entered into the expression of isolated suffering
in Philoctetes, where a returning aspect was the loss of his humanity. In the
wilderness he has become wild and frightening in the eyes of others. A
similar comparison is found in Job, who finds himself alienated from his
friends in his suffering:

“I have become a brother of jackals,
a companion of owls.
My skin grows black and peels;
my body burns with fever.
My lyre is tuned to mourning,
and my pipe to the sound of wailing.” – Job 30.29

In the situation, where Job has lost his children and wealth and his presence
has become undesirable for his friends, Job expresses a similar feeling of
isolation and alienation to what we have seen in Philoctetes. The detachment
from other humans and Job’s own loss of humanity is expressed in the
familiarity with beasts. In spite of the similarities the young man in G
maintains the distinction between the two expressions of suffering. On one
point in particular, we find grounds for considering the suffering of
Philoctetes to be different in comparison with Jobs. There is a solid Deus Ex
Machina moment in Philoctetes, where Herakles, expresses the divine plan
in a straightforward manner. In the Book of Job, God speaks from out of a
storm cloud, and in no way does God seek to explain in simple terms the
human condition as suffering. God uncondescendingly charges Job with
accepting the mystery. The drama by Sophocles drives us towards an understanding of the suffering of Philoctetes and the explanation is achieved through Herakles arriving from above to settle the matter. Understanding and the divine light of reason represent an exit from the doubt and darkness that manifested themselves in the despairing cries of Philoctetes and the incessant questioning of the chorus and the winds by Neoptolemus. When Herakles arrives, the divine plan and Philoctetes’ destiny of being cured and breaching the Troy’s defenses is revealed. For Job, there are numerous attempts at making sense of his suffering. Friends come from far and near to explain the meaning of his suffering, but Job maintains his innocence and the meaninglessness of his agonies. In the end, and at the end of a long string of attempted explanations, he finally accepts it as incomprehensible and his life is restored with just as little explanation.

The superiority, the movement of the idea, found in Job, which is not found in Philoctetes, is perhaps this lasting uncertainty. Where the darkness clears up in Philoctetes and the divine revelation of destiny breaches the uncertainty, for Job the divine remains secretive and the darkness of doubt and uncertainty prevails. The movement in the characters in Philoctetes stood in relation to doubt. Only when the characters were faced with uncertainty, were they portrayed as moving. This uncertainty is maintained in Job and so the idea is continually in motion. The suffering of Philoctetes stands opposite the suffering of Job on this point, where the divine disclosure stands opposite the continuous condition of doubt. This ties back to the function of negative philosophy and the tragic. One could say, that in this light, Sophocles’ Philoctetes departs from the tragic via the divine intervention. As the Aesthete notes in EE, Philoctetes as a tragedy becomes objective: “Denne er i strængere Forstand en lidende Tragedie. Men ogsaa her hersker dog endnu en høi Grad af Objektivitet.” SKS 2, 150

Sophocles returns to a level of clarity and objectivity, while the continual uncertainty in Job is more truthful in portraying life as the individuals lasting confrontation with doubt. This point contrasts the introductory reflections by George Steiner in The Death of Tragedy, where he considers the tragic to represent the unexplained condition of suffering while the Book of Job represents a religious reinterpretation of existence into the logical framework of divine justice.

In the phenomenological approach to the tragic, tears as

146 “In a stricter sense, this is a tragedy of suffering. But here, too, a high degree of objectivity still prevails. “ KW EO1, 151
147 George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (Faber & Faber, 2010). “Tragedy is alien to the Judaic sense of the world. The book of Job is always cited as an instance of tragic vision. But that black fable stands on the outer edge of Judaism, and even here an orthodox hand has asserted the claims of justice against those of tragedy:
the expression of suffering do not lay claim to a particular philosophy of either justice or hopelessness. In this perspective there is more that binds the expression of suffering of Philoctetes and Job together than sets them apart, but in line with Kierkegaard’s emphasis on a distinction at a deeper level, we will continue to question the differences.

Aesthetic Suffering and the Call to the Other
Kierkegaard refers to Philoctetes both in EE and G. In both cases the ancient tragedy is used to mirror the suffering of a modern tragic character. In EE, it reflects the suffering of the Aesthete’s rewritten Antigone and in G, it is the young man suffering from a self-inflicted heartache. There is an explanation of Philoctetes’ suffering in EE, and from the Aesthete’s perspective, the ancient Greek suffering is distinguished from the modern suffering of Antigone by the need for a listener:

"Philoktets Reflexion fordyber sig ikke i sig selv, og det er ægte græsk, naar han beklager sig over, at Ingen er vidende om hans Smerte. Der ligger en overordentlig Sandhed heri, og dog viser sig netop her tillige Forskjelligheden fra den egentlige reflekterede Smerte, der altid ønsker at være ene med sin Smerte, som søger en ny Smerte i denne Smertens Eensomhed.” SKS 2, 150

There is an extraordinary truth in the aesthetic suffering that cries out for the other. The Aesthete doesn’t qualify how this aspect of the Greek tragedy related to truth and whether this truth is relative to the Greek world or universally. This statement is followed a few pages further down by a similar consideration, when the Aesthete defines the reflected pain in his reimagined Antigone. Her suffering does not desire the sympathetic ear of a listener and this is one of the defining differences between the ancient and the modern:

"Jeg kan her ogsaa vise en Forskjel mellem det Græske og det Moderne. Det er ægte græsk, at Philoktet beklager sig over, at der Ingen er, der veed, hvad han lider, det er en dyb menneskelig Trang at ville, at Andre erfare det; den reflekterende Smerte ønsker imidlertid ikke dette. Det falder ikke Antigone ind at ønske, at Nogen skalde erfare hendes Smerte, men derimod følter hun det i Forhold til Faderen, følter den

So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses.

God has made good the havoc wrought upon His servant; he has compensated Job for his agonies. But where there is compensation, there is justice, not tragedy.”  

148 “Philoctetes’ reflection is not absorbed in itself, and it is genuinely Greek when he laments that no one knows his pain. There is an extraordinary truth in this, and yet precisely here there is also a manifestation of the difference from the really reflective pain that always wants to be alone with its pain, that seeks a new pain in the solitude of this pain.” KW EO1, 151
Retfærdighed, der ligger i at sørge, som er ligesaa æsthetisk retfærdigt som at man lider Straf, naar man har gjort Uret.” SKS 2, 157

The continuous interplay between Sophocles’ Philoctetes and the Aesthete’s Antigone underlines the emphasis placed on the distance between the two characters and the antiquity and modernity they respectively represent. There are grounds for comparison because there is a level of reflection in both. Reflection in the Antigone figure has been addressed in the third act, and regarding Philoctetes, Kierkegaard mentions it in his notes and in the essay on the tragic. In his notes from 1841-42, he makes two remarks on Philoctetes. In the first he states: “I Philoktet bliver Situationen selv endog reflektet v. 878. 879.” SKS Note 10.6. In connection with the Antigone figure and the presentation of reflection as the turning point between the ancient and the modern tragic, this statement places Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* as nearly modern. The notes are from the same period as the production of EE, and so there is good reason to consider this aesthetic connection between the two characters and narratives by Sophocles. In the following note, Kierkegaard writes:

“Philoktet staaer saa vel paa Grændsen til at være Drama, som til at være interessant. Philoktets stigende Forbittrelse og den dermed forbundne stigende Selvmodsigelse i hans Adfaerd er dyb psychologisk Sandhed; men det Hele er ikke antikt.” SKS Note 10.7.

Combined with the remarks on Philoctetes in EE and *G*, these notes indicate a fascination with the character in Sophocles’ play. The tragedy is on the border of being a drama and of being interesting. This might mean that it cannot be fully interesting if it is a drama and vice versa. More importantly, the statement underlines the distinction between the ancient and the modern as overstepped by Philoctetes, as not everything within the play is antique. The consideration in this context is connected to the deep psychological truth that his behavior reveals, and this is also similar to the point that the Aesthete made with regard to the ancient Antigone figure as transgressing on the

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149 “Here, too, I can point out a difference between Greek and modern tragedy. It is genuinely Greek for Philoctetes to lament that no one knows what he is suffering; it is a deeply human need to want others to understand it, but reflective pain does not desire this. It does not occur to Antigone to wish anyone to come to know her pain, but instead she feels the pain in relation to her father, feels the justice implicit in sorrowing, which is just as warranted esthetically as is suffering punishment when one has done wrong.” KW EO1, 158

150 “In Philoktetes even the situation itself becomes reflective vv. 878. 879.” Notes 10:6, KJN, vol. 3.

151 “Philoktetes stands at the threshold both of being drama as well as that of being interesting. Philoctetes’ increasing bitterness, and the increasing self-contradiction in his behaviour that is tied up with it, is a deep psychological truth, but the whole is not ancient.” KJN, vol. 3.
borders of modernity through her subjectively refined reflections on isolated suffering.

This aspect of reflection makes Philoctetes seem modern but there seems to be two qualitative differences. One is the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. Philoctetes’ suffering is objective in its exteriority and its outward expression. Sophocles’ tragedy is also objective in the sense, that the audience arrives at an understanding of the suffering through the divine intervention, which breaches the isolation and the reflected pain of the remainder of the tragedy. The other distinctive point is the modern pain as turned in on itself. The modern Antigone is both proud and suffering through her secret knowledge that detaches her from others and from a redemptive ease of her pain. Philoctetes desires company and desires to be saved from misery, while the modern Antigone is bound by her pain and solitude. His solitude is another misery, while Antigone derives a certain pleasure from proudly digging herself deeper into the pain connected with her secret. The ancient representation of the reflected pain differs from the modern on this point, where the ancient desires to be set free from isolation and while the modern desires to be left alone. When Philoctetes desires his lamentations to be heard, this sets him apart from the isolated suffering and the reflected pain of the modern Antigone.

Now, the curious aspect of bringing together the expressions of suffering and their commentators in the Aesthete and Constantin Constantius, is that there is a autobiographical dimension to both the rewritten Antigone and to the young man in G. In this perspective, the modern suffering of Kierkegaard in its willed isolation, ironically goes to great lengths to express itself in secret. Compared to antiquity and the suffering cries of Philoctetes, there is also a decisive call for attention in Kierkegaard’s pseudonymously published declarations of woe. Perhaps there is indeed still some level of antiquity in the modern subject’s desire to express its isolated suffering. This aspect of the modern self and its desire to breach through isolation could be seen as a vector pointing towards KG and a form of reconciliation with existence. In KG, the company with others is maintained as a fundamental aspect of existence, when in section IV, Kierkegaard turns to the divine and eternal statement on the condition of man in Genesis: that it was not good for Adam

152 "Naar saaledes Philoktet klager over, at han lever eensomt og forladt paa den øde Ø, saa har hans Udsagn tillige den udvortes Sandhed; naar vor Antigone derimod føler Smerten i sin Eensomhed, saa er dette jo uøgenterligt, at hun er alene, men netop derfor er Smerten først ret egentlig.” SKS 2, 157

"Thus, when Philoctetes laments that he lives abandoned and solitary on a desolate island, his remark also has external truth; when, however, our Antigone feels pain in her solitude, it is only figuratively that she is alone, but for this very reason, only then is her pain truly literal.” KW EO1, 159
to be alone, so he made for him a companion. In this sense, the tragic as the expression of suffering points beyond itself because it also points at a receiver. Even in its modern shape, the tragic contains an expression of suffering that reaches out for company.

**Religious Suffering and the Radical Claim of Innocence**

After leaving Constantin to mind his own business, the young man from G continues to inform him of his development in letters. In these letters, the young man reflects on his sorrows and the pains he has suffered and caused. These musings on the nature of his suffering brings him to qualify it in relation to Philoctetes and Job. It is in these letters, that we find the distinctions between the aesthetic and the religious, which leads Constantin to consider the young man to have come closer to the religious. In the letters, the young man explores the suffering of Job and leans on this ancient expression of suffering that maintains its claim against both human and divine justice.


In this, the first dedication to Job by the young man, his poetic force strives towards the solidity of Job’s claim against God and men. He argues against the aesthetics of suffering as the poets’ expression. Their claim for human pity is incomparable to the religious weight behind Job’s. The young man wants Job to speak, to repeat all that he has said. The individual movement of the ancient expression and its continued validity in modernity is based on this directness of his lamentation – Job’s questioning directed at god – he

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153 "In our time it is thought that genuine expressions of grief, the despairing language of passion, must be assigned to the poets, who then like attorneys in a lower court plead the cause of the suffering before the tribunal of human compassion. No one dares to go further than that. Speak up, then, unforgettable Job, repeat everything you said, you powerful spokesman who, fearless as a roaring lion, appears before the tribunal of the Most High! Your speech is pithy, and in your heart is the fear of God even when you bring complaints, when you defend your despair to your friends who jump up like highwaymen to attack you with their speeches, even when you, provoked by your friends, crush their wisdom under foot and scorn their defense of the Lord as if it were the miserable shrewdness of a decrepit court functionary or a politically shrewd government official." KW FT, 198
delivers and defends his own case in the highest court of law. The religious expression of suffering concerns the relation between the self and the Other, while the aesthetic relates the sufferings of the self to the other. The religious expression is directed at the heavens, and in line with aesthetic ambiguity, the heavens as incomprehensible is the only sensible place to direct accusations against.

The radicality of Job, the young man maintains, is that he was right to question his sufferings. All his friends and to some extent even God, have to admit that his sufferings are not just: "Hemmeligheden i Job, Livskraften, Nerven, Ideen er: at Job uagtet alt Dette har ret.” G 75. The radicality of Job’s claim defies the subjective claim of modernity on the individual to become responsible for itself. In line with the developed concept of reflection in Antigone, this religious expression of suffering in Job defies the simple form of responsibility for the self. The greatness of Antigone’s reflected pain lays in its capacity to contain the ambiguity of guilt – of being innocent and being guilty. Job’s radicality lies in his maintained claim of innocence. This claim of innocence against guilt connects with the notions of freedom and boundness. Job’s claim for innocence is a claim for freedom against the evidence of his suffering.


The passion of freedom relates to the maintained claim of innocence. Where the aesthetic suffering of Antigone maintains the ambiguity of being both bound and free, guilty and innocent, the religious suffering of Job defies the

154 “The secret in Job, the vital force, the nerve, the idea, is that Job, despite everything, is in the right.” KW FT, 207
155 “Job’s greatness is that freedom's passion in him is not smothered or quieted down by a wrong expression. In similar circumstances, this passion is often smothered in a person when faintheartedness and petty anxiety have allowed him to think he is suffering because of his sins, when that was not at all the case. His soul lacked the perseverance to carry through an idea when the world incessantly disagreed with him. It can be very becoming and true and humble if a person believes that misfortune has struck him because of his sins, but this belief may also be the case because he vaguely conceives of God as a tyrant, something he meaninglessly expresses by promptly placing him under ethical determinants. —Job did not become demonic, either.” KW FT, 207
human accusations that equate suffering with guilt. Job can be both free and innocent while he suffers and this religious addition goes beyond the ethical. If we look at Kierkegaard’s notes from 1851 and 1852, this connection between Job and the passionate claim against culpability also stands out. In NB 24:143 from 1851, we can see the crucial aspect of innocence as an objection against the culpability connected with suffering. The human selfishness lies in regarding the other as justly punished rather than suffering innocently. In his notes from 1852, the same connection between Job and the all too human cruelty connected to placing guilt is expressed.

156 “Betydningen af denne Bog er egl. at vise den Grusomhed som vi Msker begaae ved at ansee det at være Ulykkelig for en Skyld, en Forbyrdelse. Dette er nemlig den msklige Selviskhed, der ønsker at fritage sig for Indtrykket af, det alvorlige og rystende Indtryk af Lidelse, af hvad der kan hændes et Msk i dette Liv – for at sikre sig derimod forklarer man Lidelse som Skyld: det er hans egen Skyld. O, msklige Grusomhed!

Det der beskjæftiger Job er at faae Ret, i en vis Forstand ogsaa mod Gud, men fremfor Alt mod hans Venner, der istedefor at trøste ham marty ham med den Sætning at det er skyldig han lider.” SKS NB 24:143

"The significance of this book is rly to show the cruelty that hum. Beings commit by regarding being unhappy as guilt, as a crime. This is indeed hum. Selfishness, which wishes to free itself of the impression, the serious and upsetting impression, of suffering, of what can happen to a hum. Being in this life. In order to protect themselves against it, people explain suffering as guilt: it is his own fault. Oh, hum. cruelty!

What concerns Job is obtaining justice – in a certain sense, also in relation to God, but above all in relation to his friends, who instead of comforting him torment him with the thesis that he is suffering because he is guilty.” NB 24: 143, KJN, vol. 8.

157 “Den største menneskelige Grusomhed – rødsommere end hvad nogensinde den rødsomte Tyran har udtænkt eller øvet – er den, som vi Alle øve, hele Slegten øver, den, at naar en er ulykkelig er lidende i stor Forstand (langvarigt og forfærdeligt) saa sikre vi os (o, menneskelige Medlidenhed!) vi sikre os mod ham, ved at udfinde, at det er hans egen Skyld, eller at det er for hans Synder Skyld. Her ligger Job; det er egentlig det, der oprører ham allermeest, at hans Venner ville forklare hans Lidelse som Skyld. See, i den Grad elske vi Mennesker at nyde Livet, i den Grad, at de Ulykkelige de Elendige, hvis Lidelser ville forstyrre os i Livslysten og give os et andet Indtryk af Gud end at han er Lykken, dem sikre vi os saa mod ved at sige: det er deres Skyld, og saa fryde vi os ved Livet og fryde os i den Indbildning, at vi har Gud paa vor Side” SKS NB 26:26

"The greatest human cruelty – more terrible than anything the most terrible tyrant ever thought up – is the one we all practice, the whole race practices, that when someone is unhappy, is suffering greatly (protractedly and fearfully), we protect ourselves (ah, hum. sympathy!), we protect ourselves against him by making out that it is his own fault or that it is because of his sins. Here we have Job What rly upsets Job most of all is that his friends want to explain his suffering as guilt. Look, to the same extent that we hum. beings love to enjoy life, to that same extent we protect ourselves from the unhappy, the wretched, whose sufferings would disturb our enjoyment of life and give us another impression of God than that he is good fortune. The way we protect ourselves from these
greatness of Job in both instances and in connection with the young man in G, lies in his claim of innocence. This claim goes beyond his own suffering and confronts the listeners with the accusation, that they are guilty of assuming guilt. This claim is at the same time more subtle and more aggressive than Jesus saying: “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”. Job says: “Let him, who in the secret places of his own mind, accuses his suffering neighbor of being guilty, be considered guilty.” It is in this perspective that the young man deems Job to be beyond the measure of guilt. Job’s trials have granted him insights to deny the earthly wisdom of his friends. The young man defines these trials as neither aesthetical, ethical or dogmatic but as entirely transcendent. These insights are gained through trial and are reminiscent of the bold claim of Climacus in AUE, when he states the he is a devil of a philosopher on account of his trials. Climacus has been tried in the casibus of life and appeals to his sufferings as his teachers. In like manner, Job is beyond his friends in understanding his own sufferings as unjustified and radically maintaining his own innocence. Through his own innocence he maintains the possibility of innocence in all those who suffer. This is the roar of the brave Lion in the highest court, that defies the simple accusations of guilt as unproven.

The Movement through Aesthetic Suffering towards the Religious

The suffering of Philoctetes is an aesthetical suffering that demands an audience. The suffering of Job is a religious suffering that pertains to the individual’s relation to God. The young man in G contains both natures as he moves from the aesthetical towards the religious suffering, and it is in this movement that the tragic as a category plays a significant role. Aesthetic suffering takes part in the process of moving towards a religious suffering – a suffering that also contains a reflection over responsibility. In AUE, Climacus moves through the stages of suffering and the Aesthete marks the beginning of an existential philosophy with his lamentations in Diapsalmata. This movement towards an understanding of the self in relation to the other and the Other is connected to the movement of becoming a self. The wound of negativity must be kept open, and the possibility of doubt is constantly present in the aesthetic ambiguity. Only in the certainty of faith does the individual find rest and this is the even more crucial aspect of the young man,

people is by saying: It is their fault – and then we go on delighting in life and delighting ourselves in the illusion that we have God on our side.” NB 26:26, KJN, vol. 9.

158 “Prøvelse er hverken æsthetisk, ethisk eller dogmatisk, den er aldeles transcendent.”

SKS 4, 77

“This category, ordeal, is not esthetic, ethical, or dogmatic—it is altogether transcendent.”

KW FT, 210
because as Constantin notes, his turn to the religious might not last. The stages of aesthetic and religious suffering might fluctuate and the movement is not only in one direction. We return again to the movement of the idea in Job’s situation as connected to transcendence:

"Det Problem, ved hvilket han er standset, er hverken mere eller mindre end G. At han ikke søger Oplysning derom i den greiske Philosophi, heller ikke i den nyere, deri gjør han Ret; thi Grækerne gjøre den modsatte Bevægelse, og en Græker vilde her vælge at erindre, uden at hans Samvittighed vilde ængste ham; den nyere Philosophi gjør ingen Bevægelse, den gjør i Almindelighed kun Ophævelse, og forsaaavidt den gjør en Bevægelse, ligger denne altid i Immanentsen, G derimod er og bliver en Transcendents.” SKS 4, 56-57

Both ancient and modern philosophy fails in the attempt of explaining the repetition. The ancient Greek philosopher has the perception of movement but this movement only leads towards memory – a Greek would choose to recollect. As Constantin argues in the beginning of G, the love of recollection, Erindringens Kjærlighed, is the poetic, melancholic understanding of love. Constantin understands the young man as blossoming into this, the ancient Greek connection with the object of his love, where he doesn’t become responsible. He is right though, to move away from the modern philosophy, because it doesn’t contain any movement at all. There is more movement in the poetic and melancholic antiquity than in the philosophy of modernity. The distinction lies between immanence and transcendence. The idea in Job is continuously in motion, and this connects with the distinctive characteristics of his suffering. This suffering is considered a trial, and as the young man notes, a trial is entirely transcendent. The modern philosophy is entirely immanent, and so is static. The Greek contains an element of movement and a level of transcendence. Constantin also notes this about the love of the young man in the beginning of G:

159 “The issue that brings him to a halt is nothing more nor less than repetition. He is right not to seek clarification in philosophy, either Greek or modern, for the Greeks make the opposite movement, and here a Greek would choose to recollect without tormenting his conscience. Modern philosophy makes no movement; as a rule it makes only a commotion, and if it makes any movement at all, it is always within immanence, whereas repetition is and remains a transcendence.” KW FT, 186

160 “Denne Kategori: Prøvelse er hverken æstetisk, ethisk eller dogmatisk, den er aldeles transcendent.” SKS 4, 77

“This category, ordeal, is not esthetic, ethical, or dogmatic—it is altogether transcendent.” KW FT, 210
Constantin claims to participate with the suffering of the young man, and yet, he remains outside the suffering as an observer. He cannot perform the movement that the young man is capable of. The aesthetic suffering contains something more in comparison with a modern philosophy and something more than Constantin can muster, as it contains the possibility of movement. This possibility of movement is also the foundation for a religious development.

The Self in the Shadows: Subjectivity on the Stage

One of the most interesting aspects of G is the aesthetic engagement with the notion of the self. In contrast to the more psychological, philosophical or religious definitions from BA and SD, Constantin does not depart from the axiomatic condition of the individual, but rather departs from observations made on the sufferings of the young man. The observations on the young man connect with the observations on the theatre in Berlin and together they form a reflection over the self as both the detached spectator and the immersed participator. The theatre becomes the showroom of subjectivity. The philosophical opening towards this confrontation with subjectivity through theatre is described in Martin Puchner’s *The Drama of Ideas*, where he considers Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as forerunners of a movement that deconstructs objectivity and metaphysics. Kierkegaard’s notion of subjectivity is also in part a deconstruction of the self, in the sense the we have to lose ourselves in order to become ourselves.

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161 “Once again some time passed. I actually suffered exceedingly with the young man, who wasted away day by day. And yet I by no means regretted sharing in his suffering, because in his love the idea was indeed in motion” KW FT, 140

162 Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). P. 122 “Kierkegaard based his philosophy on subjective experiences and emotions, and Nietzsche demanded that philosophy give up its obsession with metaphysics and return to the study of life itself. In both cases, the attention to subjective experience and life also meant that the theater suddenly became a viable and useful model for capturing aspects of these entities.”

163 Grøn, *Subjektivitet og negativitet*. P.173. ”In another and crucial sense, it is necessary to lose oneself. When Anticlimacus repeats that a person must lose itself in order to gain itself, the loss of the self means that the person confirms the loss of the self in the process of becoming a self through the loss.” 

*My translation*
image contains elements of author, actor, and spectator – as three aspects of the self. There is both the awareness directing actions, the participating actor, and the spectating audience. In the image of the stage, the self cannot be perceived solely as the self behind the scene. Seen from the outside, Constantin is an aspect of Kierkegaard as well as the young man. The narrative grasp of detaching the characters as Constantin and the young man, the spectator and the participator is merely a fiction. And yet, the illusion can contain more truth than the obvious observation of the silhouette of the true author behind the characters. Perhaps the young man is a more truthful representation of Kierkegaard than the author behind the young man, and perhaps the same goes for Constantin and the other characters and the various pseudonymous authors. When Constantin makes his attempt at the repetition and returns to Berlin, he seeks out his old entertainment in the Königsstädter theatre. In these wild and rambling passages of his journey and arrival in Berlin, we get a glimpse of the connection with the young man as an earlier stage of Constantin’s awareness. Once he is back in Berlin and as he considers his observations, Constantin’s reflections on youth and the theatre take on a more meaningful and somehow serious note. The theatre becomes the stage of subjectivity and the place where the young self through imagination tries on all the shifting characters on the stage:

“Der er vel intet ungt Menneske med nogen Phantasi, uden at han engang har følt sig fængslet af Theatrets Trylleri og ønsket selv at være revet med ind i hin kunstige Virkelighed, for som en Dobbeltgænger at see og høre sig selv, at adsplitte sig selv i sin al-mulige Forskjellighed fra sig selv og dog saaledes, at enhver Forskjellighed igjen er Een selv.” SKS 4, 30

Constantin considers the notion of splitting the self into different shadows and imaginatively exploring the possibilities of the self to be a youthful fascination. “Det er naturligvis i en meget ung Alder, at en saadan Lyst yttrer sig.” SKS 4, 30

As considered in Act II and III, youth in relation to the Aesthete connects with antiquity. The aesthetic or tragic reconsideration of subjectivity takes these youthful exploits into account as meaningful – and perhaps more meaningful than the intellectual reflections of the more knowledgeable and older Constantin. They are meaningful as they represent an actual movement of the self in the process of becoming a self. Both Constantin and the young man are aspects of a self in this process of becoming. The fictional selves found in the theatre also add to the movement

164 “There is probably no young person with any imagination who has not at some time been enthralled by the magic of the theater and wished to be swept along into that artificial actuality in order like a double to see and hear himself and to split himself up into every possible variation of himself, and nevertheless in such a way that every variation is still himself.” KW FT, 154

165 “Such a wish, of course, expresses itself only at a very early age.” KW FT, 154
of the self through imagination. This point is presented by Constantin himself when regarding the individual through the self-vision of imagination:

"I en saadan Phantasiens Selvanskuelse er Individet ikke en virkelig Skikkelse, men en Skygge, eller rettere, den virkelige Skikkelse er usynlig tilstede, og nøjes derfor ikke med at kaste een Skygge, men Individet har en Mangfoldighed af Skygger, der alle ligne ham, og som momentviis ere ligeberettigede til at være ham selv." SKS 4, 30

The image of the self as a multiplicity of shadows contains a wonderful riddle. The usual perception of a shadow is that it is an absence of light that gives away the shape of an object when light is projected onto a surface. In Constantin’s twist, the object or rather the subject, is considered as actually existing in the shadows that it casts. Rather than understanding the subject through its core or concrete reality, the subject or self is understood through the imaginative shadows that it casts. This aesthetic notion of self also grants a more central meaning to the other as the receptacle of the imaginative shadows. The self only finds existence when it is projected onto the other. The radicality of this image of the stage and the theatrical projections of shadows, lies in the reversed perception of the self. Rather than considering the self as the center that everything else revolves around, Constantin plays with the notion of an imaginative self, that only gains existence upon impact with the other. It is only by losing the self, by giving it away to the other, that the self maintains movement. Through change of perspective, the center of existence becomes fragmented into parts and into the multitude of shadows that the individual casts. This could be deemed Constantin’s tragic or aesthetic addition to subjectivity, and it questions the entire terminology around the individual. The individual is etymologically derived from the quality of being undividable. Constantin’s image of the self as a multitude of shadows projected onto others, challenges this inherent quality through the aesthetical observations on the theatre.

The consideration of the self as a multiplicity of shadows relates to the expression of isolated suffering in Philoctetes and Job, who both stand on the edge of losing their selves in the detachment from the other and the Other. The canvas for the Greek Philoctetes is the other as human company. The canvas for Job is the divine Other, who abandoned him. Philoctetes is the narrative of a hero losing his identity in his isolation. The implications of isolated suffering connect the tragic with a reflection over identity, subjectivity and selfhood. Sophocles’ tragedy contains an aesthetic reflection of identity and selfhood as a fragile projection upon the other. Job contains

166 “In such a self-vision of the imagination, the individual is not an actual shape but a shadow, or, more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and therefore is not satisfied to cast one shadow, but the individual has a variety of shadows, all of which resemble him and which momentarily have equal status as being himself.” KW FT, 154
the additional religious reflection, that the self is also a projection upon the
divine Other. In both the aesthetic and the religious understanding of the self,
the self is not self-contained but gains existence only upon impact with the
other.

As an image, the self seen as a multiplicity of shadows mirrors Plato’s
famous image of the shadows in the cave. In this image, the shadows that are
cast onto the wall are the illusions that keep the uninitiated from the truth
and the true light above. If we follow the trajectory from the image of the
self in the shadows, we find that Constantin reverses the platonic question.
One comes to doubt whether the concept of a pure truth is not the real illusion
and whether reality and truth is not found exactly in these projected images
on the wall - in the dreams and fictions of the cave dwellers. The radicality
of the turn lies in the reversed meaning of the individual. The individual is
not a self-contained entity reflecting in isolation upon its existence – it only
becomes a self when it is projected onto the canvas of the other. The tragic,
both in the ancient and modern forms, and regardless of the historical
progression, contains this universal aspect on the self as never being self-
sufficient. This is where Constantin and the Aesthete point beyond their own
aesthetical, critical observations towards the reconciliation with the other and
the Other. The self, rather than being understood as a self-contained entity,
becomes the sum of its projections. This movement is where the self negates
the self in the process of becoming a self.

Constantin’s reflection over the self in its manifold forms is connected to
the theatre, and this connection also contains a clue to the radicality of
Kierkegaard’s contribution to philosophy. As noted by Puchner in The
Drama of Ideas, Plato’s interest in the theatre is as a representation of the
illusion contained in appearance. The philosopher, according to Plato, is
concerned with essence and ideas. When Kierkegaard returns to the theatre,
is also relativizes the notion of essence. Puchner mentions this reversal as

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Puchner, M., 2010. The drama of ideas: Platonic provocations in theater and
philosophy. Oxford University Press. P.122. “A history of philosophy from the point of
view of drama must distinguish between two principal interests. The first is an emphasis
on the theater or the theatrical. Both words are based on the Greek theatron, or place of
seeing, and both aim at the act of seeing and visual representation more generally. An
interest in this dimension of theater is deeply rooted in Plato’s own philosophy, where it
helps distinguish between (theatrical, onstage) appearance and (nontheatrical, off-stage)
essence. This distinction is captured most clearly in the parable of the cave with its
shadow theater of appearance inside and the world of essence outside the cave. In this
account, theater is relentlessly dedicated to the visible, to what we can see: philosophy,
by contrast, wants to look behind the visible façade of the world, go beyond what we
already know from everyday life and guide us toward the first things, the fundamental
entities that hold the world together.”
significant in Kierkegaard’s and Nietzsche’s uses of the theatre in their confrontations with philosophy. The image of the self as a multiplicity of shadows challenges both the notion of objectivity as well as the perception of the subject as a self-contained entity – a perception that Lessing was already alert to in Daniel Defoe’s reimagined vision of the self in isolation. The outcome of this challenge is a philosophy directed more at the possibilities of the self in imagination and the concrete realities that these may foster.

The Tragic Addition to Subjectivity
Constantin’s interest in the theatre and in the possibility of movement concerns the tragic as it contains emotions of both hope and despair. The despair lies in the universal condition of being isolated. The awareness of existing as an individual detached from everything and everyone exterior to the self. There is an insurmountable gap between the self and the other, and this awareness is also what is found in the tragic characters of Philoctetes and Antigone. The tragic though, also contains an element of hope. The hope of bridging the gap and of being heard and understood by the other. Movement in this tragic sense, consists in the engagement with the other. Adding to this, the movement in the religious awareness also confronts the isolation from God and the hope of a reconciliation. The initial question in G is on the possibility of movement and straight thereafter, the question is on love. Love is presented in the shape of the young man’s infatuation, but it also strikes a note that is taken up in KG. Love is the transcending aspect of existence and the force that overcomes isolation. The distinction from Philoctetes between words and deeds points towards the activity of love and the possibility of becoming a self through engagement. The duality between words and deeds, as well as the differentiated suffering of Philoctetes and Job, connects with the quote from Flavius on the title page of G. There it states that on the wild trees, the flowers are fragrant, on the cultivated trees the fruits. These flowers and fruits may represent the aesthetical, poetic expressions of natural love as opposed to the works of a religiously cultivated love. In this way the tragic or the aesthetic points beyond itself. The tragic awareness of isolation as a fundamental condition does not allow us to resign to the pessimistic knowledge of the Silenus, that the highest happiness for a human is to never have been born and if it has been born to die as soon as possible. That is the tragic understanding of being thrown into an uncontrollable existence, but the tragic also contains the hope of transcending the isolation of the self. This movement contains the fragile possibility of freedom as will be developed in the final act.
Act V: Emilia Galotti  
The Silhouette of a Tragic Freedom

“In jeg kalder dem Skyggerids, deels for strax ved Benævnelsen at minde om, at det er fra Livets mørke Side jeg henter dem, deels fordi de ligesom Skyggerids ikke umiddelbart ere synlige.” SKS 2, 170

In the fifth and last act we turn to Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti* and to the tragic representation of freedom. Lessing’s play is one of the most interpreted in German dramaturgy and in its own right, the tragedy has much to offer. The reader is shown the wide span of Lessing’s talent – from the elegant reflections on art and aesthetics in the opening act to comic confrontation and the tragic depth of thought on the individual as always in a fragile position between desire, virtue and all the exterior forces that we suffer under. Our specific focus is on freedom as an aesthetic category and its expression within the framework of the tragic. The question is whether we can speak tragically about freedom as tragedy so often depicts the opposite. *Emilia Galotti* contains the tragic elements of being swept away by exterior forces and it contains a defiant main character. Emilia is the new name for an ancient character, and Lessing adds several layers to her personality in his modernized version of the narrative. Through the character of Emilia, Lessing brings human freedom into question. This silhouette of freedom is not expressed positively in his philosophical writings, and it is different from a simple representation of a freedom opposed to necessity or boundness. The freedom portrayed in *Emilia Galotti* is both less

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168 “I call them silhouettes partly to suggest at once by the name that I draw them from the dark side of life and partly because, like silhouettes, they are not immediately visible.” KW EO, 172-73

169 The question on freedom in Lessing is summarized in Louise Crowther, ‘Freedom and Necessity: Spinoza’s Impact on Lessing’, *German Life and Letters*, 62.4 (2009), 359–77. In the article, Lessing’s position on freedom is considered in connection with a Spinozist denial of free will, but it also departs from a indirect source to Lessing in a conversation with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi published after Lessing’s death.

170 The reading of Emilia Galotti in the context of freedom is also developed in Edward Dvoretzky, *The Enigma of Emilia Galotti* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1963). The distinctive difference in the present reading is that freedom is not maintained as invincible. Freedom is very much at stake, and for that reason seduction remains a danger for Emilia. Though she perceives the threat, she remains susceptible. This reading contains a combination of two perspectives on the tragedy. The perspective of moral autonomy and that of psychoanalysis. These strands of research are presented in Monika Fick, *Lessing-Handbuch: Leben, Werk-
categorical and less jubilant. It is a costly freedom and its desirability is questionable.

As maintained before, the tragic concerns the experience and the expression of suffering. In this final act, we question whether the tragic might also direct us towards acting. As considered in the fourth act, pity as eleos in Homeric epic indicated a passionate movement towards action. The suffering contained in both pity and passion, Mitleid and Leidenschaft, medlidenhéd and lidenskab, points beyond passivity towards an engagement with the other. Emilia Galotti can be used to describe this movement from passivity towards activity. It was this play, that was found open on Werther’s desk after his suicide. Werther’s sufferings remained sufferings, but his internal struggles with his heart gave an eternal voice to all who have suffered.\textsuperscript{171} Emilia is also moved to the brink of suicide and, on the whole, the tragedy also represents an internalization of the action. Along with Werther and the Aesthete’s Antigone, Emilia in her modern form embodies the question on freedom. The fragile possibility of freedom is connected to the individual being called to take responsibility for the other, and this tragic call comes close to the Kierkegaardian call to love. Opposite the Aesthete’s sufferings in the beginning of the pseudonymous authorship, KG stands as solid testimony to the concrete possibility of action. These two might be seen in contrast to each other, but there is also a progression through suffering towards a realization of responsibility and the call to love. In this light, the tragic is seen as part of the movement towards understanding the self in relation to the other. Through the characters in Emilia Galotti we get a glimpse of a fragile concept of freedom that hinges upon the individual’s acceptance of responsibility and the call to love, and how this movement can go in both directions.

Emilia Galotti and the Internalized Revolution

The tragedy, Emilia Galotti, was first published and performed in 1772. Lessing had been working on a variation on the theme almost twenty years earlier, and in his notes and letters, he alludes to the tragedy and its connection with the ancient roman tale of Appius and Virginia. Lessing also

\textsuperscript{171} Goethe’s novel was modelled on the 1772 suicide of Karl William Jerusalem, who was an acquaintance of Lessing. Lessing raged against Goethe’s depiction of his friend and maintained that his suicide was not passionate or irrational. The connections between Emilia Galotti and Werther is developed more extensively in Leonard Forster, ‘Werther’s Reading of Emilia Galotti’, \textit{Publications of the English Goethe Society}, 27.1 (1958), 33–45 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593683.1958.11785672>.

knew it in a reworked form by Henry Samuel Crisp from 1754, which he had begun translating into German.\textsuperscript{172} In its ancient form, the tale depicts a greedy decemvir contriving to steal the daughter of an honest citizen. This leads the father to take the life of his daughter and in response to this heinous deed, the public rises against the corrupt government and overthrows the decemvir. Lessing’s interest lies in the tragic potential of the individual rather than the political.\textsuperscript{173} Lessing’s choice of detaching the tragic from the historical is noticed by Kierkegaard in SLV as curiously different from the norm for authors of tragedy.\textsuperscript{174} The turn towards the individual allows for a


“The first mention of his intention is found in a letter to Mendelssohn from 22.10.1757. Lessing explains his design in a letter to Nicolai (21.1.1758), wherein he also mentions the title “Emilia Galotti”. Here, he considers the internalization of the conflict. He had >>thought that the fate of a daughter that is slain by her father, who is worthy of her virtue and her life, that this would be tragic enough and fit to shake the soul<<, even if no revolution should follow (B11/1, 267)” My translation

“Erneut betont er die Konzentration auf die individuellen Schicksale. »Du siehst wohl<<, schreibt er dem Bruder (am 1.3.1772, B 11/2, 362), »daß es weiter nichts, als eine modernisierte, von allem Staatsinteresse befreite Virginia sein soll<<.”

”Again he accentuates the focus on the individual destiny. >>You will see<<, he writes to his brother (1.3.1772, B 11/2, 362), >>that it is no more than a modernized Virginia, liberated from all interest in state.” My translation

It is also mentioned in Richard T. Gray, \textit{Stations of the Divided Subject: Contestation and Ideological Legitimation in German Bourgeois Literature, 1770-1914} (Stanford University Press, 1995). P.79.

\textsuperscript{174} ”Det har oftere beskæftiget mig, at den tragiske Digtare for ret at sikre sig Indtrykket paa Tilskuerne, for at vinde Stykket deres Tillid og Tro, Opførelsen deres Taarer, støtter sig ved det Historiske, at hans Helt virkelig har udført det Store, om Digteren end ikke blot gjengiver det Historiske. At det er saaledes, vil vist Ingen negte, og ikke mod mig beraabe sig paa Lessing, da Emilie Galotti som Undtagelse bekræfter Reglen, og mangen Yttring af dets Forfatter viser, at han netop selv har betragtet det saaledes. Det langt overveiende Almindelige er, at benytte det Historiske, og med betydelig Reservation at forstaae det Aristoteliske: at Digteren er større Philosoph end Historikeren, fordi han viser, hvorledes det skal være, ikke hvorledes det er. Den comiske Digtare derimod behøver ikke et saadant historisk Tilhold. Han kalde sine Personer lige hvad han vil, han
subjective reading of the plot, and as we shall see, many of the concepts, which we have broached in the previous acts on the tragic, appear in Lessing’s rewritten tragedy. There is both the gap and the connection between the ancient and the modern, and there is a turn towards the individual. There is a reflection on the self in its dependency upon the other and there is a portrayal of the fragile possibility of self-determination within the individual.

In Lessing’s narrative, the names are altered and the plot is taken out of its historical context, though much of the Roman narrative remains intact. Emilia Galotti is the young woman who becomes the object of desire for a powerful prince. Emilia is of lower nobility and is engaged with the Count Appiani. Appiani is presented as both clever and kind as well as brave and uncompromising. Emilia’s father, Odoardo, is an upright man and representative of virtue and honor. Her mother, Claudia, is loving and kind, but as perceived by Odoardo, she is also slightly naïve when it comes to the risks of having a beautiful daughter. Opposed to these four, there are three of higher nobility. The prince, Hettore Gonzaga, is presented as an almost childish character, who only cares for his own entertainment, though he is responsible for the community. His friend and advisor, the marquis Marinelli, is sly and deceitful in all his actions and words. He manipulates the prince and makes personal advantages from the alliance. The final major character is the countess Orsina. She is the former object of desire for the prince, a woman scorned, and she represents a hellish fury. Her remarkable quickness of thought makes her an uncomfortable presence for those with

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lade Scenen foregaae hvor han vil, naar blot den comiske Idealitet er der, saa leer man nok; og omvendt, han vinder ikke ved at bruge Harlequin og Pierrot, naar han ikke veed at bruge dem uden som Navne.” SKS 6, 404-5

“I have often been engrossed by the circumstance that the tragic poet, in order to make sure of the proper impression on the spectators, in order to win for the play their belief and confidence and for the performance their tears, draws support from the historical, from the fact that his hero actually has performed something great, even though the poet does not simply render the historical. That this is the case no one, I am sure, will deny, and will not quote Lessing against me, since Emilia Galotti as the exception bears out the rule, and many comments by its author indicate that he himself has had the same view on the subject. It is by far the common practice to utilize the historical and with considerable reservation to understand the Aristotelian dictum that the poet is a greater philosopher than the historian because he shows how it ought to be, not how it is.504The comic poet, however, does not need a historical foothold such as this. He may give his characters whatever names he pleases, he may have the episode take place wherever he wants it, if only the comic ideality is there so there is sure to be laughter; and, conversely, he does not gain by using Harlequin and Pierrot when he does not know how to use them except as names.” KW SLW, 437
something to hide as she easily locates untruth and perceives the reason behind it.

The plot sets off with the prince admitting his infatuation with Emilia Galotti to Marinelli. In his eagerness to seduce her and thwart her marriage plans, the prince becomes susceptible to the advocacy of the cunning marquis. Through impulsive and rash decisions, the prince inadvertently has Emilia’s betrothed murdered. After the murder, Emilia fears that she will succumb to the seduction of the prince, and so she accepts that her only possibility of escape is to take her own life. In this moment in the fifth act, she refers to the ancient tale of a father that was worthy enough to take murder upon himself rather than letting his daughter’s virtue be stained by suicide. ¹⁷⁵ Emilia’s father accepts her decision and commits the deed in spite of his own desire for revenge over the prince. The prince in turn, when faced with the tragedy of the honest family, is awoken to his own part in the plot. In contrast to the ancient version of the play, the action is wholly internalized. The political consequences are not contained in the narrative, and in the final scene of the fifth act, the prince stands alone with the honorable father. The revolution is wholly internalized and even the internal movement is only seen as a silhouette through the silence.

Freedom is a central theme in the tragedy as Emilia finds herself trapped within a plot laid out by the prince and his advisor. The tragedy relays the implications of individual freedom between concepts of power and powerlessness, knowledge and uncertainty, vice and virtue. These concepts are addressed directly but also inconclusively, and freedom as self-determination remains a possibility rather than a certainty. Both Emilia and the prince are taken out of the exterior context to purvey the internal struggle and personal movement. At the outset, Emilia and the prince represent two radically different positions. The prince is all hedonistic desire while Emilia is all servitude and self-sacrifice. The movement in Emilia is sketched out as a possibility that is avoided only in her death. The movement, which she understands and fears, is a seduction in being drawn by the luxurious life of the prince, for who would not wish a life of wealth and pleasure? Emilia’s

¹⁷⁵ “Ehedem wohl gab es einen Vater, der seine Tochter von der Schande zu retten, ihr den ersten, den besten Stahl in das Herz senkte - ihr zum zweiten das Leben gab. Aber alle solche Taten sind von ehemd! Solcher Väter gibt es keinen mehr!” Act V, Scene VII. All quotes from EG are taken from Werke, VII.

“In former days there was a father, who, to save his daughter from disgrace plunged the first deadly weapon which he saw, into his daughter’s heart – and thereby gave her life, a second time. But those were deeds of ancient times. Such fathers exist not now.” English translations of the text in Emilia Galotti are taken from: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, The Dramatic Works of G.E. Lessing: Translated from the German (George Bell and Sons, 1878).
father also suspects Emilia’s mother of a similar disposition towards luxury rather than virtue when she insisted on having Emilia raised at the court.

The movement in the prince has the opposite trajectory. From his outset, the prince comes to doubt his own freedom, and there is a movement towards understanding and perhaps even virtue. This movement is only sketched out in the very last line of the tragedy, when Odoardo abstains from revenge and throws the dagger at the feet of the prince. The prince sees his own weakness and mourns the unhappy coincidence, that princes must be human and that they risk placing a devil as their friend. "Ist es, zum Unglücke so mancher, nicht genug, daß Fürsten Menschen sind: müssen sich auch noch Teufel in ihren Freund verstellen?" Act V, Scene VIII. We might be stretching the point, when we say that the prince has moved towards understanding and virtue, and the point would be in conflict with readings of the tragedy, that take a more static approach to the characters. There, Emilia represents freedom and virtue, while the prince represents passion and vice. One observation in particular allows us to at least entertain the idea of movement in the prince. In the first act, the prince signs a death sentence in an off-hand manner, that freezes the blood of his servant. The prince couldn’t care less for his subjects, and the life and death of his inferiors count as nothing compared to his passionate desire for Emilia. His servant, Camillo Rota describes it well:

"den Kopf schüttelnd, indem er die Papiere zu sich nimmt und abgeht: Recht gern? - Ein Todesurteil recht gern?--Ich hätt' es ihn in diesem Augenblicke nicht mögen unterschreiben lassen, und wenn es den Mörder meines einzigen Sohnes betroffen

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176 “Odoardo: Du möchtest meinen alten Argwohn erneuern:--daß es mehr das Geräusch und die Zerstreuung der Welt, mehr die Nähe des Hofes war als die Notwendigkeit, unserer Tochter eine anständige Erziehung zu geben, was dich bewog, hier in der Stadt mit ihr zu bleiben--fern von einem Manne und Vater, der euch so herzlich liebet.” Act II, Scene IV

“You almost make me again suspect that your motive for remaining with her in town, far from an affectionate husband and father, was the bustle and the dissipation of the world, and proximity of the court, rather than the necessity of giving our daughter a proper education.” Act II, Scene IV

177 “Is it not enough for the misery of many that monarchs are men? Must devils in disguise become their friends?”

178 Dvoretzky. P.107. “The play's ending shows the invincible freedom and the self-determination of the individual. In Lassalle's opinion, this conflict was applicable to every petty German principality of Lessing’s time. His portrayal of a dissembling prince who hypocritically places the blame on his aide is "beautiful." This is just one example of the simple reading of Emilia as representing freedom and the prince representing unredeemable cruelty.
The movement in the prince can be considered from this point. The prince unthinkingly signs the death sentence of a stranger in the opening act, but when we finally arrive at a point where he has good reason to make use of his power, when he understands that Marinelli has manipulated him and made him a murderer, he refrains from using his power:


Act V, Scene VIII

Even though, he understands himself to have been maliciously deceived by Marinelli, he abstains from retribution. There is a stark contrast between the prince from the opening act and the final scene. His intentions are never achieved and events occur in a chaotic and unplanned manner. None of the characters foresee the conclusion in the filicide. Through this acceptance of the limitations of both reasoning and force, the prince comes to understand himself as unfree in spite of his outward appearance of power. The whole tragedy becomes a crossing of the two individual positions between actual and seeming freedom. Emilia risks losing her freedom and the prince comes to understand his own lack thereof. Emilia maintains her freedom, and the prince moves towards a freedom of detaching himself from desire and the manipulations of the dishonest interlocutors who abuse him for his wealth and power. For both, freedom is not threatened so much by force as by seduction, and also on this count, the tragedy has become personal rather than political. The drama of power has become a drama of the self, where the conflict is internalized in this possibility of a double movement.

Ancient and Modern Objects of Desire: Bathsheba, Virginia and Emilia Galotti

In the classical Roman tale of Appius and Virginia, Appius is a powerful decemvir of Rome and Virginia the beautiful daughter of an upright man. There are both obvious and subtle differences in Lessing’s telling of the tale.

179 “(Shaking his head, as he collects the papers). ‘With all my heart!’ – A death warrant, with all my heart! I would not have let him sign at such a moment, had the criminal murdered my own son. – ‘With all my heart!’ ‘With all my heart!’ – The cruel words pierce my very soul.” Act I, Scene VIII

180 “Prince (after a pause, during which he surveys the body with a look of horror and despair, turns to Marinelli). Here! Raise her. How! Dost thou hesitate? Wretch! Villain! (Tears the dagger from his grasp.) No. Thy blood shall not be mixed with such as this. Go: hide thyself for ever. Begone I say.”
Looking at the various forms of the story from its ancient representation in Titus Livius’ *Ab Urbe Condita* and onwards towards the modern versions, *Emilia Galotti* stands out on several counts, by her name but particularly by her role and her remarks. The structure of the narrative remains the same. There is the imbalance of power, there is the tyrant, there is desire and obsession, there is a plot to take her by force, and there is the filicide. But there is also a progression in the Virginia character. She goes from being the property of her father in the ancient versions towards becoming an individual. This development is underlined in *Emilia Galotti*. Even the name might hold a clue to the difference from the Virginia story. The innocence of the name Virginia is contrasted by the name Emilia, from the latin word *Aemulus* meaning rival. Rather than being the property that might change hands and the innocent object of the affairs of others, Lessing’s Emilia takes part in the action and takes responsibility. She might be named after the Emilia in Pierre Corneille’s comedy *Cinna* from 1641. In this play, Emilia is the vengeful daughter of a murdered father and she uses seduction to plan the revenge over her father’s killer, the emperor Augustus. In the comedy by Corneille, Emilia is the motive force of the drama and she plays the part of the rival. There is also another possible meaning for the Latin *Aemulus*. In its adjective form, it can mean both jealous or striving to be equal. Lessing’s Emilia is not a rival to the prince and she has no ambitions to overthrow him, but her life and sorrows are represented as equal to the prince’s and even more significantly, she fears for her soul as equally prone to corruption. She is not just afraid of the wrongs she could suffer, she is afraid of the wrongs she could commit – she fears seduction more than abuse, and in this she has become an individual and an equal.

The narratives can all be compared to the biblical tale of David and Bathsheba. This parallel gives us a possible pathway into the material as both the tale of Virginia/Emilia and that of Bathsheba can be seen as examples of an objectification of the other. As Kierkegaard so often does in his passages of rewritten narrative, Lessing also adds new life to the ancient narrative as he brings out the personality and individuality of the young

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181 Lessing seems to have picked up the narrative in its English tradition, when translating parts of Henry Samuel Crisp’s *Virginia* that was staged in 1754. This play draws on Chaucer’s *The Physicians Tale* and John Webster’s *Appius and Virginia*.

182 The origin of the changed name in Emilia Galotti has not been developed elsewhere to my knowledge. My own interest was sparked by the simple question of a colleague as to why it was changed from Virginia to Emilia.

183 This reading also places Lessing as the prophetic voice of Nathan, the prophet who confronts David with his corruption and also the name Lessing speaks through in Nathan the Wise after being censured from the theological debate during the Fragment Controversy in the last stages of his writing.
woman who becomes the object of desire for the powerful prince. In the biblical narrative the focus is of course on David and his transgression against God and morality – the tyrant who abuses his position to steal the wife of a soldier. In the ancient roman version, Virginia functions solely as the stolen property of an upright citizen. Appius’ transgression becomes instrumental to the rebellion against corrupted power, but in both the biblical and the ancient Roman tale, the objects of dispute, the soldier’s wife and the daughter of the honest citizen, remain voiceless throughout. In Emilia Galotti, the object of desire is given a voice, a will to resist, and a concern for her own virtue and freedom.

The Tragic Transcendence of the Plebian and Patrician

In the introduction to Henry Samuel Crisp’s version, *Virginia*, there is a division of characters into plebian and patrician classes. In Lessing’s version there is a similar focus on the imbalance of power, and much of the research on *Emilia Galotti* has considered it as a democratic critique of a hierarchical society. In our analysis, we depart from the individualized focus of the tragedy, but there is still reason to consider the characters from the perspective of their societal positions. Emilia and the Galotti family are of lower nobility and so is her betrothed, the count Appiani. On the patrician level, there is the prince, the marquis Marinelli, and the prince’s former romantic relation, the countess Orsina. Outside and below these two spheres, there is a number of servants, rouges and minor characters. The Galotti family and the count Appiani are represented as humble and honest. They have fewer financial means but they have the possibility of leaving the masquerades at court and returning to their country residences. Marinelli and Orsina on the other hand are deceiving and cruel, intelligent and cunning. They are invested with both financial wealth and intellectual capacity that grant them a good measure of power. The Prince represents the extremity of unchecked power within the narrative.

At a first glance the movement between the classes goes downwards. The prince orders his servants and Marinelli around, while the prince himself takes no orders and is free even to ignore the letter of the countess Orsina. He can make demands of the Galotti family in formal matters and he attempts to postpone the wedding by ordering count Appiani away on an errand. But there is also movement in the other direction. The prince is manipulated by both Marinelli and Orsina, and often he seems at a loss for directing his unmatched power. The contrast between higher and lower nobility and the imbalance in power comes out in the final scenes when Emilia’s father

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184 Fick. P. 347.
perceives the plot against his daughter. His anger is impotent as he has forgotten his sword, but the countess Orsina hands him the means for revenge as she holds both a hidden dagger and a vial of poison. As in Philoctetes, the power over life and death, both of the other and the self, is represented in the weapon. But this power is a double-edged sword and giving the dagger to Odoardo and thereby empowering him, doesn’t achieve Orsina’s aim of having her revenge over the prince. The fact that both cunning and power finally cannot guide events underline the tragic point on a freedom, that it is not to be confused with force.

The individual flows of intention and planning cross and mingle, but the chain of events doesn’t follow any of the plans. The audience is allowed into the scheming of Marinelli and Orsina and allowed to hear the lies. In spite of intelligence and cunning, the marquis is unsuccessful in winning the favor of the prince, as the prince in the end perceives his wrong doing. The prince is unsuccessful in winning the heart of Emilia, and Orsina is unsuccessful in the instrumentalization of Emilia’s father in her plot for deadly vengeance over the prince. The lower classes both plebs and lower nobility, are considered as pawns in the great game, but through the unruliness of the plotline, we come to doubt the controlling abilities of even the most powerful and the most cunning. The complexity, unreasonableness and unpredictability of events question the rational self as the motive force that directs the action. Each character is thrown into events and is guided by imperfect knowledge towards an unknown end. Although there is an equality in this lack of control, that is not the case in terms of suffering. Suffering trickles downwards in the tragedy, and the very vocative sufferings of the prince and Orsina seem comical in the face of the earnest sufferings of the Galotti family. The prince suffers a disturbed mind and a burning desire for possession of the prized object. Orsina suffers the wounded pride of a woman scorned. For these superficial sufferings they feel entitled to theft and murder. The plebian and patrician categories are maintained in Lessing’s version, but with this duplicity, that vice and virtue do not belong to classes but to individuals.

The Prince - Observation and Objectification
The structure in Lessing’s tragedy is basically the same as the two ancient narratives, the biblical and the roman. The plot begins with observation and infatuation. The opening of the narrative in both the story of David and of Appius starts with observation. David sees Bathsheba showering, Appius
sees Virginia in the market, the prince sees Emilia at church. Objectification of the other begins with observation, and, in the first act, Lessing highlights this visual consumption of the other. Observation was also central in the reading of *Philoctetes*, where Odysseus was characterized as the unmoved observer. In this narrative, observation is connected to an objectification and a dehumanization of the other. Lessing elegantly knits in reflections over the objectification of individuals in art and the desire for possession in the opening scenes of the first act. There the prince converses with a local artist on the nature of art. The prince displays both a childish, pathetic greediness and an unconcealed contempt for others as mere distractions in the series of quick remarks and repartees. His aloofness is further underlined when he signs the petition for an execution in Scene VIII “Recht gern” to be rid of distractions from his present obsession. The image that is formed of the prince is reminiscent of two aspects from the previous acts. The prince comes across as unreflected. We might say, with the words of Climacus, that he seems to be untried in the casibus of life and has not had many sufferings to learn from. The prince is also portrayed as purely observing in the beginning, and this detached spectator only perceives the other through his desiring eyes.

The prince expresses his new found love for Emilia Galotti already in his first line and the first line of the play. There it comes out as an innocent sigh of regret as he reads the petition of another Emilia, which he grants on account of her given name. The thought of Emilia Galotti stirs his emotions, and he becomes restless. Solely focused on Emilia, he ignores the letter from his former romance, the countess Orsina: “Nun ja; ich habe sie zu lieben geglaubt! Was glaubt man nicht alles? Kann sein, ich habe sie auch wirklich geliebet. Aber - ich habe!” Act I, Scene I. When the artist, Conti, enters his chambers, the prince is presented with the portraits. Firstly, of the

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185 The moment of observation is only briefly referred to in Titus Leveius’ version but it is also described in terms of consumption in Crisp’s, Act 1, Scene II:

"One fatal morn, 
As I was seated on my throne of judgement,  
In th’ open Forum, the attendant crowd  
Awaiting my decrees, my eyes were struck  
With a young damsel that past slowly by me,"

"Here I stood rooted –  
My eyes devouring her! –“

"Thus I remain’d entranc’d; and at my eyes
Drank in her beauties, and with them deep draughts
Of poison, how delicious!"

186 “Well, well, I fancied I loved her – one may fancy anything. It may be that I really did love her. But – I did.”
countess Orsina, which he had ordered earlier and now lost all interest in. Secondly, the artist reveals a portrait of Emilia Galotti and the prince is enthralled by the beauty of her likeness on the canvass. In the exchange that follows, there is a striking and subtle dialogue on the representation of beauty in art and on the eye of the beholder.

The beauty which the artist attempts to draw forth in the countess Orsina doesn’t move the prince, as he sees through the attempts to idealize her – to flatter her. This, the artist argues, is the privilege of art, to render nature without the defects of unmanageable material and “ohne den Verderb, mit welchem die Zeit dagegen ankämpft.” Act I, Scene IV. But the prince insists on the flattery as dishonest: “Stolz haben Sie in Würde, Hohn in Lächeln, Ansatz zu trübsinniger Schwärmerei in sanfte Schwermut verwandelt.” Act I, Scene IV. When the prince desires the young woman, it is also because he prefers the innocence of Galotti compared to the wit and worldliness of the countess Orsina. Her understanding was ruined by books just as her expression has been ruined malignant intelligence.

Defending himself, the artist claims that the painter works through the eyes of love and the eyes of love alone must judge their works. The prince has lost the eyes of love regarding the countess Orsina. He has laid them on Emilia, and is no longer impressed by her portrait. When Conti reveals his second portrait, the prince loses all composure and the dignity of his manner and he openly admits his infatuation. The artist observes the change, and he perceives the prince as only present in his eyes: “Ihre Seele, merk ich, war ganz in Ihren Augen. Ich liebe solche Seelen und solche Augen.” Act I, Scene IV. Beyond observation though, the obsession with Emilia only becomes more dire when the prince learns that also the artist places her above all others in beauty. When left alone, the prince confesses to himself that he longs to possess that beauty also in person:


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187 “free from the ravages which result from a conflict with time.”
188 “You have converted pride into dignity, disdain into a smile, and the gloom of discontent into soft melancholy.”
189 “Your soul, I observe, was wholly in your eyes. I like such souls and such eyes.”
190 “Thou art mine, too cheap at any price. Oh, thou enchanting work of art! Do I then possess thee? But who shall possess thyself, thou still more beautiful masterpiece of nature? Claim what you will, honest old mother; ask what you will, morose old father. Demand any price. Yet, dear enchantress, I should be far more happy to buy thee from thyself!”
There is here a parallel between the product of art and the person represented as both being objects. The observing prince considers both the picture and the individual as objects to be possessed and consumed. Immediately after meeting the artist, the prince learns from the marquis Marinelli that Emilia is to be married on that same day. From that moment, the events follow at a breakneck pace - the entire plot unravels within the temporal space of a day. The prince must move from observation to action and, to this end, he must rely on the advice of the marquis. In this dependency, the prince is represented as almost pitiable. From falling childishly in love with a young woman and being unable to seduce her, he becomes the puppet of the scheming marquis. The prince becomes the somewhat dumb instrument in these plans. The prince is portrayed not as inhumane or cruel, but as childish and lacking understanding and empathy for his subjects. In his eyes, and his subjects exist only in his eyes, he is only concerned with his own desire and for this purpose the other is a mere object. The prince acts in accordance with this simple perception and his longing to possess the object of beauty. In this way, he is immediate and unreflected.

This immediacy is not to be confused with innocence and, like the Aesthete describes Don Giovanni in EE, the immediate erotic desire can have disastrous consequences. Immediacy, desire and objectification seems to be connected with sight in the Aesthete’s engagement with the erotic, and this adds another level to the two unmoved observers, Constantin and Odysseus, regarded in the fourth act. The immediately erotic contains an objectification of the other which is unreflectedly sensual. The prince begins his movement from this position of immediacy – a dangerous immediacy – where the other is solely an object for his desire or entertainment. The question is though, whether there is a movement through Emilia’s death and his realization of responsibility. This would stand in line with what we have found the Aesthete to express in his movement from immediacy over the tragic towards reflection. After this point – the reflected self is no longer immediate and, in a sense, no longer excusable, as the objectification of the other becomes a conscious choice. This is the frightening aspect of the reflected seducer in EE, who maintains his detachment though he understands the destructive consequences for the other. The prince gets the last line of the tragedy, and it would seem that he is somehow educated through the tragic events. This internal revolution stands as a parallel to the political revolution of the ancient narrative. The political uprising has become a wholly inner revolution towards responsibility for the other. Lessing, denies the audience the reassurance of a promise of improvement.

191 Immediacy refers to Umiddelbarhed from EE. As pointed out in the third act, suffering and the tragic stand between the immediacy of youth and the mature reflection.
from the prince, and through the open ending he maintains another tragic point: that movement is never final.

Emilia - The Violence of Seduction
The thematic focus in Emilia Galotti is mainly on the individual and through the individual tragedy of Emilia the story touches upon the larger themes of guilt, sin and suffering. In the earlier versions, the focus is on the affairs of state, and how the lust and greed of the tyrant lead to his overthrow. Lessing’s story is centered on Emilia, her dreams and hopes, when we first meet her on her wedding day. Her loss and disillusionment at the death of Appiani and, finally, her resolve not to succumb to seduction. From the beginning, Emilia is described as conscientious and pious and even on her wedding day she goes to church to ask for guidance. She is startled by the encounter with the prince at the church but she attempts to regain composure so as not to alarm the family unnecessarily.

As the events unfold, she is unable to understand the events and fathom the consequences. Almost like Neoptolemus, she acts and reacts automatically, as if she does not compute what is happening, until suddenly her mind is made up and she meets her father in the prince’s chambers with a calm, almost cold, perception of her new position. In this calm state of mind, she questions the situation as she does not accept that she can be at the mercy of the prince: “Ich allein in seinen Händen? (...) Ich will doch sehn, wer mich hält--wer mich zwingt--wer der Mensch ist, der einen Menschen zwingen kann.“ Act V, Scene VII.\footnote{192} This general question of force and power over others is at the center of the ancient form of the tale. There Virginia is born of a slave and Appius is legally allowed to detain her until ownership is clarified. This ancient focus of the tale has already been slightly alternated in Webster’s and Crisp’s versions as Virginia is given more lines and more personality. Lessing goes radically beyond it though, when he wholly denies the concept of her as an object in the hands of her father, her betrothed or the prince.\footnote{193} Lessing completes the subjective perception of Emilia as an individual in Emilia’s lines. She describes the incongruence of the notion of ownership from her own position and from this to the general question “wer der Mensch ist, der einen Menschen zwingen kann”. Immediately after she does this again when she understands that the prince will take her away from her family: ”Reißt mich? bringt mich? - Will mich

\footnote{192} “I remain alone in his hands? (...) I will see who can detain me – who can compel me. What human being can compel another?”

\footnote{193} The focus on hands in Act V Scene VII stands as contrast to the opening scenes with the focus on eyes – a contrast or a connection between observation and possession.
reißen, will mich bringen: will! will!--Al's ob wir, wir keinen Willen hätten, mein Vater!” Act V, Scene VII.194

But there are other methods than force in the objectification of the other. Though, as Emilia states, she cannot be compelled and she does have a will of her own, she fears seduction. She fears becoming an accomplice in the wrongs committed, just like her father almost goes mad when he is led to suspect his own daughter of being an accomplice to the plot by the countess Orsina. Emilia has given up on life, but Odoardo argues against it, saying that she only has the one life. She replies that she has only one innocence, and that innocence is proof against all force. She replies:


Emilia decides to die rather than succumb to seduction, and she refers to the story of Appius and Virginia “Aber alle solche Taten sind von ehedem!” 196, when she asks her father to commit the filicide.

Through the focus on seduction rather than force, the character of Bathsheba also comes alive again. If we imagine her situation and the possibility from her perspective and not that of Urias or David. As an individual, she is more than either a wife of a soldier or a servant to the king. She has ambitions and fears of her own and she would be tempted by the comfort of wealth and the prospect of being queen and giving birth to a prince. This perspective in Lessing’s tragedy is in many ways similar to the Kierkegaardian method of readjusting the lens when looking at given narrative. At a first reading of 2 Samuel 11-12, the focus is solely on David and his transgression as ruler. The same goes for the tale of Appius and Virginia. Rewriting the narrative, Lessing imagines the ruler as somewhat simpleminded and immature. But he finds an infinite resource for reflection in Emilia – the virtuous but fallible young woman, who is an equal to the men that would own her, exactly on this point of being equally corruptible. For who would not be flattered by the romantic advance of one who could have taken anyone else? Temptation and seduction here, plays a larger part than force.

194 “Takes me – would tear me – take me – would-would – As if we ourselves had no will, father.”
195 “But not against all seduction. Force! Force! What is that? Who may not deny force? What you call force is nothing. Seduction is the only real force. I have blood, my father, as youthful and as warm as that of others. I have senses too.”
196 “those were deeds of ancient times”

In her despairing realization that her fate has been sealed, Emilia begs this seemingly odd rhetorical question that implies that force is nothing compared to seduction. Force has evidently just killed her beloved Appiani and force has left her with no possibility for action. And yet – force is as nothing. The German ‘Gewalt’ can mean both force and violence. In the section on Emilia, we discussed the violence of seduction, and in this section, we consider force in relation to freedom. The most straight-forward conception opposes freedom and necessity. In this dualism, being unfree means being bound by exterior forces, and becoming free means overcoming the exterior. In this image, freedom is equal to force. In Prometheus Bound, Aeschylus’ fittingly describes this freedom from necessity and boundness as limited to the single most powerful being: “Only Zeus is free”. Freedom in an open usage is connected to force as having the freedom to choose, as being financially independent, as the freedom from oppression and coercion. This immediate connection between force and freedom is put into doubt in Emilia’s question. Lessing’s tragedy confronts the idea of freedom as force by following the idea through to its conclusion – that no amount of force can secure us against suffering and death.

Returning to the point from the Aesthete’s essay on the tragic, the thin line between suffering and action is where the truly tragic occurs. This position also relates to the tragic representation of freedom as an unattainable absolute. The three outward levels of agency in Emilia Galotti, the servants, the citizens, and the nobility, are attributed with various degrees of power, but neither of the classes can be said to be entirely free. The prince stands above the others but in spite of his position he is also unfree in the sense, that he must bend to exterior forces. We can develop the question in relation to the ancient figures of power in the other two narratives, and ask whether they are presented as free. Appius is portrayed as filled with greed and lust, and though he is representative of worldly power he is displayed as weak in comparison to the father of Virginia. If we look at David as a literary figure, his power is almost unlimited as he has divine support in all his doings, but he is simultaneously patronized almost as an unruly child and put forth as an example of bad behavior. The narrative figures of the embodiment of power in the prince, the decemvir or the king are not representations of freedom. Even in an ancient context, the empowered individual is not free nor complacent. The traditional tragedy’s fascination with the patrician classes also concerns this imagery of uninhibited force. When tragedy is criticized for not being modern on account of its one-sided focus on the aristocracy,
this might stand as an explanation.\textsuperscript{197} Only at this point, where an individual has attained all the wealth and power that mere mortals can dream about, or when the prince can choose whatever woman he wants from among the lower classes, even at this point of uninhibited agency, the chaotic element of the tragic bursts forth again to take everything away like some titanic force destabilizing all certainty and faith in control. To some extent, this might explain the tragic fascination with the patrician classes, where earthly power is little protection against the tides of fate. The concept of uninhibited power in the hands of a human becomes ridiculous. The idea of being fully in control of one self becomes ridiculous. Both are inaccessible extremities. We have freedom by degrees, as we only have power, understanding, self-awareness by degrees. Like the tragic lies somewhere between suffering and action, the tragic freedom is also portrayed as somewhere in between force and necessity.

In the criticism of their times as the modern kingdom of gods, this is the point that Lessing and Kierkegaard ironically draw forth – their times are confusing freedom with uninhibited agency – with force. In BA, Haufniensis tackles with the misconception of freedom as force when it is considered to be the opposite of necessity.\textsuperscript{198} By approaching freedom from the perspective of uninhibited force, the question of freedom is qualified as pointing beyond the scope of force. The tragic points beyond force, as even the mighty are never beyond the reach of suffering and death. The Greek tragedies would place heroes under kings and kings under gods and only at the final point of Zeus as the ultimate force would they carefully dare to attribute an entity with an unconditional freedom from necessity. What this achieves is to bring the gods, the kings, and the heroes down to earth as they also suffer in their thrownness – in Schiller's schism between the self and the exterior. If we speak tragically about human freedom, it must be from the perspective of

\textsuperscript{197} Eagleton, P.X.
\textsuperscript{198} "Naar Friheden opfattes saaledes, har den sin Modsætning i Nødvendigheden, hvilket viser, at man har opfattet Friheden i en Reflexions-Bestemmelse. Nei Frihedens Modsætning er Skyld, og det er det Højeste i Friheden, at den bestandig kun har med sig selv at gjøre, i sin Mulighed projekterer Skylden, og altsaa sætter den ved sig selv, og hvis Skylden bliver sat virkeligen, sætter den ved sig selv. Hvis man ikke paaagter dette, har man aandrigt forvexlet Frihed med noget ganske Andet, med Kraft.” SKS 4, 410
"When freedom is apprehended in this way, it has necessity as its opposite, which shows that it has been conceived as a category of reflection. No, the opposite of freedom is guilt, and it is the greatness of freedom that it always has to do only with itself, that in its possibility it projects guilt and accordingly posits it by itself. And if guilt is posited actually, freedom posits it by itself. If this is not kept in mind, freedom is confused in a clever way with something entirely different, with force.” KW CA, 108
limited force. The tragic maintains the condition of suffering, but there is still a level of freedom.

In the essay, *The Iliad – or the Poem of Force*, Simone Weil considers force as the central theme in Homer’s epic:

“The true hero, the true subject, the center of the Iliad is force. Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man’s flesh shrinks away. In this work, at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded, by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to.”

She describes the many ways in which the victors gloat over their fallen enemies and how there is always a struggle to be on the winning side. And yet, the epic also contains an inescapable aspect of suffering. The heroes and kings might have their moments of triumph, and the luck of battle shifts from day to day, but common for all is the inevitable downfall. This makes Weil highlight another and perhaps a more easily overlooked aspect of *The Iliad*. That the strongest characters also show empathy and weakness in the face of suffering. The main example is Achilles weeping together with Priam in the moment when they come together in their grief for lost loved ones. A unity is established between the great warrior and the old king without his guard—two opposites in respect to force, who are both suffering under the external forces of the gods, chance and fate. *The Iliad* is the poem of force—but it also shows how force is undermined. There is an identification with the other, there is pity and sympathy. Simone Weil describes how tragedy continues the scope of identification with the enemy in *The Iliad*, and how it points towards the gospels.

“Attic tragedy, or at any rate the tragedy of Aeschylus and Sophocles, is the true continuation of the epic. The conception of justice enlightens it, without ever directly intervening in it; here force appears in its coldness and hardness, always attended by effects from whose fatality neither those who use it nor those who suffer it can escape; here the shame of the coerced spirit is neither disguised, nor enveloped in facile pity, nor held up to scorn; here more than one spirit bruised and degraded by misfortune is offered for our admiration. The Gospels are the last marvelous expression of the Greek genius, as the Iliad is the first: here the Greek spirit reveals itself not only in the injunction given mankind to seek above all other goods, "the kingdom and justice of our Heavenly Father," but also in the fact that human suffering is laid bare, and we see it in a being who is at once divine and human.”

Weil has an eye for the universal aspect of human suffering in epic and tragedy. This is the Greek genius, that is taken into the gospel of a suffering god. There is a distinct difference in Weil’s hopeful perception of suffering and the attic tragedy from the pessimistic portrayal of tragedy as coming closer the wisdom of the Silenus. George Steiner draws out this aspect of

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199 Weil.
200 Weil.
tragedy, and hails the *Bacchae* to represent an absolute image of tragic art on account of depicting complete hopelessness.\(^{201}\) The hopeful aspect that Weil draws from the Iliad and the one she perceives as running through the tragic towards the gospel, is delicately balanced on a suffering that brings together the weak and the strong. There is an acceptance of the other as related to the self in this shared aspect of suffering.\(^{202}\) It is in this perspective, that we can ask rhetorically with Emilia – what is force? Force is an all too human illusion of control in the face of chaotic existence, and the tragic undermines its worship. Force, in the tragic perspective, is a negation of phenomena and an idealization of impossibility. The illusion of force drives the wielder towards megalomania and madness and towards inevitable downfall. In the philosophical dichotomy between activity and passivity, the tragic maintains the human condition as suffering, but though the tragic might portray existence as helpless, it is never entirely hopeless. In the last section we will explore how the tragic also contains the possibility of transcending suffering and moving the individual towards the fragile possibility of freedom.

The Prophetic ‘thou’ and the Tragic Call to Love

The tragic for both Lessing and Kierkegaard is connected to the emotional aspect of understanding. A tragedy moves the receiver from the objective perception of events towards a passionate and subjective response. It places the receiver within the fiction and allows the receiver into the emotions of the characters. The shadows of the self take part in the action on the stage. One example of the identification between the receiver and the fiction is of course the mock play within Hamlet, where the new king is made to reveal his secret. The king realizes that he is the villain on the stage and objects to the inaccuracy of events. Here the receiver understands himself through the character on stage - the receiver fills the fiction with himself. In a biblical

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\(^{201}\) Steiner, ““Tragedy,” Reconsidered’. “Absolute tragedy, whether in Euripides’ *Bacchae* or Kafka’s parable of the Law, is immune to hope.” “Thus a core of dynamic negativity underwrites authentic tragedy. It entails a metaphysical and, more particularly, a theological dimension.” Steiner highlights the theological implications of a tragic philosophy but he remains in the OT department of a fallen humanity. The question that this investigation poses, is whether the tragic also points towards a redeemed humanity.\(^{202}\) The universal aspect of suffering is radicalized in the humanity of Christ, where the suffering god identifies with the human condition by taking suffering upon himself. In a common theological trope, this suffering deity takes sin upon himself as a liberating act. But the liberation is not a liberation from sin, as sin ensues. The liberation is a liberation from judgement, and an acceptance of the thrownness of existence. Against the even more common objection that this liberation makes man free to commit more wrongs, one has simply not given enough thought to the next logical move on the chessboard of faith.
example, Nathan confronts David by telling him a story of a greedy lord in order to make David understand his wrongdoing against Urias. David does not understand the connection at first, so Nathan has to point out the blatantly obvious point, that David in fact is the greedy lord. The fiction produced an emotional response in David but only through Nathan does he understand his actions and how he has wronged Urias.

In both examples, there is a connection between narrative and the ethical claim on the individual. This ethical claim is at the same time a demand but also a possibility as Kierkegaard also points out in relation to the ‘Shalt’ in ‘Thou shalt love’ in KG. In The Heart of Knowledge: Kierkegaard on Passion and Understanding, Rick Anthony Furtak develops the interplay between the intellect and the passions in Kierkegaard’s works. To this end, he includes the example from the Bathsheba narrative as it appears in Kierkegaard’s Til Selvprøvelse Samtiden Anbefalet. The focus there is on the ‘thou’ in the biblical text. As Kierkegaard quotes it, “Du est Manden!” The ‘thou’ is the prophetic element that leads David to understand his own character and to repent. 203


"Then the prophet says to him, "Thou art" the man." See, the tale the prophet told was a story, but this "Thou art the man"-this was another story-this was the transition to the subjective. But do you not believe that David himself was well aware beforehand how abominable it is to have a woman’s husband killed in order to marry her? Do you not believe that David, the great poet, could himself easily describe this (eloquently, terrifyingly, shockingly)? Then, too, do you not believe that David was well aware that he was guilty and what he was guilty OR And yet, yet, yet someone from the outside was needed, someone who said to him: You. From this you see how little the impersonal (the objective)-a doctrine, a story, scholarly research, and all that helps when even a man like David, otherwise so devout and God-fearing (and devoutness and fear of God are
central to the emotional aspect of understanding as it bridges the objective with the subjective. In KG, the prophetic ‘thou’ is also addressed as always contained in the passive construction of the commandment that places the receiving individual as the elliptical agent.

"I Evangeliet staaer der og ikke, som den kløgtige Tale vilde lyde »Du eller man skal kjende Træet paa Frugterne«; men der staaer »Træet skal kjendes paa Frugterne,« det er udlagt, Du, som læser disse Evangeliets Ord, Du er Træet. Hvad Propheten Nathan tilføjede til Parabelen »Du est Manden«, det behøver Evangeliet ikke at tilføje, da det allerede ligger i Udsagnets Form, og i, at det er et Evangeliums Ord. Thi Evangeliets gudommelige Myndighed taler ikke til det ene Menneske om det andet Menneske, ikke til Dig, m. T., om mig, eller til mig om Dig; nei, naar Evangeliet taler, taler det til den Enkelte; det taler ikke om os Mennesker, Dig og mig, men det taler til os Mennesker, Dig og mig, og det taler om, at Kjerligheden skal kjendes paa Frugterne." SKS 9, 22

In KG, the gospel also contains the prophetic ‘thou’, when it demands – ‘thou shalt love’. The voice of the prophet, the accusing ‘thou’, is contained in the wording of the gospel. The question is, whether literature or drama also can contain this ‘thou’ or whether the gospel is essentially different from other fiction. Simone Weil considers the gospel as an extension of epic and tragedy. From the general observation that Kierkegaard uses both biblical and literary examples intermingled in his development of ideas, we could also argue that there is at least an interplay between the religious and the aesthetic. The individual must be deceived towards the subjective truth and certainly forms of personality, the subjective), when even he, when in connection with having committed such an odious crime (and previously he found-objectively enough!-nothing in the way, no conscience in the way of having Uriah killed, nothing in the way, no conscience in the way of marrying Bathsheba), when even he, after it has happened, can maintain so much impersonality (objectivity) that he can go on living and pretend as if nothing has happened, that he can listen to the prophet's tale and pretend as if nothing has happened—until the prophet, weary of this impersonality and objectivity, so extolled in our age as culture and earnestness, uses his authority and says: Thou art the man.” KW FSE, 38-39

204 “It does not read in the Gospel, as sagacious talk would say, "YOU or we are to know the tree by its fruits," but it reads, "The tree is to be known by its fruits." The interpretation is that you who read these words of the Gospel, you are the tree. The Gospel does not need to add what the prophet Nathan added to his parable, "You are the man," since it is already contained in the form of the statement and in its being a word of the Gospel. The divine authority of the Gospel does not speak to one person about another, does not speak to you, my listener, about me, or to me about you-no, when the Gospel speaks, it speaks to the single individual. It does not speak about us human beings, you and me, but speaks to us human beings, to you and me, and what it speaks about is that love is to be known by its fruits.” KW WL, 14
fiction plays an important role in the process of understanding the self in relation to the other and the Other. In relation to Kierkegaard’s reading of Nathan’s prophetic ‘thou’, we could also add, that the prophetic ‘thou’ is actually already caught within a fiction. Like the mock play within Hamlet is a fiction within a fiction, Nathan’s confrontation with David is a fiction within a fiction aimed at another audience. The prophetic ‘thou’ no longer needs the prophet, because the receiver meets the prophet within the narrative. The prophetic ‘thou’ becomes self-contained in the fiction.205

In *Emilia Galotti*, the reader is confronted with a double ‘thou’. The receiver is first confronted with the character of the prince. There, the receiver is questioned with the abuse of power, much like David is questioned with Nathan’s narrative – the temptation to take whatever one desires without repercussion. Secondly, the receiver is confronted with Emilia and her resistance against seduction. The problem is, and this is what Furtak brings out in Kierkegaard, that the ‘I’ almost never considers itself to be in the wrong. David could easily tell himself that he was righteous and living in accordance with the divine commands. Only in the confrontation with the prophetic ‘thou’ does he become self-aware. The first ‘thou’ in *Emilia Galotti* is developed through the prince and his movement from childish obsession and objectification of the other towards transgression and regret. Through this character, the receiving individual is asked whether they might have done something similar. By accepting that you have on some level objectified the other and submitted the other to the ‘I’, you must also consider yourself as the violator of the other. This is the first ‘thou’ that addresses you directly as having power over the other and having at some point consciously or unconsciously taken advantage of that power.

In a modern context, this has been elegantly brought out by David Foster Wallace in his novel *Brief Interview with Hideous Men*. Through a compilation of short interviews, the reader is accompanied by a variety of men in their pursuit of female attention. The reader encounters manipulating, conceited, objectifying, selfish, and narcissistic men in their relations to women. All are attributed with acutely insightful remarks and some of them

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205 The publisher of EE also refers to the double fiction regarding the Seducer’s Diary: “Her mode nye Vanskelligheder, idet A ikke erklerer sig for Forfatter men kun for Udgiver. Det er et gammelt Novellist-Kneb, som jeg ikke skulde have videre at indvende imod, naar det ikke bidrog til at gjøre min Stillings saa forviklet, idet den ene Forfatter kommer til at ligge inden i den anden som Æsker i et chinesisk Æskespil.” SKS 2, 16

”The last of A’s papers is a narrative titled "The Seducer’s Diary." Here we meet new difficulties, inasmuch as A does not declare himself the author but only the editor. This is an old literary device to which I would not have much to object if it did not further complicate my own position, since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle.” KW EO1, 8-9
are even likable in spite of their faults. This should make it nearly impossible for the reader not to identify with at least some aspects of their personalities. The collection of interviews culminates in the last story, B.I. #20. After the successful seduction of a young woman, the man listens to the story of how she once survived an abduction and rape by a serial killer/rapist. The cruel aspect of this scene is that the former identifications with the other men are now projected onto the serial killer - the monster. Wallace has a way of slowing time in his descriptions in panoramic, sensual hyper awareness, and does so in the description of the rape. The victim becomes aware of everything around her, survival instinct and a specific spiritual training allows her to understand her aggressor and, as a reader, you absorb this empathy and realize that the psychotic rapist is another shape of objectification not far away from the prior, more innocent portrayals of seduction.

The serial killer and the prince in Emilia Galotti are both fictional characters that the audience won’t identify with directly. Wallace circumvents the receiver’s resistance against identification by allowing the receiver slowly into identification and the acceptance of guilt before confronting the reader with the stronger image of the ‘thou’. He deceives the receiver into the unpleasant truth. This process undermines the immediate response of denying the identification with the villain. Through this trick, the objective story, which allows the reader to externalize the resentment, becomes subjective and the receiver instead must turn the judging eye at the self.

206 David Foster Wallace, Brief Interviews with Hideous Men (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2009) P.259. “That in his [the psychotic killer-rapist] cosmology it is either feed or be food—God how lonely, do you feel it?—but that the brute control he and his sharp implement hold over her very life and death allow the mulatto to feel that here he is in a hundred percent total control of the relationship and thus that the connection he so desperately craves will not expose or engulf or obliterate him. Nor is this of course all that substantively different from a man sizing up an attractive girl and approaching her and artfully deploying just the right rhetoric and pushing the right buttons to induce her to come home with him, never once saying anything or touching her in any way that isn’t completely gentle and pleasurable and seemingly respectful, leading her gently and respectfully to his satin-sheeted bed and in the light of the moon making exquisitely attentive love to her and making her come over and over until she’s quote begging for mercy and is totally under his emotional control and feels that she and he must be deeply and unseverably connected for the evening to have been this perfect and mutually respectful and fulfilling and then lighting her cigarettes and engaging in an hour or two of pseudo intimate postcoital chitchat in his wrecked bed and seeming very close and content when what he really wants is to be in some absolutely antipodal spot from wherever she is from now on and is thinking about how to give her a special disconnected telephone number and never contacting her again.”
Emilia Galotti circumvents the receiver’s resistance through the second ‘thou’. This second ‘thou’ precludes the Davidic rejection of the narrative as not concerning the ‘I’, since the receiver in most cases won’t have had the uninhibited power of the prince. The second ‘thou’ comes from Emilia and her will to refuse seduction. Identifying with her tragic fate begs an entirely different question of the receiver. It asks us whether we would succumb to seduction and the temptation of power and wealth. Whether we would give up family, faith, love for the prospect of prosperity. The second ‘thou’ asks us how much we would cost. The receiver that would let out exclamations of indignation at the portrayal of the corrupted prince could easily avoid the first ‘thou’ simply because not many have the power to commit the wrongs that they might if they had. The reflection on the abuse of power does not relate to them. The ‘I’ escapes prosecution. But the second ‘thou’ places the audience in a pickle. The second ‘thou’ asks the individual whether that person would give in to seduction, and this in many ways is a much crueler question.

Emilia Galotti anticipates the rejection of the first ‘thou’ and places another and more subtle question in the second aspect of Emilia’s rejection of seduction at the cost of her life. Choosing death would seem ridiculous to a modern audience. It is a deed of ancient times – of passionate times. This concern is part of a critique that has left tragedy behind as an ancient art form.

Eagleton considers the paradigms of postmodern and poststructuralist theory to downplay the pathos of tragedy. The raw emotion of tragedy is downplayed in favor of the intellectual insights, as tragedy almost becomes an extension of philosophy. By returning to the tragic and the passionate engagement with the other, rather than an intellectual or speculative appropriation, the feeling individual returns to the center. In like manner, the suffering individual is at the center of the Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy. From this tragic point of departure, the ‘I’ can begin to find its place among others.

Beyond the accusation contained in the ‘thou’, there is also a hopeful aspect in the possibility of overcoming the self for the sake of the other. For Kierkegaard this hopeful aspect is connected to love. Love stands in direct contrast to the imagery of objectification, violation, and seduction. This is how the tragic also transcends the depressing universality of suffering. The question is whether the tragic can move us towards love. Simone Weil would say that the epic as well as tragedy has the power to move towards pity and compassion – to actually suffer with the other on account of a shared experience of thrownness. This Greek genius of identifying with the suffering of the other comes close to the religious call to love. This is the

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207 Eagleton, P. X.
other curious aspect in bringing together David Foster Wallace and the religious perspectives on love in KG. The portrayal of the all too common objectification of the other in Brief Interviews with Hideous Men also ends with a reflection on love. The girl that has given into seduction and accompanied the young man to his room is telling the story of how she survived the rape by overwhelming the violator with unconditional love. She did not have to fake this love and it is implied that it could not have been faked, as only the real thing would have an impact on the nearly inhuman serial killer/rapist. What she describes as an unconditional love overcomes force. This turn towards love as a power within itself, a power to suffer willingly, appears entirely out of place in the generally morbid and depressing portrayal of mutually abusive relations in the authorship of Wallace. And yet love is there.

In both Emilia Galotti and Brief Interviews with Hideous Men, force is portrayed as the possibility of taking the other as an object. An object of seduction, of violation, of possession. Force is the central theme in these displays of its abuse. The prince is displayed as unharnessed force because of his wealth and political power. The serial killer/rapist is also an unharnessed force. They are alone together in his car, and he is both physically stronger and armed. In both narratives, force is overcome. In Emilia Galotti, the prince is moved towards reflection as he finally understands his responsibility through the Emilia’s death. In Brief Interviews, the victim overcomes the serial killer murderous desire by loving him. In both cases the chains of cause and effect are broken by the individual. The helplessness of the tragic in both cases points beyond suffering and towards the possibility of action. The connection between the prophetic ‘thou’ and the call to love represents the fragile possibility of a tragic freedom. The aesthetic depictions of the self in its isolation and its distance from the other also contains the hope of overcoming the distance. Likewise, the depictions of the individual as a mere object in the hands of the gods or fate or in the power of cruel masters, the tragic contains the lions roar of refusal at the highest court.

A Tragic Freedom
The tragic aspect of freedom maintains the double possibility of internalized movement represented in the prince and Emilia. The prince begins his movement as a detached observer, highlighted in his interest in art, his desire to possess Emilia, and his lighthearted signature on the death sentence. Through Emilia’s death, the political situation isn’t changed but the prince is changed. The other movement is never actualized. Emilia begins and ends in the state of virtue and freedom, but she is aware of the fragility of her
position. Once freedom is attained, it is not safe. Emilia, though free and virtuous, considers herself as susceptible to seduction and corruption – her blood flows just as red as that of any other.

There is little claim to freedom in any positive sense from this tragic perspective, and therefore it remains a silhouette. It is connected to the darker sides of life and it is not directly visible. But through the tragic, there shines a body of light. This light is the fragile hope of overcoming exterior forces and resisting temptation and seduction. Through identification with the characters that suffer under the forces of injustice and cruel fate, the receiver is confronted with the individually questioning ‘thou’. In this question, the wound of negativity is kept open, as the philosophical and ethical absolutes are denied through the aesthetic ambiguity of never being entirely innocent nor entirely responsible. This freedom is shrouded in doubt. Emilia is both bewildered and bewuthered until she feels certain, that she is trapped in the net of seduction. The prince is trapped up until the moment where he sees himself reflected in Emilia’s death and her father’s grief. Suffering moves the individual towards this possibility of freedom. In Subjektivitet og Negativitet, Arne Grøn also relates freedom to its opposite in unfreedom.

“It is stressed that freedom counters unfreedom by overcoming it. It is not that by becoming free, we leave unfreedom behind. Between unfreedom and freedom there is a termination or confusion: Freedom contains the awareness of unfreedom, in that freedom itself is a reply to unfreedom.”

Through the tragic imagination the individual is also perceived in its unfreedom and through this negativity there is an image of freedom that is not similar to force. It’s a freedom that contains the possibility of overcoming force but through sacrifice rather than victory. What should come out of the tragic aspect of freedom is close to Grøn’s point: That freedom contains the awareness of its opposite in unfreedom, and that freedom is a durative process rather than an object that, once attained cannot be lost.

Emilia is representative of both reflections on freedom. Her own individual freedom becomes apparent in the plot to take her as an object. She overcomes unfreedom by not giving in to seduction and rather sacrificing her life than giving in to unfreedom. In this her act of freedom contains the experience of unfreedom and it stands as answer. Her own reflections on force reveal the other point on freedom as a fragile possibility rather than a certainty. This tragic sense of freedom contains an objection to the notion of the tragic in Karl Jaspers’ work on the tragic, that found the tragic pointed

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"It is stressed that freedom counters unfreedom by overcoming it. It is not that by becoming free, we leave unfreedom behind. Between unfreedom and freedom there is a termination or confusion: Freedom contains the awareness of unfreedom, in that freedom itself is a reply to unfreedom.” My translation
towards a collective possibility of action and an historical overcoming of unfreedom. Emilia’s claim is that freedom pertains to the individual and that it is far from the joyous victory. Freedom contains a sacrifice of the self and it contains the durative aspect of the trial.
The aim of the project was originally to arrive at a modern concept of freedom in Lessing’s works. The intended conclusion was going to include Lessing into a modern perception of the self and of freedom. Kierkegaard was going to be used as a philosophical handle on Lessing that would open up his authorship to an alternative reading. This reading of Lessing would point forwards towards a Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean charge against metaphysics rather than pointing backwards towards a philosophy of freedom dependent upon Spinoza and Leibniz. The Kierkegaardian handle on Lessing turned out to be both difficult to grasp in a direct manner and it turned out to cast a different light on the whole concept of modernity. The focus turned more towards Kierkegaard, as his texts seemed to go further into the confusion that I had arrived at. In turn, this focus began to subtly change my reading of Kierkegaard. I had studied Kierkegaard’s readings of Lessing in PS and AUE, and considered much of the regard for Lessing to be based on an awareness of the limits of reason. The connection turned out to be more deeply rooted and all the more difficult to lay bare in a direct manner. In this difficulty, I arrived the idea of an alternative approach to both Lessing and Kierkegaard, where the outset would depart from the interest in aesthetics. There at last, there seemed to be grounds for a comparison that did not consistently come up against the shared ideological bulwark of their elusive style of writing, that denied all of the positive statements I intended to pin on them. In this process, Kierkegaard became the main voice within the project, while the voice of Lessing found a new function. In coming to know the readings of Kierkegaard in connection with his immediate relation to the German Idealists, I found that the connecting points with Lessing had not been extensively dealt with. At least it seemed clear to me, that many of the readings of the Aesthete were quick to judge his writings in connection with Hegel, and that this tendency also allowed them to overlook some of the subtler aesthetic points.

The tragic became the shared ground for Lessing and Kierkegaard and also the point, where the question of freedom seemed most pressingly present. Against the intellectual concepts of freedom stood the very solid experience of suffering contained in the tragic. This notion of the tragic transcended the ideal of human freedom through the concrete experience of its opposite. In an almost Pauline phenomenology of sin, the experience of being unfree became the foundation for speaking about freedom. Now, the aim was never to make a claim on what Lessing or Kierkegaard actually considered to be the essence of human freedom. I was, and still am, of the belief that they were quite capable of expressing themselves. If they were unclear on some
matters, I am nearly certain that they were intentionally unclear. The aim was rather to formulate a concept of freedom in dialogue with the two, that would be able to nuance the simplified and popularized usage of the term freedom as well as scholarly definitions. In this aim also, the tragic seemed a promising path. Both in fiction and in research, there is a consistent attraction towards tragedy and the imaginative appropriation of suffering. Going into the theories surrounding tragedy and the tragic, it became clear that there was also a point to be made in relation to Lessing and Kierkegaard. Their aesthetic objection against a speculative philosophy could also be applied to a field of aesthetics that had objectified tragedy. As Kierkegaard expressed, this objectifying philosophy placed the philosopher outside of the object of interest. It placed the philosopher in the doghouse outside the grand structure of the cosmos. In like manner, the philosophy of tragedy risked perceiving the tragic only from the outside in the analysis of a character, a play, or a period, without imaginatively engaging with the object of research.

Kierkegaard managed to incorporate his aesthetics and his Aesthete into the wider authorship, maintaining that this voice was of undeniable importance also for the latter works. In the Prelude, we began by considering the role that the tragic played in his writings. The claim was not that the tragic was to be considered in line with terms like anxiety and despair as indispensable terms within the existential philosophy. The aim was more to look at the possibilities of a subtler approach through aesthetics and to see what would come of it by taking the term tragic seriously and following it through to its conclusion. The main point taken from the Prelude was the different hue that the Aesthete’s writings took when shifting the focus from a Hegelian reading towards a Lessingian. The less travelled road offered some new reflections on the approach to Kierkegaard, if we entertained the idea that he was a less categorical and more existential thinker, whose observations were not just aimed at the individual, but go through the individual.

In the first act, we moved directly into the conflict on how to consider human freedom from the perspective of the tragic. The immediate result was the comparative points between Lessing and Kierkegaard, where we could see the likeness in their aesthetic objections to a speculative philosophy. The main objection against the speculative was its lack of complexity when describing human freedom. The objection revolved around the notion of the self in modernity that had been both reduced to an unrelatable simplicity and enlarged to an ideal of unimpeded agency. Rather than going into these terms immediately, the first act functioned as presentation of this critique of the philosophical milieus that both Lessing and Kierkegaard were writing against. The quest and claim for certainty and a certain foundation for
observation was the common enemy for the two as they questioned the methods of reasoning through an aesthetic objection.

In the second act, the tragic objection was considered in relation to the form that research on tragedy and the tragic took after Lessing and Kierkegaard. This was intended to show the particular aspect of their approach to the tragic and where later research went in another direction. The central aspect in the first part of the second act was the focus on the individual, not just as the object of a tragic approach but as the vessel through which a tragic approach was developed. In dialogue with Benjamin and Jaspers, this perspective was used to qualify what was distinctive in Kierkegaard’s use of the tragic. In the second part of the second act, the issue was how to relate a philosophy of the tragic to the other parts of Kierkegaard’s authorship. The tragic was considered in connection with Arne Grøn’s description of a negative philosophy and with the function of imagination and fiction in Kierkegaard’s thought. This in turn further connected Kierkegaard’s concept of the tragic with the ideas and objections picked up from Lessing. The tragic was thus positioned in relation to the objection against a speculative philosophy, and the grounds were established for attempting a development of an argument that departed from the less stable outset of aesthetics.

The third act marked a qualitative change in the argument. Where previously, the concept of the tragic and been perceived from an objective perspective, we turned to follow the Aesthete methodologically. The difference of method was contained in the essay on the tragic, where we also saw the grand binary concepts of freedom and fate, antiquity and modernity, passion and reason, related through Antigone rather than as detached terms in their own right. This was the Aesthete’s method and it contained an objection to objectivity as the argument departed from the individual character of Antigone. This method would also be taken up in the fourth and fifth act, where Philoctetes and Emilia Galotti became the vessels for iterating the concepts of self and freedom.

In the third act, the main aim was to address the notion of modernity. From the beginning, the concept of modernity had been visualized as part of the project of reiterating the concept of freedom. As it turned out, the concept of modernity arrived at was different from what I had expected. In this particular case, it turned out that the text had a life of its own, as the original expectations were left far behind. The intention of bringing modernity into the question of freedom was originally to claim that freedom for the modern individual would be very different from antique concepts of freedom. This expectation was both disappointed and qualified, and the focus on the concept of modernity also proved important when pointing out where
Kierkegaard was distinctively different from Hegel in his perception of the individual in relation history and cultural progress. The radical claim of the Aesthete was a call to be careful in attributing rational explanations to characters from other times or cultures.

The alternative method, and the method we could call the aesthetic entry, was to imaginatively engage with the literary characters, and to place oneself within their fiction. This method also placed the terms reflection and seduction in a new light. Reflection was considered as connected to the tragic, as the tragic entailed an engagement with the suffering of the other. The tragic meant to weep with Antigone in her tomb and to add one’s own voice to the chorus of despair. This was the reflection contained in the tragic movement: that the we could see ourselves in the suffering of the other.

In the fourth act, we went on to make use of the aesthetic entry into the concept of self. Rather than defining a self in dialogue with various fields of research, we departed, like the Aesthete, from a tragic character. In Sophocles’ version of Philoctetes, we considered the ancient depiction of an unstable self. There, Philoctetes was on the verge of losing his sense of identity and self in his prolonged isolation. Neoptolemus was on the verge of becoming a self as he went from being an idealistic and ambitious young man towards perceiving himself as responsible for Philoctetes. Odysseus as the only static character was shown to have already lost himself exactly in this rigidity of not allowing himself to be changed in the meeting with the other. Through these reflections on the ancient tragedy, we arrived at observations on the self that were applicable to modern renditions as well. The insights on selfhood and dependency were not remarkable or ground breaking in and of themselves, but the path towards them through an imaginative engagement with fictional characters contributed to an understanding of how we could read ancient fiction. Not just as a source to a different culture but a source to the self in modernity, that was not so entirely different from the ancient versions.

The understanding of the self as only being a self in the durative process of becoming was a Kierkegaardian notion, and this could easily be applied to the Sophoclean tragedies. The addition to the Kierkegaardian perception of the self consisted mainly in the reflections on the connection between the aesthetic and the religious modes of becoming a self. This movement as passionate or religious was explored in the two characters of Philoctetes and Job. They were similar in that they both went through suffering in their trials, but they were different in the final explanation. The aesthetic path towards the self was directed at a destination within history and a perceptible truth. The religious had placed the objective of existence outside of history and understanding. The images of the two different deities showed this
distinction. Herakles arrived on the scene with a full explanation of Philoctetes’ fate and destiny, while Job’s god arrived in a storm cloud and left without further explanation. For both though, the path towards the becoming a self went through uncertainty and doubt, and this connected Kierkegaard’s understanding of the self with his epistemological denial of certainty.

In the fifth act, we finally arrived at the question of human freedom, and again we attempted an iteration through one particular tragic individual. We were introduced to Emilia Galotti in her modern form but also made aware of her long history as an object of desire for the powerful. In Lessing’s tragedy, Emilia was considered as more than an object, and also more than the static depiction of a simple freedom. The double possibility of movement towards and away from freedom was represented by the prince and Emilia, and in this movement, we qualified a notion of freedom in relation to force and seduction. We arrived at a tragic concept of freedom that was not to be confused with force. A freedom that could not be attained once and for all. Freedom became almost a burden and a continuous trial that was confronted not so much by exterior force as by seduction.

Through the image of seduction, we considered the implicit confrontation with the receiver. Against a simple and static notion of freedom as the liberation from exterior necessity, the prophetic ‘thou’ was more demanding. In the prophetic ‘thou’ there was a continual judgement, as no one can really say that they have done enough for the other. But in the call to take responsibility for the other, there was also a possibility of freedom. We considered this judgement and this possibility of freedom in connection with the call to love. Love and seduction became the qualifying terms for a freedom that was dependent on participation rather than the objectification.

As a whole, the project has taken up a difficult question in a dialogue with two difficult interlocuters and arrived at an ambivalent answer. In the process, these difficulties have been used to accentuate the connecting aspects of both authors, and this at least has shed some new light on both. It is my hope, that the difficulties that have been maintained rather than solved might at least also lead others to admit the difficulty of addressing these terms. On a positive note, the project has pointed towards a renewed philosophical and theological interest in the field of aesthetics and fiction as a means for portraying a more complex mode of existence. A portrayal that maintains the aesthetic ambiguity and denies the inevitable reductions of a positive philosophy. Like the quest for becoming a self and becoming free, I hope to have shown that the academical quest of remaining earnest in our representations of reality is also a durative process, and that we must constantly struggle with the seduction of certainties and simple answers.
Summary:
Kierkegaard and the Tragic: Aesthetic Entries into the Concepts of Modernity, Self, and Freedom.

Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authorship sets out in suffering as the Aesthete aphoristically engages the reader with his despair in Diapsalmata. The thesis represents an attempt to consolidate the aesthetic outset with Kierkegaard’s continuously developed concepts of modernity, self and freedom. Kierkegaard’s outlook on the tragic is unfolded in connection with Lessing’s writings on and of tragedy. This connection is balanced at the edges of a positive philosophy and it playfully questions the limits of reason and the possibilities of fiction as it explores a passionate rather than speculative response to existence.

The tragic is taken up with the aim of highlighting the movement of the individual from the awareness of being thrown into existence, towards an understanding of the self in relation to the other, and towards the fragile possibility of freedom. The tragic presents the human condition as suffering. Suffering is taken both in the aesthetic expression of anguish and pain, but also within the philosophical categories of activity and passivity. The universal aspect of suffering is used to bridge the gap between antiquity and modernity, as well as the gap between the self and the other. Finally, the tragic is also considered as the possibility of overcoming suffering as passivity. These three concepts are developed in dialogue with three tragic characters: Sophocles’ Antigone and Philoctetes and Lessing’s Emilia Galotti.
Dansk sammenfatning:
Kierkegaard og det Tragiske: Æstetiske Indgange til Begreberne Modernitet, Selv og Frihed.

Kierkegaards pseudonyme forfatterskab tager udgangspunkt i lidelsen, idet Æstetikeren aforistisk inddrager læseren i sin egen fortvivlelse i Diapsalmata. Dette projekt er et forsøg på at tænke Kierkegaards æstetiske udgangspunkt sammen med begreberne om modernitet, selv og frihed. Kierkegaards syn på det tragiske bliver udfoldet i forbindelse med Lessing’s tanker om tragedien og Lessing’s egne tragiske produktioner. Denne forbindelse står på grænsen af den konventionelle filosofi, og igennem den spørges der ind til fornuftens begrænsninger og fiktionens muligheder, idet projektet udforsker den lidenskabelige snarere end den spekulative reaktion på tilværelsen.

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