doi:10.1017/hgl.2025.14 *Hegel Bulletin*, 1–30

'I suffered my deeds more than I acted them': Hegel on Sophocles' Oedipus Plays

Béatrice Han-Pile

Abstract

I reconfigure Hegel's distinction between *Tat* (deed) and *Handlung* (action) to illuminate Oedipus's enigmatic formula: 'I suffered my deeds more than I acted them'. Most interpreters hold that Oedipus mistook his *Tat* for a *Handlung* and wrongly took responsibility for parricide and incest. I argue against the merely causal reading of *Tat* presupposed by this view that the tragic *Tat* also has an intentional structure. On the Restrictive Intentionalism about Action (RIA) which underlies *Handlung*, what counts as my action is only the realization of a conscious intention, accomplished with reasonable knowledge of the relevant circumstances and foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention. On RIA, Oedipus killed the charioteer and married Iocasta: parricide and incest happened to him. By contrast, on the Inclusive Intentionalism about Action (IIA) which underlies the tragic *Tat*, what counts as my action is everything I bring about in realizing a conscious intention, regardless of reasonable expectations about knowledge of the circumstances or foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention. On IIA, parricide and incest are part of the 'whole compass' of Oedipus's deeds. I argue that Oedipus is right to take responsibility for his deeds and draw on Tony Honoré's conception of 'outcome responsibility' to characterize the responsibility at stake as blameless liability. Where Oedipus errs is in taking ethical responsibility for his deeds. I show that in *Oedipus at Colonus* the older Oedipus reverses his position and holds, somewhat surprisingly, that he is innocent and 'did nothing'. I argue that this reversal presupposes an implicit shift from IIA to RIA, and that this shift helps to finally make sense of Oedipus's enigmatic formula: Oedipus suffered his deeds (on RIA) more than he acted them (on IIA). I conclude by widening the perspective beyond ancient Greece and engage with Bernard Williams's interpretation of the same formula.

For Bob Stern
In Memoriam

This paper originates in the contrast between two sets of lines, one from each of Sophocles' two Oedipus plays. At the end of *Oedipus The King* (henceforth

OTK),[1] at the terrible moment when he finally understands that he has killed his father and that his wife, Iocasta, is his mother, Oedipus blinds himself so that his eyes 'may no longer see either such bad things as he suffered or such bad things as he did' ('οὐκ ὄψοιντό νιν οὔθ' οἷ' ἔπασχεν οὔθ' ὁποῖ' ἔδρα κακά'; *OTK*: 1272, my translation).[2] The oppositional grammatical structure of the sentence (οὔθ/οὔθ) makes it clear that the bad things (κακά) that he suffered (ἔπασχεν) and those that he did (ἔδρα) are not the same. But in *Oedipus at Colonus* (henceforth *OC*), written about thirty years later, the older Oedipus says to the Chorus, who is afraid of him and of the pollution that attaches to his person: 'ἔργα μου πεπονθότ' ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα' (*OC*: 266–67). Translating this is difficult. Bernard Williams renders it as 'I suffered those deeds more than I acted them' (1993: 68). Other translations include: 'my deeds, deeds of a man more sinned against than sinning' (Storr); 'I suffered more than ever I acted' (Grennan and Kitzinger); 'my acts lay more in passive suffering than active doing' (Taplin); '*my* acts, at least, were acts of suffering more than actions outright' (Fagles); and 'it is the effects of others' actions, rather than my own, which I have suffered' (Fainlight and Littman). As translators are clearly struggling with the sentence, it is worth returning to the Greek: 'my deeds' (ἔργα μου, my works), says Oedipus, 'are things I suffered (πεπονθότ[α]) more than (μᾶλλον ἢ) things I did (δεδρακότα)'. As Williams's translation is the most succinct and the closest to the Greek, I shall use it with the following amendment: 'I suffered *my* deeds more than I acted them'.

This elliptic sentence is as puzzling as it is powerful. While it uses the same two verbs as in the earlier play (δράω and πάσχω), in similar tenses (aorist and aorist participle), and in the same order, the relation established between the two aorist participles by the comparative 'μᾶλλον ἢ' now suggests that the things suffered and the things done are one and the same, and that suffering and acting are on a continuous scale: Oedipus suffered his deeds *more* than he acted them. But how can that be? To our ears the older Oedipus seems to be making a category mistake: either he did these things, or he suffered them. In our contemporary thinking about action, a person is either an agent, someone who does things, or a patient, someone to whom things happen or are done. One cannot be both at the same time, in relation to the same thing. And yet Oedipus seems to be saying that this is exactly the paradoxical situation he found himself in: what he did happened to him. Is this (one more) cognitive failure on his part?

Attending to Hegel's reflections on the Oedipus plays can help us understand, rather than dismiss, the singularity of Oedipus's pronouncement. Although Hegel never discusses it explicitly, there is an echo of its ambivalence between activity and passivity when he says that Oedipus acquired 'the dreadful realisation that he has become his own dark fate in himself' (daß er [sein eigenes dunkles Schiksal] in sich geworden) (*Aesthetics*: II, 1219/551, translation

modified).[3] All the commentators of Hegel on Oedipus I have found agree that Hegel uses a distinction between two conceptions of action, *Handlung* and *Tat*, to interpret Oedipus's judgement that he is guilty of parricide and incest as the result of a confusion between the subjective perspective of *Handlung* and the objective perspective of *Tat*. From the first-personal point of view available to him at the time, what Oedipus meant to do, and did, was kill a threatening charioteer and marry a queen. It is only from an external, objective point of view, that of Tiresias for example, that Oedipus can be said to have killed his father and married his mother. The tragedy of Oedipus is that by mistaking his *Tat* for a *Handlung*, he wrongly took responsibility for crimes he did not commit.[4] In this, he shows himself to be a child of his archaic time, incapable of adopting more modern, subjective forms of consciousness.[5]

Although there is some textual support for this view, in my view Hegel's position is more subtle, and much less dismissive of tragic consciousness.[6] I propose to read Hegel as using the distinction between *Handlung* and *Tat* to excavate a specific, *tragic* understanding of action, according to which acting and suffering are part of 'the whole compass of the deed' (*PR*: §118). On my reading, Hegel is less interested in normative assessments extolling the merits of the modern conception of action over its ancient counterpart than in engaging in a philosophical and historical reconstruction: recovering what it meant, for Sophocles' Oedipus, to act tragically. From this quasi-archaeological perspective, the alleged 'confusion' between *Tat* and *Handlung* is only such for what Hegel calls the 'modern' point of view of morality, which relies on its own assumptions about moral action and responsibility to retrospectively interpret, and assess, Oedipus's comportment. But if we bracket what Williams calls in *Shame and Necessity* the 'progressive' reading of Greek antiquity, then another possibility comes into view: namely, that perhaps Oedipus was neither confused about, nor wrong in taking responsibility for, his deeds but rather, that what counts as a 'deed' for him is different from what the modern, moral point of view understands by the term. If I am right, then Hegel's approach to Sophocles' plays sits at a particularly interesting nexus: that of idealism looking back to an older conception of action, so as to look forward and recover insights of the Greek *Sittlichkeit* that may be integrated into a synthesis that goes beyond an ethics of pure morality. Hegel's position is thus both within, and beyond, idealism.[7]

The paper is structured as follows: firstly, I argue, against the merely causal interpretation of *Tat* dominant in the secondary literature on Hegel and Oedipus, that in the context of the Sophocles plays *Tat* must *also* be construed as involving intentions, albeit in a significantly different way than *Handlung*. This helps us understand how Oedipus acted his deeds and why they are *his* deeds rather than mere changes he brought about in the world. Secondly, I show that the reconfiguration of the relationship between *Tat* and *Handlung* allows a different

sense of responsibility to emerge. Drawing on Tony Honoré's work in law and philosophy, I suggest that this is best understood as 'outcome responsibility'—a non-moral form of liability, to which no fault attaches. I further argue that Oedipus's error, if there is one, does not consist in mistaking his *Tat* for a *Handlung* but in sliding from outcome responsibility to ethical responsibility. Thirdly, I turn to *OC*, about which Hegel says comparatively little, to show that the play presents a radical reversal from *OTK*: the older Oedipus now claims his innocence and presents a defence which culminates in a somewhat startling statement given his personal history: 'I did not act' (*OC*: 540). I use the reconfigured distinction between *Tat* and *Handlung* to interpret this pronouncement and the notion of passivity it presupposes. Having elucidated both how Oedipus can say he 'acted' and 'suffered' his deeds, I bring together these threads to return to his elliptic formula and, in doing so, distinguish my approach from Williams's interpretation of it in *Shame and Necessity*. Overall, my hope is that this excursus through Hegel's interpretation of the Sophocles plays can shed some light on Oedipus's own understanding of his deeds as well as on forms of tragic ambiguity, agential and ethical.

'Every atrocious thing a human can do, I have done' (*OTK*: 1407): reconfiguring the relationship between *Tat* and *Handlung*

According to what might be called the 'standard view' amongst commentators of Hegel and Oedipus, Hegel contrasts two perspectives on action: the subjective perspective characteristic of *Handlung*, for which intentions, as well as reasonable knowledge of the relevant circumstances and of foreseeable consequences, are central to understanding action, and the objective perspective of *Tat*, for which intentions and knowledge are irrelevant. According to Sandis (2010: 49), 'Hegel […] claims that the Theban king's great error was to mistake his Tat for a Handlung', a view which Falkenstern (2018: 164) endorses by saying that 'Sandis is indeed correct that Hegel's view is that Oedipus does not see the difference between his Tat and his Handlung'. Falkenstern goes on to say that 'from where he stands, Oedipus cannot see the difference between the objective aspects of his deeds and what he did intentionally and knowingly, or between intended consequences and those that result from chance or accident' (2018: 164). There is support for this view in the following passage, which both authors cite:

> Oedipus has killed his father; he has married his mother and begotten children in this incestuous alliance; and yet he has been involved in these most evil crimes without either knowing or willing them. The right of our deeper consciousness today

> would consist in recognizing that since he had neither intended nor known these crimes himself, they were not to be regarded as his own deeds [*Taten*]. (*Aesthetics*: II, 1214/545)[8]

On this view, acting is considered subjectively and has both conative and cognitive aspects: there must be an intention, and the agent must be aware of this intention and have reasonable knowledge of the relevant circumstances and of foreseeable consequences. By what Hegel calls the 'Will's Right To Know', it is thus incorrect to impute to Oedipus parricide and incest: 'the will's *right*, however, is to recognize as its action [*Handlung*], and to accept responsibility for, only those presuppositions of the deed [*Tat*] of which it was conscious in its aim, those aspects of the deed which were contained in its purpose' (*PR*: §117). Oedipus intended neither parricide nor incest and, having left Corinth and lived in exile so that Polybus and Merope (his 'parents') could be safe from him, he could not be reasonably expected to know that the arrogant charioteer and the Theban queen were his father and mother respectively. Accordingly, Oedipus is responsible for what he did only in so far as this matches his intentions; or perhaps better, what he did is best characterized as the realization of the relevant intentions.[9] Consequently, Oedipus is innocent of parricide and incest.

In other passages, however, Hegel is careful to put the 'right of our deeper consciousness' in perspective by insisting on the moral character of the actions it is meant to apply to: '*if an action is to be moral*, it must in the first place correspond with my purpose, since the moral will has the right to recognize in the resulting state of affairs only what was present inwardly as purpose' (*PR*: §114A, my italics). Note the proviso, which leaves open the possibility that not all actions should be considered from the perspective of morality,[10] or even that the perspective of *Moralität* itself may not be the ultimate (or best) one anyway. A few pages later, the same text suggests that in the context of ancient Greece perhaps actions should be considered from a legal, rather than moral, perspective, a point to which I shall come back: 'the Ancient penal codes, however, attached less weight to the subjective side of action […] than we do nowadays. This is why sanctuaries were instituted in ancient times for harbouring and protecting the fugitive from vengeance' (*PR*: §118). Sometimes Hegel even adopts the perspective of the heroic age, not just in order to recontextualize the moral view but also to criticize it:

> the independent solidity and totality of the heroic character repudiates any division of guilt and knows nothing of the opposition between subjective intentions and the objective deed and its consequences, while *nowadays, owing to the complexity and ramification of action* [*Handlung*], *everyone has recourse to*

> *everyone else and shuffles guilt off himself so far as possible*. (*Aesthetics*: I, 187/*TWA*: 13.247, my italics)[11]

Understanding tragic action properly may provide a counterweight to the modern tendency to argue from action as *Handlung* so as to shirk responsibility and 'shuffle off' guilt. But then what counts as a tragic deed for Oedipus?

Throughout his analyses Hegel consistently uses the word 'Tat' and its cognates (e.g., 'tun') to refer to Oedipus's deeds. The following passage gives us helpful indications about the tragic *Tat* while reinforcing the contrast between the moral and ancient views:

> Our view in this matter is more moral, in that in the moral sphere the subjective aspect, i.e. knowledge of the circumstances, conviction of the good, and the inner intention, constitute for us a chief element in the action. But in the Heroic Age […] the objective action, by being [the individual's] own production, is and remains his own [*als von ihm ausgehend das Seinige ist und bleibt*]. (*Aesthetics*: I, 188/*TWA*: 13.248).[12]

The quote indicates that the action is the agent's 'own production', or more literally, that the action 'comes from' him (*ausgehend*). How are we to understand this relationship between the tragic agent and his *Tat*? All the commentaries on Hegel's interpretation of Oedipus I have found claim that this relationship should be understood merely causally.[13] Sandis claims that 'Tat (deed) correspond[s] to the objective (which I am causally responsible for) and Handlung (action) correspond[s] to the subjective (which can be morally imputed to me)' (2010: 46). Along similar lines, Falkenstern states that 'a deed or act (Tat) is merely a change in the external world […] and the importance of the distinction between deed and action involves a related distinction between causal responsibility and moral accountability' (2018: 163), while Witt indicates that 'characters in tragedy […] satisfy the causal, but not the epistemic, condition for voluntary action' (2004: 70). Understanding *Tat* merely as a change causally brought about by the agent is, in a sense, invited by ancient Greek in which, as both Williams and Vernant note, being αἴτιος, responsible, is closely related to being αἰτία, cause: to be responsible is to be a responsible cause. Hegel uses the verb *ausgehen* to characterize the relation between the tragic agent and what they do. This can indeed be taken in a causal sense: the deed then 'comes from' the agent in the sense that the latter is its efficient cause and brings it into existence.

However, understanding the relationship between agent and tragic deed as merely causal is problematic, for at least two reasons. Firstly, if causing something

is sufficient to act and make the cause an agent, then presumably everything that is susceptible of being a cause can, by the same token, potentially qualify as an agent: there would be no difference between, on the one hand, Oedipus killing the arrogant charioteer and, on the other, the sun melting the snow—call this the 'Too Many Agents' objection. Secondly, one can cause something without exercising one's agency. Suppose someone had pushed Oedipus from behind in the path of the incoming colts, causing them to spook, and the chariot to overturn, and that this resulted in Laius's fracturing his skull on a rock. Oedipus would still cause Laius's death but presumably what happened would not be imputed to him as his deed, nor would he be held responsible for it—call this the 'Not Enough Agency' objection.

If the relationship between the tragic agent and his *Tat* is to be more than just causal, how are we to characterize it? Somewhat unexpectedly given the above, Hegel himself describes the relation between Oedipus and his deeds as involving intentions. When analysing tragic conflict (an issue to which I return), Hegel speaks of the 'antagonism between [Oedipus's] consciousness and intention in his act [*Der Widerstreit des Bewußtseins und der Absicht bei der Tat*] and his later consciousness of what the act really was' (*Aesthetics*: I, 214/*TWA*: 13.278–79).[14] *Tat*, at least in the case of Oedipus and instances of the third collision, involves intentions. While Hegel also uses the concept of 'intention' in relation to *Handlung*, in the context of ancient Greek tragedy it seems prudent to avoid this more technical sense, especially as the concept is used in relation to *Tat*.[15] We can specify its sense with Vernant's help: while firmly rebutting the idea that the ancient Greeks had a concept of the will, Vernant emphasizes that the word 'ἑκον', which characterizes comportments in which agents engage of their own accord ('de plein gré') and which Oedipus himself uses, 'comes to include the idea, in its pure and simple form, of intention, conceived of in general terms' (Vernant and Vidal Naquet: 1988: 63). Such a 'general sense' of intentionality is 'that of a directedness towards a goal which the agent seeks to bring about' (1988: 63).[16] And certainly Oedipus acted intentionally in this non-technical sense: he did intend to retaliate against the charioteer who hit him on the head with his double-headed prong, and to kill his servants. He also intended to claim his reward for solving the Sphinx's riddle and to marry the queen of Thebes. He shows absolutely no regret about either, and when he tells Iocasta about his encounter on the crossroads, he shows pride and more than a hint of self-satisfaction at his own efficiency: 'I paid him back with interest! Short work, by God—with one blow of the staff in this right hand I knock him out of his high seat […]—I killed them all! Every mother's son!' (*OTK*: 807–12).

The problem with claiming that the tragic *Tat* also involves intentions, however, is that this risks collapsing the difference between *Tat* and *Handlung*. As we saw, the hallmark of action as *Handlung* is that it includes an ineliminable

reference to the intentions of the agent. If it now turns out that properly understood, tragic deeds too require this reference, then what is there to distinguish *Tat* from *Handlung*? Hegel, once more, can help out here. When reflecting on Oedipus's *Tat*, he distinguishes two sides to the latter: 'Oedipus' act (*Tat*), so far as his will and knowledge went, consisted in the fact that he had slain a stranger in a quarrel; but what was unknown was the actual and essential deed (*Tat*), namely the murder of his own father' (*Aesthetics*: I, 213/*TWA*: 13.279). As we saw, Oedipus's deeds are intentional in the sense of exhibiting directedness towards a goal. His problem, Hegel suggests, is that Oedipus's 'actual and essential deed' realized more, or even something *else,* than what he intended to do—in this case, parricide. I thus propose that a key characteristic of the tragic *Tat* is that *its outcomes exceed the realization of the relevant intention*. In another passage, Hegel reinforces this point by contrasting modern and heroic individuals and highlighting a further characteristic of the tragic *Tat*: 'a man nowadays does not accept responsibility for the whole range of what he has done [*was er getan hat*]; he repudiates that part of his act [*Tat*] which, through ignorance or misconstruction of the circumstances, has turned out differently from what he had willed […]. But the heroic character does not make this distinction' (*Aesthetics*: I, 187/246).[17] So, for modern individuals, the fact that Oedipus could not be reasonably expected to know the consequences of realizing his intention of killing the arrogant charioteer would rule out parricide from being counted as his action. By contrast, from the heroic perspective this fact does not exonerate Oedipus from parricide.

So the difference between *Tat* and *Handlung,* in the context of Hegel's reflections on Sophocles' plays, is not that the first is merely causal and the second intentional. Both involve intentions, but the manner in which *Tat* and *Handlung* relate to intentions is different. I propose to distinguish between two ways in which an action can be said to be intentional:

(1) Restrictive Intentionalism about Action (RIA): what counts as my action is *only* the realization of a conscious intention, accomplished with reasonable knowledge of the relevant circumstances and of foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention, so long as reference to my intention is a necessary condition on accounting for the change(s) I brought into the world as my action.
(2) Inclusive Intentionalism about Action (IIA): what counts as my action is *everything* that I bring about in realizing a conscious intention, regardless of knowledge of the circumstances or foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention I could reasonably be expected to have, so long as reference to my intention is a necessary condition on accounting for the change(s) I brought into the world as my action.

According to RIA (which underlies Hegel's characterization of action as *Handlung*), in order to count as my action any change(s) I bring about in the world must realize an intention of mine, which needs to be cognitively accessible to me at the time of the action. I must also have reasonable knowledge of the relevant circumstances and of foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention.[18] For the action and the intention to be properly related, the account of the action must refer to my intention as a reason for my action. Conversely, what counts as my action is only the realization of my specific intention and its reasonably foreseeable consequences. On RIA Oedipus's deed consists in marrying Iocasta: he brought about a change into the world (the marriage), with the conscious intention to do this. Given his upbringing it would not have been reasonable to expect him to know that Iocasta was his mother. Finally, Oedipus's marriage cannot be accounted for as his action without reference to his intention to marry Iocasta.

By contrast, IIA (which underlies Hegel's characterization of action as *Tat*) is a much broader conception of action. According to IIA, in order to count as my action any change(s) I bring about in the world must realize a conscious intention, but not necessarily that only. Correlatively, whether I could be reasonably expected to have knowledge of the relevant circumstances and of foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention does not matter to what counts as my action: by contrast with RIA, there is no 'get out' clause. Realizing my intention may include bringing about changes which I did not consciously intend but would not disapprove of,[19] but also changes which I would not have wanted in the first place, so long as an account of my action must refer to my intention: what counts as my action is the whole set of changes I brought into the world by realizing my intention. On IIA, then, Oedipus did realize a conscious intention (marrying Iocasta). However, in realizing this intention, he also brought about another outcome (incest). Whether he has sufficient knowledge of the circumstances, or could reasonably foresee this outcome, is irrelevant to IIA. Like his marriage itself, this second outcome cannot be appropriately accounted for without reference to the realized intention (why did Oedipus enter an incestuous relationship? Because he married Iocasta). So, the key difference with RIA is that on IIA what counts as Oedipus's deed is both his marriage *and* entering an incestuous relationship: as Hegel says, the 'whole compass of the deed'.[20]

Thus IIA helps us to understand the sense in which Oedipus's deeds also involve intentions and this, without collapsing the difference between *Tat* and *Handlung*. Understanding *Tat* according to IIA also allows us to address the objections above. Recall that on 'Too Many Agents', the concern was that if the tragic *Tat* is understood purely causally, then any cause could be an agent. While IIA remains a causal account of agency, in the sense that to act is to bring

about a change in the world, it is not a merely causal account: any deed requires the formation and realization of an intention. This rules out regarding events like the sun melting the snow as deeds. The intentional character of *Tat* as a whole also takes care of the second objection, 'Not Enough Agency': the reason why Oedipus counts parricide as his deed is not just that he caused the death of Laius—as we saw, he could have caused this by accident, without acting at all. It is that he caused the death of his father *in the course of realizing a conscious intention* (dispatching the chariot driver and his servants as efficiently as possible), and so through the exercise of his agency.

Importantly, the IIA reconfiguration of *Tat* allows us a better grasp of what makes the conflict at the heart of Oedipus's story possible. According to Hegel, all ancient Greek tragedies exhibit some form of collision. The first, weakest form of collision occurs between natural events. The second form of collision opposes antithetic ethical principles, such as νομός and οἶκος in the case of *Antigone* (where Creon stands for the laws of the city and Antigone for the laws of the hearth). The third collision, however, is exemplified by Sophocles' Oedipus plays. It is the most intense because it 'has its proper ground in spiritual forces and their variance, insofar as this opposition is called up by the deed [*Tat*] of the man himself' (*Aesthetics*: I, 213/*TWA*: 13.279). But how does this work? 'If human action is to be the ground of the collision', Hegel continues, 'then the natural result produced by man, otherwise than by man as spirit, consists in the fact that unknowingly and unintentionally he has done something which later proves in his own eyes to have been a transgression of ethical powers essentially to be respected'[21] (*Aesthetics*: I, 213/*TWA*: 13.278). So, the collision occurs between what man has produced as spirit, and what he has produced 'otherwise', i.e., 'unknowingly and unintentionally'. This, I submit, is made possible by the very structure of the tragic deed as *Tat*: what counts as a man's deed comprises both an outcome produced by him as 'spirit' (i.e., the realization of his conscious intention), and a 'natural result […] produced otherwise than by man as spirit', i.e., an unintended outcome unknowingly produced through the exercise of his agency in the pursuit of his intention. The IIA reconfiguration of the tragic deed thus allows us to see why the collision is possible in the first place: rather than involving the external juxtaposition of two standpoints, subjective and objective, the collision is *internal* to the action itself. Oedipus's deeds are, so to speak, like a timebomb ticking in the background of his life, waiting for the unintended aspects of what he did to be revealed as his. In order, however, to characterize, not just why the third collision is possible, but how it impacts the tragic agent (and so in which sense Oedipus says he both acted and suffered his deeds), we first need to investigate what the responsibility which attaches to *Tat* consists in.

'No one else of humankind is fit to bear my tainted burden but myself' (*OC*: 1415): reconfiguring responsibility away from morality

Hegel insists that in the Heroic age, 'the subject claims that what has been done, has been entirely done by him alone and that what has happened is completely his own responsibility' (*Aesthetics*: I, 188/*TWA*: 13.247; see also 187/*TWA*: 13.246).[22] By contrast, on RIA what counts as my action is only the realization of what I consciously intended, with reasonable knowledge of the circumstances and foreseeable consequences of realizing my intention: consequently, I hold myself responsible only for this. Hegel points out this feature of action as *Handlung* in the following passage: 'a man nowadays […] enters to his own account only what he knew, and, on the strength of this knowledge, what he did on purpose and intentionally' (*Aesthetics*: I, 187–88/*TWA*: 13.247). Presumably, this serves to protect agents by insulating what counts as their actions, and what they are responsible for, from moral luck. The responsibility of modern agents is moral in the sense that it is centred on individuals, presupposes the existence of the will and the possibility and legitimacy of being bound by obligations and duties.

The IIA model underlying Oedipus's *Taten*, however, is different. Recall that on IIA Oedipus's deeds include parricide and incest because he brought them into the world by realizing an intention of his, in such a way that accounting for the deed requires a reference to his original intention (why did Oedipus marry his mother? Because he intended to marry the Theban Queen). For the heroic age, then, the agent is responsible also for non-intended outcomes he does not know about so long as these outcomes happened, as per IIA, through the exercise of his agency. As Hegel puts it, '[the heroic character] is answerable for the entirety of his act [*das Ganze seiner Tat*]' (*Aesthetics*: I, 187/246).[23] But how are we to understand this responsibility?[24] Characterizing it as a form of moral responsibility would be anachronistic, if only because arguably the ancient Greeks did not have our concept of the moral will.[25] Hegel himself is careful not to characterize Oedipus's responsibility in this way. It might be more consistent with Hegel's approach to Greek antiquity to understand this responsibility as ethical, in the broad sense that *Sittlichkeit* ('ethical life') regulates the relationships between individuals by reference to the norms and customs of the community, which determine which comportments are worthy of praise or blame. Yet by contrast with other plays by Sophocles, such as *Antigone,* where the chorus is often critical both of Creon and Antigone, in *OTK* and in *OC* the chorus never blames Oedipus for his deeds. It may criticize the way in which he treats Creon ('I know that you should not believe an unproved charge against a friend who swears his innocence' (657 sqq.)), but with respect to parricide and incest the

chorus only expresses sympathy and terror—the two emotions tragedy typically elicits according to Aristotle's well-known observation in the *Poetics*. Towards the end of *OC*, just after Oedipus has become aware of the full scope of his deeds, the chorus exclaims: 'poor wretch! I can hardly bear to watch you, though […] there are so many things I want to learn and understand—but even the sight of you makes me shudder' (1303 sqq.).[26] Similar emotions underlie the chorus's reply to Antigone's plea on behalf of her father in *OC*: 'know, daughter of Oedipus, that because of your fortune we pity you both in equal measure. Yet we tremble at what the gods send us' (270 sqq.). So, if Oedipus does not appear blameworthy to the chorus but an object of pity and fear, in which sense is he responsible for the 'whole compass' of his deed?

Following Hegel's earlier reference to 'the Ancient penal codes', I propose to draw on Tony Honoré's legal notion of 'outcome responsibility' to help us understand the responsibility involved in Oedipus's deeds. 'Outcome responsibility', writes Honoré, 'is the idea that certain outcomes of our conduct, settled according to causal criteria, are ours, even when unforeseen or unintended. We identify with them and others attribute them to us' (Honoré, cited in Cane and Gardner 2001: 223). Honoré develops the concept of outcome responsibility in the context of an analysis of the conditions of liability under tort law. Generally, liability means that a burden applies. Tort liability gives the victim the right to seek reparation or compensation. Most forms of tort liability involve what philosophers would call moral responsibility: the tort of negligence, for example, occurs when a person fails to fulfil a duty of care. Intentional tort concerns cases where the damage is the result of intentional wrongdoing. However, some forms of tort recognize that liability applies even if the person themselves has done nothing wrong: for example, a parent can be held vicariously responsible for the damage their child caused, and asked to pay for repairs or offer compensation.

What is most interesting in the context of Hegel's interpretation of Oedipus, however, is what is called 'strict liability'. Strict liability applies when a person is liable for damages they caused themselves, even if they did not act wrongfully or negligently. In such cases, Honoré tells us, 'we are responsible for what we do, including what we do without intending to, or without foreseeing the consequences' (1999: 9).[27] Honoré gives the following example:

> if purely by your fault in darting out into the road I run you over, I must stop, send for the ambulance and give you what help I can in the meantime. My responsibility is not as great as if I had been at fault. […] It may not be moral in the sense that I am morally responsible for the accident itself. But just because I have hurt you, I am responsible, and by virtue of that responsibility bound to take certain steps. (1999: 31)[28]

This, I submit, helps us to understand the sense in which Oedipus is responsible for killing his father and marrying his mother. Albeit unintentional, these are harms that he caused through the exercise of his agency, in such a way that the harms he caused cannot be explained without reference to his agency. Consequently, Oedipus is outcome-responsible for these harms in the sense of being liable for them, even though he is not *guilty* of them. This also sheds further light on the horror of Oedipus's plight, for outcome responsibility applies *even if the agent is not at fault* ethically or morally: the terrible thing about outcome responsibility is that it must be borne by morally innocent perpetrators.[29]

The distinction between outcome, moral and ethical responsibility gives us a better grip on the phenomenology of the third collision. As we saw, the collision is made possible by the structure of tragic action as *Tat*, in which both subjective and objective aspects are bound together. Hegel indicates that what the agent has done 'unknowingly and unintentionally […] later proves in his own eyes to be a transgression of ethical powers essentially to be respected' (*Aesthetics*: I, 213/*TWA*: 13.278).[30] Parricide and incest are profound transgressions of both the natural and the social order, a matter not just of legal or ethical but also religious bearing. Oedipus is torn apart by a conflict between what he thought he had done and what he really did, and also between the person he thought he was (a hero who triumphed over the Sphinx thanks to his γνώμη, his intelligence and judgment) and the tainted man (ἄναγνος; *OTK*: 823) he turns out to be.[31] Hegel indicates, however, that experiencing this profound conflict rests on a key (mis)step: 'the consciousness of his deed, which [Oedipus] acquires later, then drives him on, through this previously unconscious transgression, into dissension and contradiction with himself, *once he imputes the transgression to himself as caused by him*' (*Aesthetics*: I, 213/*TWA*: 13.278, my italics). The conflict is thus generated by Oedipus taking responsibility for his deed. But what *kind* of responsibility? 'Every atrocious thing a human can do, I have done' (*OTK*: 1407), says Oedipus. As we saw, he should 'only' attribute to himself outcome-responsibility, since he intended, let alone knew about, none of these atrocious things at the time of the action. But this is not how Oedipus sees the matter: he views himself as blameworthy, and so *ethically* responsible for his deeds, which he now regards as 'transgressions'—ethical and religious offences—he is guilty of. This is a recurrent thread throughout *OTK*: 'say, am I bad?' (ἆρ᾽ ἔφυν κακός; 821), Oedipus wonders anxiously, waiting to hear the testimony of the sole servant who survived the attack on Laius, before concluding that 'if he [the servant] says that it was a traveller journeying alone, why then, the burden of the guilt must fall on me' (846). Towards the end of the play, Oedipus cries out: 'what sort of creature, beautiful to see but foul underneath, you nurtured! Now bad [κακός] I am revealed, bad from birth' (1395). Thus Oedipus's fatal error, if there is one, is not that he took his *Tat* for a *Handlung*: the real confusion lies between outcome and

ethical responsibility. In 'imputing the transgression to himself as caused by him', Oedipus goes a step too far: he moves from liability for an unwanted outcome to ethical responsibility for a crime.

At this point, however, one may object, possibly with a degree of annoyance, that this is a very theoretical approach, and that it is not so easy in real life to distinguish between liability and blameworthiness (or guilt): how could Oedipus *not* blame himself? Surely *this* is what tragedy shows us, and whether Oedipus erred or not in judging himself blameworthy does not matter in the sense that it was psychologically *unavoidable* that he should do so. I will return to this issue later. But here is the thing: *Sophocles* seems to think that it was *not* unavoidable that Oedipus should judge himself blameworthy. Although neither Hegel nor the commentators I have read point this out, there is a very significant change of perspective in the thirty or so years which separate *OTK* from *OC*. A reversal, really, for in the later play we find the older Oedipus marshalling a set of arguments to persuade the chorus, not only that he is *not* blameworthy, but that in fact he did not *do* anything in the first place (in which case deeming him blameworthy would not just be an error but a category mistake). I now turn to these arguments, with two aims in mind: first, to show that such arguments rely on Oedipus now implicitly re-characterizing his deeds not as instances of *Tat* but of *Handlung*, on the RIA model of action; and second, to understand the sense in which Oedipus can justifiably say that he 'suffered' his deeds.

'I did not act' (*OC*: 540): activity and passivity in *Oedipus at Colonus*

At the beginning of *OC* the older Oedipus, accompanied by his daughter Antigone, once more unwittingly does more than he intended: he sits on a stone to rest, without realizing that by doing so he has profaned a sacred grove dedicated to the Erinyes. This time, however, things do not turn out too badly. No lasting harm is done: Antigone leads him out of the grove and there Oedipus faces the accusations of the chorus who, upon realizing who he is, is horrified that he has desecrated the grove. Contrary to what one might expect after *OTK*, the older Oedipus responds with an impassionate defence of his younger self. At the time, he says, he was under the grip of anxiety (μόχθος) and so too prompt to blame himself for his previous 'errors': 'when my troubles were no longer young, I began to see that my passion had pushed me too far, that I'd blamed myself too much for my mistakes (κολαστὴν τῶν πρὶν ἡμαρτημένων)' (436 sq). As Oedipus's speech progresses, he depicts himself as less and less blameworthy. Having asserted that 'his acts did not deserve such punishment' (442), he then claims to be 'innocent by law' (νόμῳ δὲ καθαρός; 550) and presents a

defence on four counts. First, he was ignorant (ἄϊδρις; 552), unaware (ξυνιεὶς; 976). Second, he was ἀκών (240): his deeds were 'not done of his own accord' (975), a claim which is repeated several times in the play (ἀκόντος (521), ἀέκων (966), ἄκων, ἦκον (975)). In other words, Oedipus was ignorant of the full circumstances under which he acted (without that ignorance being blameworthy) and had no intention to commit parricide or incest: he is therefore innocent. As he says himself, 'if I came to blows with my father and killed him, ignorant (εἰκότως) of who he was and what I did, how can you blame that unwilled (ἄκον), unknowing, action?' (962 sqq.).

As Vernant points out, the terms the older Oedipus uses have now become Greek juridical categories:

> with the advent of law and the institution of the city courts, the ancient religious conception of the misdeed fades away. A new idea of crime emerges. The role of the individual becomes more clearly defined. Intention now appears as a constitutive element of the criminal action, especially in the case of homicide. The divide between the two broad categories of ἑκον and ἄκον, in human behavior is now considered a norm. (1988: 63)

So, according to the legal practices of his time, Oedipus is justified in saying that he is innocent, for 'a person who has acted despite himself, ἄκων, is not guilty' (1988: 64). The third argument Oedipus presents uses another legal term: Laius, not him, is αἴτιος, responsible cause:

> so answer me one question: if someone came along right now and tried to kill you, you the righteous one, would you investigate and check if the assassin was your father, or would you retaliate immediately? I have no doubt that you, as you love life, would strike back at the guilty man, not cast around to check legality. (*OC*: 988 sqq.)

What Oedipus did was not murder: it was self-defence, and it is the other party, not him, who was at fault (a 'guilty man'). Oedipus states this explicitly in another passage: 'he [Laius] tried to murder me: I, in self-defence, pure before the law, moved in innocence' (990). In a striking reversal of what his younger self said in *OTK*, the older Oedipus now states that 'even if my father's spirit were to come to life, I don't believe that he would speak against my case' (992 sqq.).

So far, Oedipus has been using the juridical categories of his time to reinterpret his past deeds to prove that he is legally innocent. His fourth reason, however, seems to shift the terrain to ethical ground. In 536–40, the chorus says 'you suffered' (ἔπαθες). 'I suffered horribly', replies Oedipus (ἔπαθον

ἄλαστ᾽ ἔχειν). Still dubious, the chorus interjects: 'you acted' (ἔρεξας), to which Oedipus retorts curtly: 'I did not act' (οὐκ ἔρεξα). How are we to understand this pronouncement, especially in the context of Oedipus's story, which suggests that he did rather too much than too little? While the general meaning of ῥέζω is 'to act', its more specific sense is 'to do something bad to someone' (κακῶς ῥ. τινά). This is the option taken by Fainlight and Littman, who translate the chorus's interjection as 'the [horrible] things you did' and Oedipus's οὐκ ἔρεξα as 'I did nothing', meaning that he did none of the things he is accused of. Once again, the difference between *Tat* and *Handlung* can help us make sense of this statement. Throughout his defence Oedipus has been relying implicitly on a shift from IIA to RIA. Whereas his younger self considered parricide and incest as unwanted, but genuine, outcomes brought about through his agency, the older Oedipus restricts the scope of what he did to the outcomes he intended and knew about. He is thus reconfiguring his deeds as instances of *Handlung* rather than *Tat* (and refusing *both* outcome and ethical responsibility). On RIA Oedipus would only be guilty of, and responsible for, parricide and incest if he had known at the time that these were at stake, and intended them. It is only for an external observer, or from a retrospective, more knowledgeable point of view, that these *look* like his actions—but they are not. As Quante remarks in relation to *Handlung*, 'the new interpretation describes the process otherwise than the self-understanding of the agent at the point in time of the implementation: it also for that reason does not describe the action' (2004: 93). This helps specify the meaning of activity and passivity on RIA: acting consists in exercising one's agency in an intention-restrictive way, consciously and with reasonable knowledge of the relevant circumstances and of foreseeable consequences. By contrast, being passive can mean two things: not to exercise one's agency at all, or less intuitively, to exercise one's agency but in such a way that the outcomes of such exercise exceed the realization of the relevant intention(s) and the scope of what the agent could reasonably be expected to know about the relevant circumstances and foreseeable consequences. Thus from his perspective, the older Oedipus did nothing: parricide and incest are terrible accidents that happened to him.

On this revised, perhaps somewhat revisionist, story, there is no place for tragic collision anymore. The conception of action now prominent does not provide an adequate 'ground', as Hegel put it, for such collision, because it does not allow for the subjective and the objective aspects of a deed to coexist within the deed itself: Oedipus's new perspective on his deeds is purely subjective. Perhaps this is why Hegel says comparatively very little about *OC* as a tragedy, focusing most of his analyses on *OTK*. What he does say, however, is revealing: what we find in *OC* is 'an inner reconciliation which, because of his subjective character, already borders on our modern treatment. The most perfect classical example of this that we have before us is the eternally marvellous *Oedipus Coloneus*' (*Aesthetics*:

II, 1219/*TWA*: 15.515).[32] While tragic conflict in *OTK* was grounded in the internal relation between the subjective and the objective aspects of *Tat*, in *OC* the reconciliation is purely subjective: Oedipus can claim innocence, and restore his integrity, only by firmly adopting the perspective of *Handlung*. This 'borders on the modern' firstly, because of the shift from tragic *Tat* to modern *Handlung*, and secondly, because the reconciliation is internal to Oedipus's *consciousness* (as opposed to tragic conflict being primarily internal to the structure of the deed itself): it is by reflecting on the circumstances and reasons for his actions that the older Oedipus acquits himself of wrongdoing, acquiring in the process an interiority that his younger self did not have.

There are reasons, however, to doubt that Oedipus's inner reconciliation is genuine. Oedipus is still troubled, bitter and angry, and his defence may sound too close to denial to convince the audience that he has genuinely come to terms with his past. As the play progresses, the chorus becomes sympathetic, but this is not because they believe that Oedipus has done nothing, as he claims: having feared him to begin with, they now pity him.[33] In fact, *Oedipus* himself does not seem to truly believe that he did nothing either: the more reflective assessment he puts to Theseus is, as we saw, that he suffered his deeds more than he acted them. It is to this assessment that I now return in conclusion.

'I suffered my deeds more than I acted them' (*OC*: 266-67)

We can now make sense of Oedipus's formula, and of the paradox that underlies it, namely: if they are his *deeds,* surely by definition Oedipus acted them, rather than suffered them? The paradox arises, as is often the case with paradoxes, from the implicit juxtaposition of two incompatible perspectives. Recall that on RIA, what I do includes only the changes I brought into the world by realizing a conscious intention, with reasonable knowledge of the circumstances and of foreseeable consequences. What I suffer is everything else. As we just saw, it is in this RIA sense that Oedipus can say that he did nothing: he suffered parricide and incest. By contrast, according to IIA what I do includes all the outcomes brought about through the exercise of my agency in seeking to realize a conscious intention. It is in this sense that Oedipus acted his deeds: although he did not intend parricide and incest, he nevertheless did these things because they are outcomes of the realization of what he did want to do, namely kill the charioteer and marry the queen. Thus the distinction between RIA and IIA allows us to make sense of Oedipus's puzzling pronouncement: he suffered his deeds (on the RIA understanding of passivity) *and* acted them (on the IIA understanding of action). In conformity with the new standpoint of *OC*, the older Oedipus,

contrary to his younger self, now prioritizes the RIA perspective over its IIA counterpart.

Yet there may be more to Oedipus's statement. So far, I have taken his formula as describing what it meant for him to act as a tragic hero and how, due to the structure of tragic action in cases of the third collision, doing something also entailed suffering it. But Oedipus's formula can also be taken from a diachronic perspective, as a reflection, not on what should be counted as his deeds, but on the overall balance of activity and passivity throughout his life. It is from this diachronic perspective, I believe, that Bernard Williams comments that 'the terrible thing that happened to him, through no fault of his own, was that he did these things' (1993: 70). Williams takes for granted both that Oedipus did commit parricide and incest (otherwise there would be nothing 'terrible' to speak about) and that he was not morally at fault. If this paper is right, the distinction between RIA and IIA has contributed to clarify the sense in which Oedipus did these things, and what should count as the things he did. It has also helped us to understand why Oedipus, while (outcome) responsible, is not at fault with respect to parricide and incest.[34] But Williams's elliptic comment points towards another direction: it treats Oedipus's enigmatic pronouncement as a meta-reflection on circumstances in which human beings may find themselves in a position to both do and suffer the same deeds, and have their lives destroyed by this ambiguity. For Williams, the terrible thing that happened to Oedipus is that, through no fault of his own, he was unlucky enough to be in this kind of position.

In the context of the Sophocles plays, this is largely due to the role of fate and of the gods. The chorus says that Oedipus was guided by a δαίμων, a 'power above man' (OTK: 1258). Oedipus himself refers both to divine power and to the curse on the Labdacids when reflecting on his story: 'perhaps it pleased the God to punish me thus, because of some ancient grudge against my kin' (OTK: 965). He did what he did θεῶν ἀγόντων, 'the gods leading' (OTK: 996). At the very end of *OTK* he exclaims: 'Apollo, my friends, it was Apollo who made me do these acts which caused such suffering' (1330 sqq.). Oedipus immediately adds 'but it was my own hand, none other, which blinded me': but if Apollo *made* him do the things he did, whether on RIA or on IIA Oedipus would be exculpated from any agential responsibility, since he was just an instrument for the prophecy.[35] Yet Oedipus pierces his eyes with his brooch: he does not blame the God, but himself. Here, and in addition to the agential ambiguities grounded in the structure of tragic action, the ethical ambiguity examined earlier resurfaces: Oedipus, even as he implicitly recognizes that it is not his fault that he did what he did, still sees himself as blameworthy. He both suffers his fate *and* accepts ethical responsibility for what he was made to do.

I have suggested that this paradoxical position can be analysed as resulting from an error, a confusion between liability and ethical responsibility. My sense,

however, is that even if, at the time, the thought had occurred to Oedipus that he was responsible, but not blameworthy, for parricide and incest, it would have offered scant consolation. This thought might even have appeared offensive to him, as if it diminished the magnitude of what he had done, and suffered. If error there is, then, it is not in a purely epistemic sense. As is well known, the Greeks had a concept for errors which are both cognitive and ethical: ἁμαρτία, a word which, along with its cognates, Oedipus uses several times in relation to himself. In English, ἁμαρτία is perhaps more accurately translated by 'errancy' rather than 'error'—ethical or psychological drifting just as much as cognitive mistake. Such errancy may be better explained here in psychological than in epistemic terms: faced with the awfulness of what he has done, it would be almost impossible for Oedipus *not* to feel blameworthy. As we saw, he implicitly views ethical responsibility as immediately and solely applicable to himself. Further, there is a horror which attaches to the *nature* of his deeds themselves: in the context of ancient Greece this is expressed by Oedipus finding himself tainted, 'polluted'. Even if an (imaginary) Athenian court, upon hearing Oedipus's defence, acquitted him of parricide on the grounds that he neither intended to kill Laius nor knew who the latter was, such court would not be able to remove the pollution that attaches to the act of parricide itself.[36] Arguably this religious taint, which Oedipus suffers because of the sacrilegious nature of his deeds, contributes by contagion to his feeling blameworthy for what he has done.[37]

Perhaps if he could make reparations to his victims or their family this feeling of blameworthiness would slowly dissipate, and in time Oedipus would come to dissociate outcome from ethical responsibility. But reparations are impossible. His victims *are* his family (and beyond this, his city, afflicted by pollution): he has harmed everyone and everything that matters to him. His father and mother are now dead because of him. His two daughters, for whom Oedipus consistently shows in both plays a very touching love, are now tainted by their parentage, and he is keenly aware of this: 'come, let me clasp you with a brother's arm. […] See you I cannot. But I weep for you, for the unhappiness that must be yours, and for the bitter life that you must lead' (*OC*: 1483 sqq.). And Creon, whom he asks for exile from Thebes as punishment, refuses his request, saying that only the God can grant this (*OC*:1516). Oedipus is left faced with the dread of what he has done, without any possibility of redress or reparation: it is only through the intervention of Apollo, and in ritual death, that he finds peace and becomes a protective power for Athens.[38]

So, perhaps a key thing to understand from Sophocles' two plays, now that their historical and religious context, even reconstructed through scholarship, is dead to us, is that there are deeds that are so terrible, and circumstances that are so unfavourable, that it is impossible, short of the intervention of a God,

to come to terms with what we have done, even though it also happened to us. This, I think, is largely why the story of Oedipus speaks so strongly, and so directly, to us today. For the difficulties of understanding what exactly one has done, and is responsible or blameworthy for, as well as of coming to terms with terrible moral luck, are not the exclusive province of ancient Greece. Beyond the demise of tragedy as an artform and the withdrawal of archaic myths, we can for example hear unexpected echoes of these difficulties in the testimonies of Vietnam Veterans gathered by Jonathan Shay in his exploration of moral injury in *Achilles in Vietnam*.[39] Consider this

> there was a LURP [Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol] team from the First Brigade off of Highway One. […] Now, they saw boats come in. And they suspected, uh, now the word came down [that] they were unloading weapons off them. […] We moved down […] and we opened up on them. And the fucking firepower was unreal, the firepower that we put into them boats. […] Daylight came [long pause], and we found out we killed a lot of fishermen and kids. (Shay 1995: 1–2)

While the context is very different,[40] the structural similarities with key moments of Oedipus's story seem clear. Like Oedipus confronting the aggressive charioteer, these men found themselves in a very difficult and urgent situation, without full knowledge of the circumstances. Like Oedipus, they intended to do one thing but realized more, and something other, than their intention, in what they did. Like Oedipus, when faced with the 'whole compass of their deed' these men experienced profound difficulties in parsing out activity and passivity, responsibility, guilt and innocence. Like Oedipus, they shouldered guilt,[41] and most subsequently self-harmed or displayed self-handicapping comportments as a result of what they had done, and suffered. And like these men, I am tempted to say,[42] Oedipus suffered terrible moral injury. According to the definition currently in use, moral injury arises in the course of 'perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations [held by the agent]'.[43] It seems to me that Oedipus's self-blinding can be taken, not just as a self-inflicted punishment for his deeds, but also as a severe reaction to extreme moral trauma. Consider the chorus's testimony: 'like a dirge, over and over he chanted, lifting the pins, striking through his eyelids until bloody matter spurted down his cheeks and beard—not drops, but a gush like black rain or hail drenching him' (OTK: 1274). The chorus itself seems to recognize this trauma: 'the shock and pain are more than man can bear' (OTK: 1293). From this perspective, Oedipus's formula takes yet another meaning: whatever the balance of activity and passivity in each of his deeds, however much he was moved by Apollo or acted from his own character,[44] he was the victim of what he did.

He is a morally innocent perpetrator who unwittingly transgressed some of the most deeply held values of his time, which he shared. Ultimately, it is perhaps because of how what he did recoiled on him, ruining in the process both his life and his self-understanding as a man of honour and piety, that Oedipus suffered his deeds more than he acted them.[45]

Béatrice Han-Pile
University of Essex, UK
beatrice@essex.ac.uk

Notes

1. Abbreviations used:

Aesthetics = Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, vols. I & II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)/Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, TWA* Band 13–15.

GW = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*:

Gesammelte Werke: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst, Band 28.1, Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1820/21 and 1823, ed. N. Hebing (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015).

Gesammelte Werke: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst, Band 28.2, Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Jahres 1826, ed. W. Jaeschke and N. Hebing (Hamburg: Meiner, 2018).

Gesammelte Werke: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst, Band 28.3, Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Wintersemesters 1828–29, ed. W. Jaeschke and N. Hebing (Hamburg: Meiner, 2020).

Gesammelte Werke: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst, Band 28.4, Anhang. Editorischer Bericht und Anmerkungen, ed. B. Collenberg-Plotnikov (Hamburg: Meiner, 2022).

PR = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)/*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017).

TWA = Hegel, *Theorie Werkausgabe*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980).

NB: all translations from GW 28 are mine.

2. I am grateful to Vasilis Politis for his help with the key translations from ancient Greek in this paper.

3. My thanks to Timo Juetten and Leonard Weiss for their help with German translations. Special thanks to Leonard Weiss for his invaluable assistance with checking Band 28 of Hegel's *Gesammelte Werke*.

4. See for example Falkenstern (2018: 166): 'in Hegel's view, Oedipus takes full responsibility of the unintended consequences of his deeds as if they were the results of fully intentional

actions. […] Because he could not see the difference between Tat and Handlung […] he mistakenly takes accountability'.

5. 'Due to his historical standpoint, Oedipus is unable to separate his knowledge and intention from the objective facts and consequences of his acts' (*Aesthetics*: II, 1219/551).

6. Throughout the two volumes of the *Aesthetics* and the *Philosophy of Right* I have only found two passages indicating a negative normative judgment on tragic consciousness. One of these is cited on p. 4 and the other, in footnote 11.

7. From a historical point of view, Hegel's interpretation of Oedipus as profoundly ambiguous with regard to his own agency is clearly echoed in Nietzsche's reading of the plays. In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche calls *Oedipus at Colonus* a 'glory of passivity' (*Glorie der Passivität*) and (like Hegel) insists on the 'infinite transfiguration' (*eine unendliche Verklärung*) operative in Oedipus's death. He also highlights the 'divine dialectic' whereby 'in his purely passive behaviour the hero achieves the highest form of activity' (1999: 47).

8. See *GW*: 28.2, 593–94: 'es ist so ein Gegensatz vom Bewußtsein der Umstände und dessen was wirklich ist. Dieß kommt z.B. vor beim Oedip, auf der Reise zum Orakel bekommt er Zwist mit einem Manne und erschlägt ihn, diess ist kein Verbrechen in der Zeit dieses Streites, dieser Mann aber der nur gewaltthätig gegen ihn war war auch sein Vater, diess wusste Oedip nicht, er herathet die Koenigin Jocaste und diese ist seine Mutter, er tritt so ohne es zu wissen in eine blutschänderische Ehe'. 'Thus, there is an opposition between the circumstances as they are consciously known [*Bewußtsein der Umstände*] and what is actually the case. This is so, for instance, in relation to Oedipus: while he is making his journey to the oracle, he gets into a fight with a man and strikes him dead, which is not a crime in the age in which this fight occurs. However, this man who acted violently against him was also his father. Oedipus did not know this and married queen Iocasta who is his mother. Thus, without knowing, he enters an incestuous marriage'. For the contrast with the modern attitude, see the excerpts from *GW* 28.2 quoted in footnotes 8 and 9.

9. As is well known, there is an ongoing debate in the Hegel secondary literature as to whether Hegel understands the role of intentions in relation to action from an *ex ante* or a *post hoc* perspective. Proponents of the first view, like Quante or Laitinen, hold that intentions are prior to action in the sense that they guide its realization. By contrast, proponents of the second (expressivist) view, like Taylor or Pippin, hold that the intentions operative in action may not be available to the agent at the time of the action and can only be characterized retrospectively, in the deed itself. In the case of *moral* action, as here, there seems to be more textual support for the first view. The conception of the tragic *Tat* I propose below can be seen as a hybrid in the sense that it both presupposes prior intentions and allows that the deed may realize intentions that the agent was not aware of. This conception differs from both interpretative trends because it holds that tragic action can include outcomes that were not intended at all.

10. Here too there is ongoing debate as to whether Hegel's concept of action entails by itself a moral attitude in the agent. While Houlgate (1986) defends this view, Quante holds that 'the concept of action refers to concrete subjects who are in a position to coordinate their natural

will in a rational way and to pursue intentions with their intentional acts' (2004: 170–71): only *autonomous* actions, in which the will determines itself from itself, require the moral perspective. Understanding tragic action on this second model, as moral, would be a retrospective mistake since for Hegel the system of *Moralität* only appears after the end of the Greek *Sittlichkeit*.

11. See *GW*: 28.2, 593, which elaborates on the modern attribution of guilt: 'wenn wir namlich handeln oder bei der Beurtheilung der Handlung gehort dazu, daß sie als Handlung eines Individuums angesehen werden, ihm imputirt werden kann, zugerechnet, dazu gehort daß man die Umstande richtig gewußt, erkannt hat, ist dieß nicht und hat das Individuum doch gethan, so nimt es nicht den ganzen Umfang dessen was es gethan hat als das Seinige an, sondern nur das was es gethan hat in Beziehung auf die gewussten Umstände'. 'For when one acts or evaluates an action, it is important that this action is regarded as the action of a [specific] individual, that it can be imputed i.e. attributed to this individual. It [also] matters that one has come to know, to recognise the circumstances well. Where this is not the case and the individual has acted nonetheless, they do not acknowledge the entire scope of what they have done as their own. Rather, they only recognize what they have done in relation to the known circumstances'. See also footnote 9.

12. See *GW*: 28.2, 593: 'ist in der Gegenständlichkeit eine andere Bestimmung als der Mensch gewußt hat, so wirft er das ganze Produkt seiner Handlung, das ein Anderes ist, von sich ab and schreibt sich nur das zu was er gewusst hat und in Bezeichung darauf gethan hat. Der heroische Charakter macht diese Unterscheidung nicht auf diese Weise sondern rechnet sich das Ganze zu was heraus gekommen ist und steht für diess Ganze'. 'If the subject matter [Gegenständlichkeit] contains a determination distinct from what the human has been aware of [was er gewusst hat], he throws away the entire outcome of his action which is an other [ein Anderes] and attributes to himself only that which he has known and what he has done in relation to the latter. The heroic character does not make such a distinction, rather, he attributes to himself the entirety [das Ganze] of what has emerged [from his actions] and he stands for this entirety'.

13. Note that this does not mean that intentions cause actions. As observed by Quante, Hegel remains silent on this issue. Expressivist interpreters would deny that this is the case. For our purposes here, the relevant causal relation is between the agent and the changes they bring into the world by being the source these changes 'come from', as Hegel puts it.

14. See also, for example, *Aesthetics*: I, 213: the tragic collision is 'brought about by a man's deed [*Tat*]' and issues from the 'consciousness and intention involved'.

15. On the difference between purposiveness, voluntariness and intention according to Hegel, see Quante (2004: 106 sqq.). In a nutshell, intentions have higher cognitive requirements than the first two. They require the ability to represent a subjective end to oneself. For a more recent analysis, see Laitinen and Sandis (2019). As far as Oedipus's own perspective is concerned, Hegel states in §118 of *PR* that 'the self consciousness of heroes (like that of Oedipus and others in Greek tragedy) had not advanced out of its primitive simplicity either to reflection on the distinction between deed and action, between the external event and the purpose or

knowledge of the circumstances, or the subdivision of consequences'. Given this, it seems preferable not to use the difference between *Vorsatz* and *Absicht* to analyse Oedipus's mental states.

16. Along similar lines, Williams (1993) argues that it would be both absurd and impossible to make sense of the *Iliad* or tragic plays without referring to intention. I shall return below to the contrast between ἑκον and ἄκον, and the role it has in the Oedipus plays.

17. The passage from *GW* 28.2 quoted in footnote 5 continues thusly: 'hier hat nun der Heroismus die Seite dass der Thäter das ganze Product seine That in seinem ganzen Umfange auf sich nimt, sich Vatermord und Blutschande zuschreibt'. 'Here the heroism manifests itself in the fact that the agent [*der Thäter*] accepts the entire outcome of his deed, that he attributes to himself patricide as well as incest'.

18. See *PR*: §118. What counts as 'reasonable knowledge' can only be specified relative to the context of the action. For example, if I throw a live cigarette butt on the ground in a forest during a dry spell and this causes a fire, setting fire to the forest would count as my action because it was reasonable to expect me to consider this as a foreseeable consequence of the realization of my intention of throwing my live cigarette butt on the ground. By contrast, while perhaps Oedipus could have learned from the herald the identity of the charioteer, it would not be reasonable to expect Oedipus to have known that Laius was his father, given that he believed that *Polybus* was his father, with no reason to doubt that belief, and that Polybus was in Corinth, being king of this city.

19. See for example the case of Freud's inkpot as analysed in Velleman (2000).

20. See *GW*: 28.2, 593: the agent stands for 'the entirety of what has emerged [from the deed], 'das Ganze zu was heraus gekommen'.

21. See *GW*: 28.2, 609: 'solche Verletzung von etwas Wesentlichen kann durch das Individuum selbst hervorgebracht sein z. B. so daß der Mensch bewußtlos etwas thut was dann als eine Verletzung von etwas sich zeigt was man wesentlich respektiren soll, daß er so selbst die Verletzung hervorbringt, die ihn in einen Widerstreit bringt, das Bewußtsein bei der That und das Bewußtsein dessen was die That an sich war. Oedips That war in seinem Bewußtsein der Kampf mit einem Menschen den er tödtet, das Andere war was die That an und für sich war, Mord seines Vaters'. 'Such a violation of something essential can be brought forth by the individual himself; for instance, when a human being unwittingly does what later turns out as a violation of something which deserves our respect essentially. It is this human being himself who brings about the violation which then leads him into the tension [between] the conscious awareness during the deed [*Bewußtsein bei der That*] and the knowledge [*Bewußtsein*] of what the deed was in itself. As far as Oedipus' consciousness was concerned, his deed was a fight with a man whom he killed. What the deed was in and for itself, namely patricide, is something different'.

22. Note the parallel between 'what has been done' and 'what has happened', which reminds us that both are internally related by the dual structure of the tragic deed. See also footnote 13 and *GW*: 28.2, 890, with specific reference to Oedipus: 'den Oedip sehen wir als wissend, und zugleich als so unwissend daß er seinen Vater erschlägt und doch will er deshalb nicht

unschuldig sein, er nimt die That auf sich, betrachtet sie ganz als seine Handlung, wüthet gegen sich selbst, reißt sich die Augen aus, wird ausgestoßen und wird als ein Gräuel betrachtet'. 'Oedipus is presented to us as knowing and, at the same time, as not knowing that he strikes his father dead. And yet, he does not want to be without guilt for this reason. He accepts the deed [*That*], regards it entirely as his action [*Handlung*], he rages against himself, rips off his eyes, gets expelled, and gets regarded as an atrocity'.

23. See passages from *GW*: 28.2, 593 already quoted in previous footnotes.

24. In the existing secondary literature on Hegel and Oedipus, Witt comes closest to answering this question by introducing a distinction between 'accountability' and 'culpability'. However, her account of 'accountability' is very thin.

25. Since the publication of Snell's 1953 magnum opus, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, this has been a matter of considerable debate. The current view seems to be that while the Greeks had a notion of intentionality, and made a difference between acting without being forced (ἑκον) and under constraint (ἄκον), they did not have our moral concept of the will as the rational capacity to determine oneself autonomously. Williams, for one, thinks that they are better off for not having it. See for example Williams (1993), Vernant (1978), Mishliborsky (2019).

26. *OC* itself ends with a lament for Oedipus's plight: 'look on Oedipus[…]—see what a wave of terrible misfortune has submerged him. Before that final day when one can say his life has reached its end with no distress or grief, no man should be called happy' (1525 sqq.).

27. One may wonder how far the chain of consequences goes—in other words, where the buck stops. Honoré points out that this depends on the purpose of the inquiry (1999: 124–25), and also on further circumstances, in particular whether another agent intervenes. For example, if while driving my car I injure someone through no fault of mine, I am outcome responsible for this person's injuries and I must help them best as I can. But if a medic, trying to treat the injured person, makes a medical mistake which results in this person death, then this death should not be considered as an outcome of my exercising my agency by driving. See also Wojtowicz (2022b: 505).

28. Honoré continues, in a way which chimes with Williams's analyses of agent-regret: 'Indeed, unless I am wholly insensitive, I shall feel and express regret for the harm I have done. For it is a myth that fault and desert are essential to responsibility' (1999: 31).

29. One may raise a methodological concern here, namely that having recourse to Honoré's concept of outcome responsibility to analyse the case of Oedipus is anachronistic, since this concept was not available to the latter (my thanks to a referee for raising this point). In this respect, note that I do not *attribute* to Oedipus the view that he is outcome, rather than morally or ethically, responsible. On the contrary, I follow Hegel in emphasizing throughout the paper the difference between Oedipus's own understanding of what he did on the one hand, and possible further characterizations on the other. More generally, I think that a significant aspect of the work of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Williams or Foucault consists in showing us that there is much to be gained, philosophically speaking, by using contemporary conceptual tools to obtain different perspectives on past concepts and practices, *so long as the more recent*

perspectives are not retrospectively attributed to past agents. If we could not use insights from the present to enrich our understanding of the past (while keeping firmly in mind that such insights were not available to past agents), it simply would not be possible to deepen our understanding of both past and present in the ways genealogists set out to do, and did.

30. See *GW*: 28.2, 609, quoted in footnote 17.

31. Note that Honoré himself sees a deep connection between outcome responsibility, accountability and identity: 'we identify with [certain outcomes of our conduct] and others attribute them to us. They form a constituent of our individual character and identity' (Honoré cited in Cane and Gardner 2001: 223). This is a key reason why outcome-responsibility is such a heavy burden on those who incur it.

32. See *GW*: 28.1 (Nachschrift Ascheberg 1820–21): 211: 'die Versöhnung geschieht im Griechischen nur an sich für das Gemüth; aber wir gönnen es den Individuen, daß sie auch die Befriedigung in sich haben. Ein Beispiel davon sehen wir im Oedip. dieser fällt durch seine That; eben weil es seine That ist, beraubt er sich des Lichts der Augen; am Ende wird er im Tode verklärt. dies ist die Erscheinung der Versöhnung im Individuo. (Wie verschieden erscheint Oedip gegen Müllners Hugo!) dis ist auch näher der Begriff der religiösen Versöhnung in der modernen Zeit'. 'For the Greeks, reconciliation happens only in itself [that is,] for the mind [*das Gemüth*]; but we grant it to the individuals that they have this satisfaction within themselves. Oedipus can be regarded as an example of this. He falls through his [own] deed; it is precisely because it is his [own] deed that he deprives himself of his eyesight; in the end, he gets relieved/transfigured [*verklärt*] in death. This is the appearance of reconciliation in individuo. (What a difference between Oedipus and Müllner's Hugo!) This also corresponds to the concept of religious reconciliation in the modern age'.

33. According to Allan (2013), Oedipus's defence was intended by Sophocles to fail.

34. One may object at this point that Oedipus is not *fully* innocent. An impressive feature of Sophocles' dramatic art is that *OTK* is structured as a mise en abyme. As it unfolds, the play makes manifest to the audience the same faults which Oedipus's past deeds also reveal: pride, angry reactiveness, overconfidence in his own judgment and subsequent blindness to all other points of view. Even in *OC* Oedipus is still incredibly quick to anger, as evidenced by his response to Creon and his curse on Polynices. From this perspective, there are reasons to think that Oedipus's comportment is ethically wrong: but these reasons are not that he committed parricide and incest. What Oedipus can be justifiably blamed for are *faults of character* which, as far as the audience can see, he has done nothing to correct and which manifest themselves again and again in the manner he treats Tiresias and Creon, and conducts his inquiry. Note, however, that this is compatible with the reading of the Oedipus plays I have proposed above. Even if Oedipus's character displays some epistemic and ethical vices, it still remains that he did not intend to commit parricide or incest, and so is not morally at fault *in relation to these particular actions*. I thus disagree with Gaskin (2018), who holds that Oedipus is fully morally culpable, if only because if this was the case, then there would be nothing tragic to his story, and instead of pity and fear we would experience satisfaction at a bad person getting his comeuppance. Tragedy can only thrive where ambiguity lies.

35. One may object that this incompatibilist reading of the role of the prophecy, and more generally of fate, is not the only possible one. On some readings at least (e.g., Dodds 1966), the role of fate is best understood on a compatibilist model according to which the prophecy, even though it lays out the outcome in advance, does not compel in any way the protagonists of the drama: the influence of Apollo is manifested at an epistemic level, by the withdrawal of key information (such as Oedipus's true parentage). In this case Oedipus would be (outcome-responsible for his deeds, since knowledge of the circumstances does not matter on IIA, and there would be no *non sequitur*. Either way, however, Oedipus sees himself as blameworthy. One may further wonder why the Delphi oracle's prophecy, or more generally the curse of the Labdacids, do not play a more prominent role in my interpretation (I am grateful to a referee for raising this issue). In this I am following Hegel, who does not mention either in relation to Oedipus (he alludes to the second in relation to Antigone). In my view, this is because in cases of what Hegel calls the 'third collision' (to which the two Oedipus plays belong), whether an action counts as tragic does not turn on whether such action was fated or accidental. Consider Sophocles' *Ajax,* the other example given by Hegel in this context: what makes Ajax's slaughtering of the sheep tragic is not that it was fated (there is no indication in the play that it was), but that it exhibited the same ambiguity as Oedipus's killing of Laius, namely: both men intended to do one thing and did another, and had to live (or die, for Ajax) with what they did. On this view it is not fate, but this terrible ambiguity between what was intended and what was done, which is at the core of tragic action. Finally, note that the primacy of the 'third collision' in thinking of tragic action is also the reason why I do not consider here the possibility of what one might call 'ontological guilt', namely the thought that tragic heroes may be guilty, not by virtue of what they do, but by virtue of who they are (I am grateful to another referee for raising this point). This, I believe, is particularly relevant to Hegel's analysis of Antigone in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* but not to his views on Oedipus.

36. Allan (2013: 187) argues in this respect that Oedipus himself is aware of this fatal flaw in his defence, and this is why the chorus is not convinced.

37. Crisp has recently used the notion of 'pollution' to explain agent regret as irrational. In his view, the 'special relation [between the agent and what they have done] is most plausibly seen as involving a secularized version of the notion of ritual uncleanliness and pollution' (2017: 13). Crisp argues that since belief in pollution is outdated, one should do away with it, and so with agent-regret. In my own view, pollution is an *added* factor to the dreadfulness of Oedipus's situation: it does not explain why he incurs (outcome) responsibility as an agent for his deeds, and so cannot account for agent-regret.

38. Cf. *Aesthetics*: II, 1219: 'In Colonus […], a God himself calls him; […] his bones become a salvation and safeguard of the state that received him as friend and guest. This transfiguration in death is, for us, as for him, a visible reconciliation within his own self and personality'.

39. Other echoes can be heard in cases of agent-regret. See for example https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/09/18/the-sorrow-and-the-shame-of-the-accidental-killer (also cited by Wojtowicz (2022a)): 'Patricia', a 42 year old paralegal, was driving home when the sun suddenly hit her eyes. She felt a 'very strange impact', pulled over and ran into the

road. She had run over a motorcyclist, who died from his injuries. To friends and family who kept telling her it was not her fault, she replied: 'yes, it was an accident […] but at the end of the day I *hit* him, I took *his* life. No matter how much you want to dismiss it as an accident, I still feel responsible for it, and I am. […] Why does nobody understand this?' As noted by Alice Gregory, the author of the article, 'accidental killers often report experiencing symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder: flashbacks, hallucinations, nightmares, and what's known as "moral injury"'.

40. Notably: these men were soldiers in a war, and so under orders and with an obligation to fight. This was not the case for Oedipus. Also, the Oedipus plays are works of art, structured and brought to life by the skill of the dramaturgist, whereas these testimonies are raw and unpolished.

41. Should one object that 'guilt' is anachronistically applied to Oedipus here, it is worth recalling Williams's warning that it would be wrong to infer, from the fact that the Greeks did not have a separate word for 'guilt', that they had no understanding of the emotion we use the word to refer to. He observes that while what arouses shame in an agent is an act (or a situation) which typically elicits from others contempt or derision, what arouses guilt is an act which typically elicits anger, resentment or indignation. Since one finds both types in Greek culture, Williams thinks that αἰδος, the Greek word for 'shame', does not only encompass what we understand by 'shame' but also elements of what we call 'guilt', and so that the distinction between guilt and shame is retrospectively used by us to (mis)describe and assess ancient Greek ethical categories.

42. I am encouraged to voice this suggestion by Shay's innovative and rich diagnostic analysis of Achilles as having suffered moral injury in the Troyan war.

43. Like Shay before them, Litz et al. (2009: 697) observe that moral injury includes symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harming (non-suicidal injury and suicidal behaviour), self-handicapping behaviour and demoralisation (e.g., hopelessness).

44. In this respect, the locus classicus is Lesky's (1961) views on 'double motivation'.

45. My thanks to David Batho, Henri Böschen, Wayne Martin and Dan Watts for their comments on the first draft of the paper. Special thanks to Bob Stern for his comments, but also for almost daily email exchanges across many years, and for encouraging me to write on Hegel.

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