

PHILOSOPHY'S TRAGEDY

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Abstract: Is tragedy, as Nietzsche declared, dead? In recent years many philosophers have reconsidered tragedy's relation to philosophy. While tragedy is deemed to contain important lessons for philosophy, there is a consensus that it remains a thing of the past. This article calls this consensus into question, arguing that it reifies tragedy, keeping tragedy at arm's length. With the interest of identifying the necessity of tragedy to philosophy, it draws from Quentin Skinner to put forward an alternative approach to genre as living form. This approach alters our understanding of the philosopher at the heart of philosophy's dialogue with tragedy, Immanuel Kant. Moreover, it shows that tragedy is closer to contemporary philosophy than we might think.

Keywords: tragedy, philosophy, genre, Quentin Skinner, Immanuel Kant.

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context. Even *past* meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable . . . they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form.

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986, 170)

Philosophy and tragedy share several curious similarities. For example, both find their origins in ancient Athens. Both, at times, were institutions central to Athenian public life. Yet unlike philosophy, tragedy did not begin on the margins of the city. It was, from the early fifth century BCE, the centerpiece of the notorious City Dionysia. During this festival, the city's best poets would stage dramatic performances that became known as "tragedies." Scholars speculate that "tragedy" originally meant something like "goat-song," indicating the close ties between the ancient theater and rituals of animal sacrifice (Hall 2010, 1). From what we can tell, the tragedies presented serious events that involve suffering, and a key part of a tragedy's success at the City Dionysia lay in its ability to evoke an emotional response in its spectators.

The suffering presented by the tragedies was not simply of any kind but resulted from the collision between the normative demands of society, represented by the ancient myths of Athens, and human ambitions, represented by the tragic heroes.

After the golden age of tragedy during the fifth century, philosophy became increasingly prominent in Athenian public life. Under the eye of the philosophers—Plato in particular—tragedy was analyzed in terms of its philosophical, or, rather, *pseudo*-philosophical, dimensions. In the *Republic*, Plato (2004, 607b5–6) divided philosophy and tragedy by identifying an “ancient” quarrel between the two, and diagnosed the prominence of tragedy over philosophy as the sickness responsible for the demise of Athens. To establish the superiority of philosophy, he argued that the *techné* of the tragic poets is three times removed from the truth, disparaging tragedy’s preoccupation with appearance in favor of philosophy’s attention to eternal form (Plato 2004, 602c–d).

While Plato claimed access to a superior vantage from which to criticize the prominence of tragedy in public life, in other times and places philosophers have employed the language of tragedy in order to check the excesses of philosophy. During the nineteenth century, for example, Friedrich Schelling attacked the drive of rationalist philosophy to achieve systematic knowledge of the world by appealing to tragedy. Schelling argued that tragedy ought not to submit to philosophy. Rather, philosophy itself, when viewed aesthetically, is the protagonist in its own tragedy. In Schelling’s view the task of philosophy is to recognize its hubris. Like King Oedipus at the close of *Oedipus Rex*, philosophy is faced with the task of plucking out its eyes so that it might see.

In recent decades, an increasing number of philosophers have appealed to the impulse of Schelling’s thought by returning to the notion of tragedy as a means to question philosophy’s limits. This interest is not limited to any one field of philosophy but stretches from the philosophy of literature (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988; Cavell 2002; Eagleton 2002), to political theory (Euben 1986; Rocco 1997; Lebow 2003; Badger 2012), ethics (Butler 2000; Nussbaum 2001; Young 2013), epistemology (Cavell 1999; Critchley 2009), feminist philosophy (Irigaray 1985; Loraux 1991; Honig 2013), and the history of philosophy (Schmidt 2001; Krell 2005; Williams 2012; Thibodeau 2013). Broadly speaking, contemporary philosophers who turn to tragedy share a concern that recent trends in the discipline have neglected the aspects of human experience that lie beyond the empirical sciences. As Kant cleaved ideas from life, thereby warranting Schelling’s critique, these trends discard the finite dimensions of human experience, such as family, emotion, suffering, and death, in favor of problems that can be definitively answered. Remembering the themes of Greek tragedy, it is argued, allows us to correct the form that philosophy ought to take.

In this article I have two goals. First, I want to establish that there *is* a contemporary turn to tragedy, and to show the importance of this turn for the task of rethinking the limits of philosophy. Second, I want to suggest that the way that contemporary philosophers have understood tragedy rests on a problematic notion of genre. I argue that tragedy is not simply an ancient form of art from which we can glean philosophical lessons, and that it is not limited to the philosophical “idea” of tragedy presented in Schelling’s philosophy. Rather, I argue that tragedy is necessary to philosophical inquiry; indeed, perhaps constitutive of it, at least under present historical conditions. Philosophers who understand themselves as distinct from tragedy express a tragedy of their own: what I will call “intellectual tragedy.” Intellectual tragedy denotes a form of blindness that befalls modes of philosophizing that fail to acknowledge the human conditions of thinking. In this sense, tragedy is present whenever philosophy steps beyond its human limits. If tragedy is present today, and essential to philosophizing, then it is vital that philosophy recognize its own intellectual tragedy.

The recognition of intellectual tragedy, I suggest, can be understood in two ways: first, through historicization and, second, through what that historicization brings to light. In the first two sections of the article I argue that contemporary philosophers who presume the death of tragedy *dehistoricize* genre; thus the task of recognizing intellectual tragedy is through historicization. By genre I refer to the form of an artwork that emerges in its constitutive parts. I argue that such form cannot be defined by a single work (an “origin” or “birth”) or an “Idea” that transcends the material works. Rather, in section 3 I argue that a genre must be understood as a living form that is dynamically expressed in different times and places by creative agents.

To build this understanding of genre I draw from the philosopher at the heart of the contemporary turn to tragedy: Immanuel Kant. In the reflective notion of judgment Kant develops in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the judgment of form involves a dynamic process of co-determination where both the artwork and the interpreter are involved. Thus understood, a genre cannot be mimetically reproduced. Rather, to identify a genre is a productive achievement that draws on *present* meanings. When viewed in this way, to claim that tragedy is “dead” is tantamount to claiming a final view that transcends human conditions. Such a claim, I suggest, overestimates the ability of philosophy to determine historical genres, thus expressing an intellectual tragedy.

Tragedy in Contemporary Philosophy

The contemporary interest in tragedy can be understood in terms of two distinct lines of inquiry that I will characterize in terms of the

“Nietzschean” and “Idealist” views. The first—what I will call the Nietzschean view—follows Nietzsche by arguing that tragedy is properly understood according to its “birth.” The second—the Idealist view—is primarily concerned with the *philosophy* of tragedy in post-Kantian idealism, with the aim of locating the “tragic Idea” or “tragic absolute.” Each view can be anchored upon a respective seminal text: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (1990, originally 1962), which inspires the Nietzschean view, and Peter Szondi’s *Essay on the Tragic* (2002, originally 1961), which provides the basic framework for the Idealist view. Both views, I suggest, share a common enemy: a Kantian mode of philosophy that is seen to separate ideas from life.

Through a historical approach to fifth-century Athens, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet see philosophy and tragedy as competing forms of presentation, and they reject the philosophical tradition in favor of the mode of thinking expressed in the tragedies. Following Nietzsche, they identify the birth and death of tragedy, arguing that tragedy “succeeded epic and lyric” before it “faded away as philosophy experienced its moment of triumph” (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990, 29). Again following Nietzsche, they view the triumph of philosophy in negative terms. In order to recover the lost world of tragedy, they argue that we must return to the tragedies themselves, each of which “constitutes a message, enclosed within a text and inscribed within the structures of a discourse that must be analyzed at every level from the appropriate philosophical, stylistic, and literary points of view” (1990, 30).

While those who draw from Vernant and Vidal-Naquet historicize tragedy by exploring its contextual meaning, they tend to dehistoricize philosophy, viewing philosophy as a way of thinking that labors to remove ambiguity from human experience. In this view, philosophy must move aside for a mode of thinking that has learned from the tragedies if we are to grasp the dimensions of experience outside the logical constraints that philosophy places on the world. For Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, even those philosophers who take hold of tragedy, such as Schelling and Hegel, retain the drive to ease the ambiguity of life by constructing a system of understanding that deems tragedy to be mere appearance. Reason’s drive to systematicity is seen as a desperate attempt to occlude the ambiguity of life, meaning that philosophy—the clearest expression of the will to knowledge—is basic to the problem.

Martha Nussbaum presents a Nietzschean view in *The Fragility of Goodness*. She begins by arguing that Plato, through Socrates, makes a “systematic assault” on tragic knowledge. Aristotle does little to correct this error, she informs us, and merely develops “a complicated attempt to preserve some elements of the tragic picture while doing justice to Socrates’ position” (Nussbaum 2001, xiii). For Nussbaum, the tragedians uncover something that was obscured by an exhaustive religious

comprehension of the world: the fact that the “ability to function as a citizen, the activities involved in various types of love and friendship, and even those activities associated with the major ethical virtues (courage, justice and so on) require external conditions that the agent’s goodness cannot by itself secure” (2001, xiv) The tragic poets provide us with an alternative that precedes Kant’s attempt to limit morality to the rational sphere, revealing that “powerful emotions, prominently including pity and fear, were sources of insight about human life” (2001, 69, xv).

While Nussbaum’s appeal to tragedy as a counterpoint to philosophy may shed light on the limits of certain kinds of philosophy, her notion of “philosophy,” “Kantian” philosophy in particular, tends to give a caricature of the Western tradition.¹ The problem of caricaturing the tradition in this way is that it reifies philosophy as an analytic mode of thinking impermeable to the fragility and disorder of tragedy. This deprives Nussbaum’s account of the rich resources that philosophers can provide for identifying the role of reasoned thought in a world that resists logical standards. In the following section I argue that the Nietzschean school could greatly benefit from an alternative methodological approach to historical genres that situates tragedy in the present rather than remembering it from history’s farther shore.

The second line of thinking in the contemporary interest in tragedy does not abandon the philosophical tradition, as does the Nietzschean school, but aligns itself with the dramatic transformation that philosophy undergoes after Kant. I call this understanding the Idealist view because it takes the German Idealist treatment of “the tragic”—the attempt to overcome the theoretical-practical dualism left by Kant’s philosophy—as the deepest philosophical articulation of tragedy. Building from Szondi’s *Essay on the Tragic*, it views philosophy’s encounter with tragedy as a transition from a speculative understanding of metaphysics that buffered the subject from the finite conditions of experience to a mode of philosophy that is sensitive to the fallibility and fluidity of life. For Szondi, the philosophy of the tragic was “begun by Schelling” and “runs through the Idealist and post-Idealist periods,” meaning that it is “proper to German philosophy” (2002, 1–3). Szondi determines that Schelling’s *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795–96) begins the philosophy of the tragic by arguing that tragedy (in the shape of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*) reconciles freedom and nature, presenting the equilibrium between the “superior strength” of

¹ In her later work, Nussbaum (2000) puts forward a more complex view of the relation between philosophy and art, suggesting that art and ethical theory can be “allies” and not simply “adversaries.” I have limited my comments here to her earlier view, for her reading of Kant and “Kantian philosophy” in her later work remains unable to benefit from Kant’s critique of taste in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

the objective world and the self-affirmation of the “I” in its absolute freedom (Schelling 1980, 192).

Terry Eagleton draws from Szondi, questioning the narrow vision of mainstream contemporary philosophy through appealing to Schelling’s idea of the tragic. For Eagleton, the philosophy of tragedy reminds us that we are “amphibious animals” who inhabit the natural and intelligible realms, never quite at home in either (2002, 287). Eagleton argues that “it is tragedy, rather than Kant, which supplies the solution” to our amphibious position, for it hurls a bridge over the disparate parts of our experience (2002, 119). In Eagleton’s framework, the idea of tragedy acts as a kind of historical protagonist, bridging “the gap between pure and practical reason which the critical philosophy itself could never span” (2002, 119).

Dennis Schmidt also presents an Idealist view, arguing that the philosophy of tragedy confronts the impoverished scope of contemporary philosophy that is unable to respond to the manifold questions that humans have asked throughout history. For Schmidt, “Schelling opens the door for what will prove to be an escalation of the importance of the question posed by tragedy” (2001, 276), for it is Schelling who identifies the experience whereby the spectator feels the unity of nature and freedom in a medium that philosophy cannot provide. The “turn to the work of art by philosophers since Kant” and the “move to reaffirm the integrity of the work of art for the project of self-understanding is clearly evident in contemporary works” (2001, 2–3). For Schmidt, tragedy has *already* transformed philosophy; our task is to continue this transformation by drawing from this tradition within philosophy.

The Idealist view contains two significant problems, both of which become evident through historicization. The first is that Schelling was not the first philosopher in the so-called preoccupation with Greek tragedy (Thibodeau 2013, 2).² The fascination with re-creating the tragedies on stage exploded in France during the seventeenth century, causing philosophers such as Jean-Baptiste Dubos (in Moor 1763, 11) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1997) to explore the merits and dangers of tragic theater for national modesty and others such as David Hume (1998, 126–32) and James Moor (1763, 11–15) to grapple with the paradox posed to our understanding of moral sentiment by the “tragic effect.” The influence of these thinkers in Germany and the extensive popularity of German translations of Shakespeare’s tragedies led to a host of philosophical work on tragedy in German philosophy in the mid- to late eighteenth century, the most significant being the work of Johann Gottfried Herder. In the 1770s Herder (2006, 292) developed a

² Thibodeau argues that the philosophical “preoccupation with Greek tragedy . . . manifests itself for the first time in the writings of the young Schelling” (2013, 2).

theory of taste from his reflections on tragedy, building a system that aimed to unite reason and feeling in sensuous cognition in a manner that influences Schelling's treatment of Kant. It is only possible to conclude that the philosophy of tragedy was "begun by Schelling" if Schelling's treatment of tragic art is taken to be decisive in such a way that renders previous treatments mere poetics and the contemporary philosophy of tragedy merely descriptive.

The second problem with this narrative is that it reifies philosophical concepts by aiming to identify a particular "tragic idea" (Szondi) or a "tragic absolute" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988; Krell 2005) that is free from the constraints of history and culture. For Szondi, the tragic idea is a "dialectical phenomenon" that is concerned not with historically specific subject matter but with "freedom itself, which, now at odds with itself, becomes its own adversary" (2002, 10). For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy and for Krell, tragedy is "the absolute *organon* . . . because tragedy is itself presentation of the tragedy of the absolute" (Krell 2005, 425). In this conception, tragedy presents the failure of the Kantian dualism, fusing freedom and necessity into a single experience and thereby ironing out pure and practical reason into an aesthetic task. Szondi sets the framework for this view by defining the task as one of making "the various definitions of the tragic comprehensible by revealing a more or less concealed structural element that is common to all"; the task is to consider their theories of tragedy not "in view of their specific philosophies" but "in the hope of securing a general concept of the tragic" (2002, 2).

The problem with Szondi's method, as Julian Young notes in *The Philosophy of Tragedy*, is that the conditions that "made tragedy an important phenomenon in the nineteenth century cannot be elevated into an account of what makes tragedy an important phenomenon *tout court*" (2013, 266), since in other times the genre of tragedy is called upon to confront different content. Young is sensitive to the dialogical character of tragedy, suggesting that if we take the meaning that nineteenth-century philosophers found in tragedy as the key to understanding the philosophical importance of tragedy as a whole, we limit its power to a particular moment in philosophical history that, for all intents and purposes, is finished.

Method in the History of Philosophy

If we are to be sensitive to Young's critique of philosophers who dehistoricize tragedy, a new historical method is required that is sensitive to the historical nature of genre. At the heart of both the Nietzschean and the Idealist view is the same concern: the attempt to identify tragedy's proper content. The Nietzschean view is concerned with

reconstructing the environment of ancient Athens to show how tragedy presents the collision of Greek *anthropos* and the symbolic order of the gods. The Idealist view is concerned with defining the modern experience of tragedy as that between the theoretical order and the practical order of Kantian philosophy. While it may be true that tragedy is difficult for us to see in our technologized society, where problems are framed as mere puzzles requiring the correct application of expertise, the Idealist and Nietzschean views do not consider the possibility of seeing tragedy anew. In conceptualizing tragedy as a thing of the past, the Idealist and Nietzschean views undermine their ultimate goal: to cleave open new horizons within a narrowly defined conception of philosophy.

The problems created by the Idealist and Nietzschean views are underpinned by the question of philosophical method in the history of ideas. Proponents of the Nietzschean view, on the one hand, use the language of “Greek tragedy” (Nussbaum 2001, 25)³ and “tragic man” (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990, 37),⁴ presuming that an authentic understanding of ancient Greek tragedy can be found. This approach ignores the dynamic origins of tragedy; that tragedy was a creative form of presentation that developed over a period of one hundred years. Further, it ignores the problem that only thirty-two out of more than one thousand tragedies remain today (Hall 2012, 1). To make any determinant claim on the tragic genre from this sample seems tenuous at best. Even if we were to presume that the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were the only ones written, their work is so diverse that the interpreter who defines “Greek tragedy” by choosing one of their plays as the definitive tragedy has no reason for this selection other than arguing that it expresses the “true greatness” of the tragic spirit, whatever that might be.

Proponents of the Idealist view, on the other hand, employ a historical method that undermines the agency of philosophers. Some describe philosophy’s interest in tragedy through the use of language appropriate to a machine: tragedy is “programmed by the horizon opened by the critical philosophy” (Beistegui and Sparks 2000, 7). Others employ desubjectified language appropriate to an organic process outside human control, stating that tragedy “emerged in Greece at the end of the sixth century” (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1990, 29) and that it “appears” again in the “wake of Kant” (Schmidt 2001, 276). The language of “program” suggests that the idea of tragedy was set in motion by a force external to the philosophers who bear the idea, while the

³ “Greek tragedy shows good people being ruined because of things that just happen to them, things that they do not control.”

⁴ “Tragic man is constituted within the space encompassed by this pair, *ēthos* and *daimōn*.”

language of “appearance” connotes an organic process whereby a particular arises as an expression of a greater whole. In both analogies, the whole is both the necessary and the sufficient condition of the particular, implying that the particular (in this case, the philosophy of tragedy) is fated by a historical force outside the agents (philosophers such as Schelling) who bring them into being.

The alternative method I propose draws from the methodology advanced by Quentin Skinner, which begins by historicizing philosophical problems.⁵ The mechanical and organic analogies used by the Idealist view present history as a tragic drama in which, to use Skinner's words, “ideas get up and do battle on their own behalf” (1969, 11). Skinner argues that the tendency of historians of philosophy to search for an “ideal type” leads to a kind of “non-history” in which philosophers are mere occasions for their ideas. Such reflection aims to point out earlier “anticipations” of later doctrines, crediting each writer in terms of his or her ability to predict the subject matter to which the historian attends. According to Skinner, “philosophers have perhaps been rather slow” to question the model of history implicit to this method, failing to note the serious implications it has “for the analysis of meaning and understanding, as well as for the discussion of the relations between belief and action, and in general over the whole question of the sociology of knowledge” (1969, 50). In this view, if we reject the particularity and creativity of past philosophers, our inquiry risks falling into a dehistoricized conception of philosophy.

John Dewey describes this dehistoricized approach as the method of the “contemporary philosopher” of history. Such a philosopher comes to his work “protected and perhaps muffled by an immense intervening apparatus.” He has, in his head, an array of preestablished concepts ready to be applied to the phenomena he encounters, carrying “a vast body of distinctions previously made, of problems already formulated, of solutions formulated ready to hand.” Dewey concludes that the contemporary philosopher “technalizes” in advance the two variables involved in the historical task: “himself as a thinker and the cultural material thought about.” Once he has technalized the two variables, “the material thought about is not the existent scene but ideas and doctrines previously distilled from a great variety of other such scenes” (2012, 33).

The “technalized” imagination that Dewey identifies manifests a form of intellectual tragedy, for it abstracts ideas from the locale of the

⁵ Recently, Skinner's new methodological approach has been criticized on three fronts: it presumes that it is able to reconstruct the intention of the philosopher through historicization; it assumes that intentional utterances can be enclosed and understood; and it presents the task of history as the recovery of the mentality of past phases of life (see Keane 1988). I include the work of Dewey and Bakhtin to avoid these weaknesses.

philosopher and creates a dualism between life and idea. Intellectual tragedy, as Stanley Cavell describes it, identifies a kind of tragedy that “is not a matter of saying something false” (1999, 19) but the “inability to acknowledge, I mean accept, the human conditions of knowing” (1999, 454). This failure to accept human conditions is evident in Szondi’s method, which aims to look past the specific philosophies of each thinker to secure “a general concept of the tragic.” Szondi’s method expresses an intellectual tragedy to the extent that it detaches ideas from the subjective locale of the thinker. For Dewey, we can avoid the intellectual tragedy of the technalized imagination if we take care to identify the ideas that were “alive and active in forming the mind of the philosopher,” meaning that we must “reconstruct the environment sufficiently to know what problems its needs imposed upon the thinker, and what direction it gave to the imaginings it invoked” (2012, 33). This reconstruction is not aimed to stabilize historical meaning. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes, when we recall past moments of an ongoing dialogue, there are “immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings” (1992, 294), and in the dialogue’s subsequent development, these meanings are revitalized in new form. Rather, it entails a methodology that recognizes the importance of beginning with historical context, with full appreciation that interpretation is a productive, dialogical activity.

Recognizing the fluidity of past meanings as they are appropriated in new contexts, while accepting the importance of attending to the material conditions in which ideas are creatively produced, entails that the task of engaging with historical ideas is not to overcome intellectual tragedy. Rather, it is to navigate this tension while remaining fully conscious of the danger involved in any intellectual endeavor; it is to identify a procedure for thinking that is aware of the risk of mistaking our interpretation as historical fact. This is to say that if philosophy is to take account of tragedy it must come with a proper historical approach to philosophy more generally. Or to put it in other words, a proper historical method and taking account of tragedy are linked; both teach us a similar lesson. In this view, tragedy is not opposed to philosophy; it is constitutive of it.

If we proceed via Szondi’s method, we occlude both our own agency as thinkers and the agency of the philosophers posing the ideas that concern us. We are, to use Dewey’s words, “protected” and “muffled” from the content of our analysis by technalizing the two variables involved: ourselves as thinkers and the cultural material we are exploring. A historical method that takes account of intellectual tragedy, on the other hand, proceeds in a similar fashion to the tragic poet who is aware of the dangers of bracketing the ideas from the agent. Like tragedy, it presents history as the product of conscious agents who are simultaneously free and bound by the ideas that shape their action.

Thus philosophers must refuse to eliminate the risk involved in their practice, for they too are subject to the same conditions.

Kant and Tragedy

While intellectual tragedy can be recognized through historicization, it can also be recognized *through that* historicization; that is, through recovering what has been dehistoricized. In this regard I turn to the central opponent that both the Nietzschean and the Idealist view oppose: “Kantian” philosophy that aims to still the fragility of life by identifying a timeless order beyond change and decay as the basis of philosophy. For the Nietzschean view, Kant is in league with Plato, aiming to still the fragility of life by sealing an absolute break between the noumenal realm of ideas from the phenomenal (tragic) realm of change and decay. For the Idealist view, Kant’s theoretical-practical dualism draws traditional philosophy into a fateful climax, one that is superseded by the “idea” of the tragic in the work of Schelling; an idea that fuses the theoretical sphere with the practical. Both views see Kant as a static, antitragic thinker who is determined to subordinate the order of appearances to the eternal order of form. Yet both views, I suggest, dehistoricize Kant’s dynamic engagement with an intellectual tragedy emerging in his own time, thus occluding the insights that Kant might bring to bear on contemporary modes of thought that stray beyond human limits in a similar way. Recovering Kant’s response to intellectual tragedy can assist us to develop an approach to genre that acknowledges the living nature of form.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant (1999, A132/B171) proposes a view of knowledge as the determination of empirical sensation under concepts, which he describes in terms of “judgment.”⁶ The universal exists prior to the individual appearance and simply needs to be applied. In this model of cognition, ideas remain separated from life, and the task of judgment is to bridge the divide by applying concepts to the sensory order. What Schelling came to see is that a conception of knowledge based exclusively on judgments of determinants faces a particular problem: any appearance for which no established concept is adequate will go unnoticed, for no amount of applying a universal will demonstrate that the multiplicity to which it applies has any kind of unity. Such a model of judgment cannot, for example, make sense of the dynamic appearance of a living being, such as the self-formation of an embryo or the internal propagation of a plant, for it is limited to preestablished

⁶ Citations to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the customary A/B page numbers from the first and second editions. Citations to *Critique of the Power of Judgment* are to volume 5 of *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie Ausgabe. Translations quoted are from the Cambridge University Press editions (1999 and 2000).

form. Neither can it synthesize the appearance of a new genre, such as Greek tragedy, Elizabethan drama, or German *Trauerspiel*, for these genres transgress their precedents. Schelling noted that Kant's model of judgment in the First Critique constitutes an intellectual kind of tragedy, for it separates ideas from life, thereby occluding the possibility of the creation of form from within the matter of experience. It exemplifies Dewey's "technalized" imagination, for it keeps the judges "buffered" and "protected" from the object that they judge.

In criticizing Kant's model of cognition in the First Critique, the Nietzschean and Idealist views raise an important point. What goes unnoticed in both views, however, is that Kant himself, at his more radical moments, becomes aware of this problem in his own thinking; a fact that is especially clear in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In his Third Critique, Kant's concern for the developing life sciences causes him to become aware of a tragic current in his own thinking, for he discovers that his determinant model of judgment excludes the possibility of new form. Kant recognizes that a model of judgment exhausted by the application of preestablished concepts cannot, for example, derive any meaning from the self-propagation of organic life—a new discovery in the mid-eighteenth century—for it cannot gather and synthesize form that emerges within experience. To grapple with this dilemma, Kant allows the new, form-giving understanding of nature developing in the life sciences to collide with the picture of nature as an already constituted region of causality assumed by philosophy. By doing so he allows one of the deepest antinomies of his time to come into appearance, by which "one is compelled, against one's will [*wider Willen nötigen*]," to enlarge one's understanding of what philosophy is (Kant 2000, 5:341).

To respond to the failure of his earlier model of judgment when faced with phenomena that resist preestablished concepts, Kant proposes a new, reflective kind of judgment. While he held that reflection is essential to judgment in *Critique of Pure Reason*, it was limited to the activity of the understanding (Kant 1999, A261/B316). In *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant (2000, 5:179) claims that there is a reflective kind of judgment that operates *free* from the understanding; that is, free from the concept of nature as a preconstituted region of causality. The "reflexivity" of reflective judgment means that it is sensitive to sensory manifolds for which no rule can be found. Yet because reflective judgment does not involve the subsumption of objects under concepts, it does not yield the finished kind of knowledge found in determinant judgment. Rather, it is aware of its own creative role in representing the world, giving form to new ideas in a co-determinant fashion; in the creation of such form both subject and object are dynamically involved.

Kant's separation of judgment into two kinds acknowledges the failure of his exclusive focus on determinant judgment to subsume certain sensory manifolds under a concept. Further, it recognizes the reason for this failure in terms of confusion about the kind of judgment appropriate to organic life. The failure of determinant judgment does not entail that, in matters pertaining to life, the task of philosophy is futile. Rather, it reveals that judges who understood cognition purely in terms of determinant judgment were subject to intellectual tragedy: they mistook their subjective private conditions to exhaust the possibilities of living form.⁷ What is thus required, as Kant outlines, is a new procedure that accepts the productive nature of our grasp of living things.

Reflective judgment provides an exemplary response to intellectual tragedy, opening us to the dynamic nature of form produced by living beings. This includes historical genre. What is important for our analysis is that Kant's reflective account of judgment permits the language of "creation" in discussing form. Creation connotes both the rupture of something new into the sensory manifold and the continuity of a living form. In the paradigm of creation, the whole from which a particular appears is necessary but not sufficient for its origination. There is a kinship with what came before, but this kinship can only be understood in terms of the willful self-propagation of a creative center of agency. If the creator and the spectator of an artwork are both living beings, then when it comes to interpretation, both subject and object are dialogically involved.

Kant's reflective judgment aspires to operate without the conceptual "buffering" of Dewey's contemporary philosopher. When philosophy is understood as a reflective practice in contexts of living form, we as philosophers do not stand above dead form in order to explain its development. Rather, we stand in the same sphere as that which we aim to analyze, meaning that *we* are vulnerable to alteration as we undertake our inquiry. It is this transformative character of the process of reflection stemming from intellectual tragedy that renders tragedy constitutive of philosophy.

Conclusion

When understood through a historical method appropriate to the living nature of genre, tragedy can be seen as a way of presenting modes of

⁷ Kant describes reflective judgment as "a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment" (2000, 5:293).

thought that have failed to acknowledge the human conditions of thinking. In this view, tragedy's importance to philosophy lies in its transformative character; through presenting our experience in the form of tragedy, the familiar world is problematized and new connections are made. If we search for the proper content of tragedy, we end only with the conclusions that are built into such an assumption. If we reject this assumption, however, the problem is necessarily altered: tragedy is not dead but a series of experiences that express a common form. As we see in the case of Kant, tragedy is both substantive and procedural, requiring a collision particular to one's own times (for Kant, the collision between the life sciences and rationalist philosophy) and a new way of thinking that can allow that collision to come into presence. In this view, what is distinctive about Kant's account of reflective judgment is that he did not attempt to heal the collision by a stronger exercise of his previous model of judgment but rather allowed the collision to transform the practice of philosophy—even if this transformation was partial and required extension by later philosophers.

To recognize tragedy as a living genre does not leave philosophy unaltered. When Friedrich Schlegel reflected on the renewed life given to tragedy after Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he observed: "The conviction that those eternal borders [between philosophy and tragedy] are immutable has almost universally been shaken" (2001, 18). Yet the fragility of philosophy's borders should not surprise us, Schlegel argues, for philosophy "always must organize and disorganize itself anew" (1991, 60). In Schlegel's framework, the return to tragedy signals not the death of philosophy but philosophy's return to its original task: presenting the truth. In this sense, tragedy is necessary to philosophical inquiry; indeed, perhaps constitutive of it. If we take Schlegel's reflections seriously, the task of those who see the importance of tragedy for contemporary philosophy is not to outline a final account of "ancient Greek tragedy" or to define the tragic "idea" but to present the tragedy of their own times.

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