

Antigone's Work(s) Of Love

"...you are in love with the impossible"

Michael R. Michau

Ismene [to Antigone]: "...you are in love with the impossible" (Lloyd-Jones, line 90).

In a much neglected section of Søren Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* (1847), he contends that a test of blessedly independent love is to be administered to and by the person who is to recollect one who is dead (2:IX). How is this realistically possible? In this case, the dead are quite literally unable to love in return. Thus, in instances like these, there is an essential element of the heteronomous asymmetry, or one-directionality, of commanded love.

In this paper, I contend that Antigone's commitment to bury her slain brother Polyneices, regardless of whether it actually transpired or not, was a *work of love* in this robust and divine sense. In short, she passes Kierkegaard's test with flying colors. Her act of love in open defiance of her uncle, King Creon, was at the same time *both* heteronomous, i.e., responding to an externally-commanded duty, *and* autonomous, i.e., self-generated, freely chosen, and willing to universalize this maxim. How can a moral action be *both* heteronomous *and* autonomous? While this may appear to be an impossibility, a Platonic or Derridean *aporia*, Kierkegaard maintains that commanded love believes all things, and is never let down. One can freely choose to respond to command – this is the highest and most blessed independence of love. Kierkegaard and his various pseudonymous authors agree that faith, too, is a paradox, and it entails having the courage and trust to accept the overflowing presence of the infinite within the finite. Agapic love is such a presence. Antigone's faith in the rectitude of her decision – her work of love – is the central moral lesson in Sophocles's tragic drama.¹

As Kierkegaard warns us, however, we need to carefully decipher exactly what *kind* of love Antigone was showing toward her slain and unburied brother. While many commentators have suggested that there were incestuous (i.e. erotic) dimensions of Antigone's feelings for Polyneices, and thus she was motivated solely by personal inclination (or heteronomy, in

Kantian language), I will claim that, prior to any discussion of eroticism between Antigone and Polyneices, she was fulfilling her autonomous *and* heteronomous duty;

- 1) to her gods,
- 2) to her royal family, and ultimately
- 3) to herself, to bury her dead brother.

Moreover, all three of these duties were aneconomic and apolitical – they existed outside of, and prior to, the social-political-juridical domain. Once Antigone acted in the real world upon her moral choice, and was subsequently arrested for her transgression, however, she did not choose to hide from her deeds. This reconfirms the absolute gift of her work of love toward Polyneices. Once Antigone began to act, this issue became immediately entrenched in the political. As GWF Hegel's reading reminds us, Creon represented the state, social order, hierarchy, and an ethic of justice, and his opponent Antigone represented anterior commitments to family, the gods of the underworld, prior to the social order, and an ethic of care.² The stage was set for a battle of the sexes, within a cursed family, and this struggle crossed ethical and ideological boundaries. Where Emmanuel Levinas notes that "Politics must be able...always to be checked and criticized starting from the ethical," I maintain that both Levinas and Kierkegaard would claim that Antigone's deed was to be found essentially in the *ethical* domain, and that Creon's *political* domain must always be able to be checked and criticized starting from the ethical (the infinite asymmetry of love-as-response to commandment) (Levinas 80). The ethical face-to-face encounter and relation always and ever exist in a social (i.e. economic) atmosphere, and yet the ethical must forever hold the political in check. I contend that, by writing the tragic drama in this way, Sophocles was warning his audience and the larger Athenian culture about the dangers of a politically-infused morality, rather than an ethically corrected polity.³

In the next section of this paper, I will make clear Kierkegaard's position on the love of the dead, demystifying *prima facie* impres-

sions – including TW Adorno's critique – that this is an absurd, if not morbid, requirement to exact of someone. Additionally, to bolster the Kierkegaardian analysis, I will show how a Levinasian perspective adds to, and illuminates, the analysis of infinite human responsibility. Next, I will see how the Kierkegaardian and Levinasian methods and teachings find resonance in Antigone's choice of (eternal) death over (mortal) life.

Third, I will anticipate and encounter the inevitable critical question that emerges: what about Ismene? Doesn't Antigone have responsibilities toward her, qua a living relative, as well as Polyneices, their dead brother? Sophocles, his critics, Kierkegaard, and Levinas all agree that Antigone does bear a certain amount of responsibility for Antigone. However, against some interpretations of *Antigone*, Kierkegaard, Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, and I will argue that Antigone liberates Ismene in and through her love for her younger sister. Following *Works of Love*, one must not love the neighbor in a possessive way. That would amount to placing conditions on love, which is commanded to be unconditional (i.e., without restriction, expectation of reciprocity, etc.). Authentic love, in this sense, frees the beloved and helps one to become an autonomous and responsible subject on one's own terms. Ismene was, in a Kantian sense, in a state of *Unmündigkeit*, or personal and moral immaturity. Early in the play, she says to Antigone, "We must remember that we are women, who cannot fight against men" (Lloyd-Jones, line 62). Antigone's work of love toward her sister allowed her to mature, and hence to become an independent moral agent.

Kierkegaard and Levinas on Necro-Agapē

The Danish...word for task, *Opgave*, includes in it the word for gift, *Gave*. The task that is commanded embodies the gift; we can understand this according to the English expression for assigning a task: "It is given to you to do X" (Ferreira 41).

Kierkegaard on Necro-Agapē

Agapic love, for Kierkegaard, is a freely given gift. In *Works of Love*, he examines the complex

dimensions of this divine command. Death, as we are all painfully aware, is the great equalizer. In death, there are no distinctions – the community of the deceased does not make discriminations based on gender, social status, or creed. Kierkegaard wishes to offer a test for the love of the living. One is to check one's love of the living-as-neighbors against the person's work of love in respectfully remembering those who have passed into eternity. "Here," Kierkegaard writes, "the one who is living is disclosed; here he must show himself exactly as he is, because the one who is dead has withdrawn himself completely" (Kierkegaard 347). Clearly, for Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, one is to love the persons that one encounters in everyday worldly commerce. He continues, "If we are to love the persons we see, then also those we have seen but see no more because death took them away" (347-348). This kind of love is a "task, and one need not have seen much in life to have seen enough to be assured that it may very well be necessary to emphasize that it is a task, a duty, to recollect the dead" (348). The work of love in recollecting someone who has passed is simultaneously (1) the most unselfish, (2) the freest, and (3) the most faithful kind of love. Following Kierkegaard's analysis, allow me to explain.

First, "the work of love in recollecting one who is dead is a work of the *most unselfish* love" (349). In the case of recollecting one who is dead, all attempts at reciprocity are stunted. The love of the deceased is an aneconomic affair – the economies of exchange and mutuality are literally impossible. Kierkegaard likens this aspect of love to a parent's love for a child. In ideal circumstances, parents love their infant without any direct expectation of return or reciprocal love. Agapic love, in the fullest and only true sense of the word, is nonpossessive. It does not expect anything – it gives.

Second, "the work of love in recollecting one who is dead is a work of the *freest* love" (351). One is not legally bound to mourn and to respectfully remember those who have passed. The dead themselves are in no position to compel the living to lovingly recall them. Kierkegaard continues, "In order to test properly whether love is entirely free, one can of course remove everything that could in any way extort

from one a work of love" (351). To return to the parent and child scenario, the infant is initially a helpless human being. The parents' love for the child eventually is recognized as supporting the child into a young adult, helping her realize her independence. Love gives – it frees. Earlier, Kierkegaard maintained that "love is a revolution" (265). The revolutionary potential of love is exactly this point, that love frees, and that the freest love is enabling the neighbor, the beloved, to become a fully autonomous moral subject. When agapic love is present, mutual edification is also present. "Love builds up by presupposing that love is present in the ground" (219).

Third, "the work of love in recollecting one who is dead is a work of the most faithful love" (355). Everyday notions of love (*Elskov*) direct themselves toward objects. One loves *this* particular person; the celebrity is loved by *that* group of fans. The beloved and the celebrity, in this instance, run the risk of changing (and deteriorating in talent and good looks) over time. Abiding love, however, loves the beloved throughout these changes. This kind of love is precisely eternal. By removing the physical presence and changeability of the beloved, in the instance of loving the dead, this kind of neighbor-love (*Kjerlighed*) is the most faithful. One generally has faith in things that she cannot prove to be true. Believing in agapic love has no direct object; rather one loves through works of faithful love. Kierkegaard concludes this important test by reminding us that:

it is our duty to love the people we do not see but also those we do see. The duty to love the people we see cannot cease because death separates them from us, because duty is eternal; but accordingly neither can the duty to those who are dead separate the living from us in such a way that they do not become the objects of our love. (358)

Levinas on Necro-Agapē

Similarly (and perhaps following Kierkegaard in this line of thought), Levinas observes that one's responsibility to the Other individual knows no bounds. "The intersubjective relation," Levinas describes, "is a non-symmetrical relation" (Levinas 98). The face of the Other

ruptures my self-same egoic identity, and commands me: "thou shalt not kill". The Other individual stands in a position of height, or as Kierkegaard would say, "heightened inequality," over and against the self. For Levinas, one is at one and the same time:

- 1) Responsible for the Other individual;
- 2) Responsible for the responsibility of the Other individual;
- 3) Responsible for the persecution and suffering of the Other individual; and
- 4) Responsible for the death of the Other individual.

It is in this multifaceted and deepening sense of responsibility that Levinas contends that the subject is essentially held *hostage* to the other. *Substitution* in this sense is an essential structure of human subjectivity, according to the Levinasian interpretation. In Antigone's "Kommos," her lamentation, she recounts to the audience and the Chorus that, while her future husband and children are, in a sense, replaceable, her dead brother is certainly not. This connection between Levinasian substitution-as-subjectivity and Antigonean irreplaceability appear to be material extensions of one another, or a double midrash.

Early in the drama, the Chorus is to be proven incorrect in their observation to Creon: "There is no one foolish enough to desire death" (Lloyd-Jones, line 220). Along the lines of the fourth axiom of Levinas's description of human responsibility, Antigone is willing to die for her commitment to fulfilling her duties. She singularly takes the responsibility on her shoulders to bury her brother. If Ismene did not want to be a part of this duty, then that's her choice. Antigone chose not to deny her familial and godly duties to bury the dead. As we shall see in section IV, Levinas's axioms two and three are addressed and responded to Antigone's responsibility for the responsibility of Ismene. If Ismene is not mature enough to recognize her moral autonomy, then it is incumbent upon Antigone to teach and edify (i.e. "upbuild") her.

I have included what I take to be a new euphemism, "necro-agapē," in the title for this section, underscoring the radical asymmetry implicated in Kierkegaard's test for one's love of the living. Agapic love gives without expectation of return,

or even of being considered among other elements of economic society. This kind of love is ethical, and not directly or easily translated into the political without a concurrent violence. Love-as-response to command, or duty, "makes love free in blessed independence" (Kierkegaard 39). There is no hint or threat of contingency in such a selfless posture. Similarly, the responsibility for the Other in Levinas's terms is infinite. At no point is one able to say, "I have done all that has been asked of me". Responsibility for the face of the Other, in Levinas's terms, is a "thou must which takes no account of a thou can" thus, there is a surplus of commands to obey. Kierkegaardian love and Levinasian responsibility know no bounds, no vanishing points. Antigone's love and responsibility in this play exemplify these philosophical writings.

Antigone as Necro-Agapic Moral Agent

given women's natural, social, and political disabilities, their limited education except in the sphere of religion, and their isolation from daily contact with men [in the ancient Athenian context], female moral autonomy becomes unpredictable and threatening. (Foley 115)

love for the neighbor makes a person blind in the deepest and noblest and most blessed sense of the word, so that he blindly loves every human being as the lover loves the beloved. (Kierkegaard 69)

Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* teaches the attentive reader how to be a better lover, starting with the commandment to love. Love-as-response to commandment, or duty, ought to be the backbone and litmus test of all other forms of love: friendship (*philia*); romantic, erotic relations; mundane encounters with strangers in the marketplace, etc. It is my contention that love-as-response to command informs and engenders Antigone's decision to bury her brother, thus continuing (or engendering) the Oedipal drama.⁴ Obeying one's *daimon*, her inner voice of conscience, serves as an excellent example of the heteronomous autonomy, or the autonomous heteronomy, of Antigone's choice to act.

In the "moral" of the story, the last lines of this tragic drama, the Chorus observes:

Good sense is by far the chief part of happiness [*eudaimonia*]; and we must not be impious toward the gods [*theos*]. The great words of boasters are always punished with great blows, and as they grow old teach them wisdom [*sophia*]. (Lloyd-Jones, lines 1350-1354)

By obeying the god-within, Antigone's *daimon*, she made a wise decision, regardless of the consequences that befell her or those nearby her.

Now love is stated in many ways, and it is quite often difficult to decipher someone's inner states or motivations when performing a work of love. What were Antigone's feelings for Polyneices? How much do they matter in terms of her moral motivation to act on his behalf? In Kantian terms, one's moral motivations should not at all be heteronomous, that is, influenced by personal inclination or desire. Autonomous moral choices are the only ones that can possibly count as moral or immoral. Antigone exhibits the shortcomings of Kant's analysis, and advocates a freely chosen (autonomy) command (heteronomy). Whereas, in the end of *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus asks, Oedipus: Who will marry Antigone?, we can see the major question of *Antigone* where Antigone asks herself: Who will bury Polyneices? It was a task that Antigone freely chose, and imposed upon herself, to carry out this familial duty which is coextensive with her duty to the gods below.

Was Antigone biased in favor of Polyneices? That is, did she make her decision solely because of her kinship relation with him? Kierkegaard in no way intended to instruct his readers to stop loving their family members or those nearby. He only wished to teach them how to love them in the proper way – as neighbors. Love of neighbor (*Kjerlighed*) is set against preferential love (*Forkjerlighed*) in that "the neighbor" does not show preference – the neighbor is each and every Other human individual. If one loves her kin more than strangers, she is not showing the strangers neighborly love. Antigone's (re)claiming of her autonomy, in the Kantian sense, exhibits her willingness to universalize her maxim of "One must bury the dead". This maxim shows

no direct sign of preferentiality or conditionality. It is in this sense that Antigone was correctly acting as Polyneices's neighbor. Agapic love, for Kierkegaard, should ground one's friendships and romantic (erotic) relationships, not to mention one's relationship with one's self. Improper and debased versions of love, according to Kierkegaard's writing, originate in an improper relation to one's self (*Elskov*).

Kierkegaard contends that the only person whom one can successfully deceive is one's self. Antigone does not endeavor to deceive anyone, or to hide from her moral decision. She chose her fate, and did not shirk from her self – and other-imposed duty. And, as a result of this social transgression, she is punished in the most severe way. In her lamentation, she pleads to the Chorus, "For by acting piously I have been convicted of impiety" (Lloyd-Jones, line 922). Thus emerges a strange, though not unexpected, twist of fate.

In Levinasian terms, once the face-to-face encounter encounters another Other, that is, as soon as the relationship between two becomes a relationship among three, one is immediately plunged into the realm of the political. Antigone has a responsibility toward Polyneices. Additionally, she has a responsibility for her sister, Ismene. She is being pulled in two different directions at the same time. What is she to do? How does one decide between competing claims on the self? In the next section, we will discuss the relationship that Antigone has with Ismene. Many commentators have criticized Antigone's character for not paying enough attention to her surviving relative. However, as we shall see, Antigone's work of love extends in all directions, including both the dead and the living.

What about Ismene? She's *Not Dead*

Socrates [...] knew that the art of power [of love] lies precisely in making another free. (*JP* II 1251, in Kierkegaard 406)

At this point, or perhaps throughout this exposition, one may rightly ask: what about one's duties toward the living? What about Antigone's apparent acts of ignorance or hatred toward her supposedly beloved sister, Ismene? Is

Antigone completely unsympathetic (or incapable of empathy) with regard to her living sister? Here we can turn once again to Kierkegaard for insight. One has a duty to love those who she sees, not in spite of their imperfections or other qualifications, but in and through their individual particularities. What appears to be an act of ignorance or worse, hatred, may actually be a work of love. One cannot directly intuit the moral motivations of another, solely based on the exterior actions of the Other. Works of love take many forms. As I shall show, Antigone's autonomous and heteronomous work of love has direct and upbuilding consequences for her relationship with Ismene.

Kierkegaard and "Love's Visibility"

Here we again turn to *Works of Love*, where we read that one is not only to be tested by loving and recollecting the dead, but also to love the people one sees on an everyday basis. These are literally one's "neighbors". Kierkegaard writes, "To be able to love a person despite his weaknesses and defects and imperfections is still not perfect love, but rather this, to be able to find him lovable despite and with his weaknesses and defects and imperfections" (157-158). Since humans are created in a divine image, according to Kierkegaard's Christianity, there is something lovable in each and every one of us. The task and gift of love are not to go out into the world and find the lovable objects (the qualities, characteristics and personality-traits that we find attractive or complementary to our proclivities); rather, it is to find the people we see lovable. We are to love those we see as they are, and not wish that they would change to better suit our needs and wants. That is placing restrictions or conditions on love, and agapic love-as-response disallows this from being primary in one's neighbor-relationships. Kierkegaard continues:

When it is a duty to love the people we see, one must first and foremost give up all imaginary and exaggerated ideas about a dreamworld where the object of love should be sought and found – that is, one must become sober, gain actuality and truth by finding and remaining in the world of actuality as the task is assigned to one. (161)

One cannot claim to love God without first and foremost loving the neighbor, the one who is seen in the quotidian lifeworld. In this respect, Kierkegaard and Levinas are in complete agreement.

In terms of *Antigone*, the heroine needs to love Ismene as she is: vulnerable, immature, and uncertain of her abilities. For Kierkegaard, love builds up. Antigone's task in her love for Ismene is to allow to personally and morally mature, to take responsibility for her own actions, and to ultimately become an autonomous moral subject. Antigone does not solely love Ismene for what she could be, but she also loves her into becoming a better Ismene. This kind of love does not condemn the neighbor for being imperfect, but the agapic love-as-response posture mutually edifies the lovers, and brings them up from one level of humanity to a higher one.

Nissim-Sabat and Autonomous Empathy

In Marilyn Nissim-Sabat's view, autonomy, or human independence, is not separate from empathy, or human interdependence. In fact, "Antigone...exemplifies *par excellence* the unity of autonomy and empathy" (Nissim-Sabat 230).⁵ Antigone's autonomous moral choice to bury her brother is coextensive with her empathy for the living, her sister Ismene. Helene Foley observes that "the moral self is radically particularized, and achieving knowledge of the other concrete persons toward whom we act is a complex and difficult moral task" (Foley 190). In implicit agreement with Foley, and following Husserlian phenomenology, Nissim-Sabat defines empathy as the "capacity to apprehend the motivational structure of the psychic life and worldview of the other person as other" (Nissim-Sabat 229). One could say that, with regard to Polyneices, Antigone felt "compassion for his soul's suffering, that is, to end her own suffering caused by her acute perception of his plight" (Nissim-Sabat 230). Antigone's empathy was not one-dimensional, however. She also cared for Ismene a great deal. She did not wish her to be punished for a crime that she did not commit. It is in this sense that Antigone's love was a freely given gift, intended to liberate the beloved (both Polyneices and Ismene).

Antigone's autonomy, her authentic

freedom, is expressed in her refusal to acknowledge that she did anything wrong and in her implicit claim to have been motivated by reasons that she gave to herself, that she constituted as of sufficient weight to motivate her action. (Nissim-Sabat 244)

According to Nissim-Sabat then, Antigone's moral character is autonomous. Her actions were self-imposed. Implicit in Antigone's autonomous moral character is her empathic motivations to liberate Ismene. Nissim-Sabat continues:

Antigone's empathy is expressed [...] in her refusal to allow [the chorus] to victimize her (and themselves) further by making compliance the price of affection [...] Antigone's empathy is manifest in that she appeals to the Chorus to pity her and witness her unjust death on the ground of her self-recognition as having her own reasons for her action, reasons that are principled and universalizable. Her empathy is her refusal to abandon her reasons and her appeal to the Chorus's autonomy, an autonomy that would, if deployed, be manifest as empathy for her. (Nissim-Sabat 245)

Agapic love, or love-as-response to commandment, is non-possessive. "They say that if you truly love someone, set them free" – this phrase is true for the case of Antigone's apparent turning away from Ismene.⁶ In the "Exordium" to *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym, Johannes de Silentio reminds the reader of the following Biblical story:

When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast. It would be hard to have the breast look inviting when the child must not have it. So the child believes that the breast has changed, but the mother – she is still the same, her gaze is as tender and loving as ever. How fortunate the one who did not need more terrible means to wean the child! (Kierkegaard 11)

Silentio's recounting of this important lesson resounds in *Antigone*. In order to help Ismene morally mature, Antigone needs to give her the appearance that she has changed, and no longer wishes to have Ismene be dependent upon her.

This is Antigone's performative-aspect showing itself, in that her love for Ismene never falters; however, her exterior appearance modifies itself to allow Ismene liberate herself, and live her life on her own terms once Antigone is dead. The following debate between Antigone and Ismene illuminates this point:

Ismene: I did the deed, if she agrees, and I take and bear my share of the blame.

Antigone: Why, justice will not allow you this, since you refused and I was not your associate!

Ismene: But in your time of trouble I am not ashamed to make myself a fellow voyager in your suffering.

Antigone: Hades and those below know to whom the deed belongs! And I do not tolerate a loved one who shows her love only in words.

Ismene: Sister, do not dishonour me as to not let me die with you and grant the dead man the proper rites!

Antigone: Do not try to share my death, and do not claim as your own something you never put a hand to! My death will be enough!

Ismene: And what desire for life will be mine if you leave me?

Antigone: Ask Creon! You are his champion!

Ismene: Why do you give me such pain, when it does you no good?

Antigone: It grieves me to mock you, if I do mock you.

Ismene: What help can I still give you, now that things have come to this?

Antigone: Save yourself! I do not grudge you your escape.

Ismene: Ah me, am I to miss sharing your death?

Antigone: Yes, you chose life, and I chose death!

Ismene: But I did not fail to speak out!

Antigone: Some thought you were right, and some thought I was.

Ismene: Why, our offence is equal!

Antigone: Be comforted! You are alive, but my life has long been dead, so as to help the dead.

(Lloyd-Jones, lines 535-560)

What appears as Antigone's disregard for Ismene's future is actually her assisting Ismene

to go on living her own life on her own terms. Antigone mentions that, if Ismene were receiving the impression that Antigone were poking fun at her, this would "grieve" her. In this important passage, Antigone's work of love for Ismene is made most apparent in its latency. Nissim-Sabat argues:

Antigone wishes to save Ismene's life because she considers it pointless, and not beneficial to Ismene or anyone else, for Ismene to die without moral understanding and commitment to the moral issue at stake, i.e., without autonomy in the moral sense of the term. (247)

Here autonomy and interhuman empathy are exposed as being continuous with one another. Nissim-Sabat concludes,

Antigone's own empathy is profound, as is her manifest love for Ismene. That is to say, her empathy for Ismene is a directedness toward the autonomy of the other, towards the growth and transcendence of the other, which is at the same time a directedness towards stimulating the empathic capacity of the other. That is, empathy, as active grasping of the motivational structure of the psychic life of the other, is a directedness towards recognition of transcendental intersubjectivity. (248)

It is not until one responds to duty, according to Kierkegaard and Levinas, that one becomes a moral agent, i.e. a human being in the most fulfilled sense of the word. Nissim-Sabat's addition to this requirement for (autonomous) human subjectivity is that interhuman empathy is not at all to be neglected in this quest for self. Antigone's decision to become a moral self is both autonomous and heteronomous, and this is shown in her courage to act responsibly both toward her deceased brother and her living sister, in the face of her certain punishment to the point of death. In a way, we could see Antigone's decision to substitute herself for Creon's misguided condemnation of Ismene as co-conspirator in the burial of Polyneices, even though Ismene had nothing to do with it (recall that she even went so far as to resist Antigone's initial request for assistance).

Antigone's Möbian Work(s) of Love

Antigone [to Creon]: I cannot side with hatred.
My nature sides with love.⁷ (Woodruff, line 524)

As the above analysis has indicated, *Antigone* is a Greek tragedy that makes apparent;

- 1) that the ethical must always and ever serve as a corrective to the political, and
- 2) that Antigone's necro-agapē for Polyneices, and her steadfast concern for Ismene, are not at odds with one another, and
- 3) that human autonomy, or independence, and interhuman empathy, or interdependence, are two sides to the same coin.

Thus, the love that Antigone shows toward Polyneices and the love that Antigone exhibits toward Ismene are material continuations of one another; that is, they demonstrate the inner-outer continuum of the Möbian strip. Nissim-Sabat asks, "Was Antigone's act of burying her brother in defiance of Creon's edict autonomous or heteronomous?" (228). In a Möbian way, we can say "yes" to both prongs of this question.

In a recent text, Cecilia Sjöholm reopens George Steiner's question: "What would happen if psychoanalysis had chosen Antigone rather than Oedipus?" (Sjöholm xi). As a result of this investigation, we can amend this pressing and difficult question to read: What would happen if Western ethics had chosen *Antigone* rather than Plato's *Republic*? Foley has observed, "Insofar as women in tragedy and epic are moral agents with a difference, they reveal in a positive sense important social and ethical alternatives and in a negative sense the social consequences of actions undertaken from a marginal, morally questionable, or socially resistant position" (116). The task of becoming a moral self in a socio-political climate of tyranny will always and ever be a task of Sisyphean proportions. However, as Kierkegaard's Danish language reminds us, a task is simultaneously also a gift given. Agapic love, both of the living as well as of the dead, while not in theory impossible, is an infinite task, the task of a lifetime.

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Notes

1 As Kierkegaard's extended meditation suggests, the purity of Antigone's heart is to *will one thing*. Ostensibly, Antigone makes one (and only one) choice in this drama: to bury her brother, Polyneices. Everything else that happens in this Sophoclean drama is ancillary to this pivotal point.

2 That Antigone was a *woman* is by no means an insignificant factor, neither for Sophocles nor for his audience of fellow Athenian citizens. Foley reminds us of the following analogy: in ancient Athens, the female was to the home (*oikos*) what the male was to the city-state (*polis*). There existed rigidly separate spheres, and there were grave consequences awaiting those who attempted to cross this gender-divide. Antigone is such a character (Foley 9). Additionally, Foley observes that "the gendering of ethical positions permits the public exploration of moral complexities that would not otherwise have been possible" (Foley 172). Such is clearly the case for *Antigone*. Foley continues, "Although Antigone indeed threatens the civic order with her act and ensures its disastrous conclusion by her intransigence, it is Creon who acts destructively to the city in aiming to serve it" (Foley 197).

3 In later (i.e., fourth century BCE) Greek thinking, the philosophers Plato and Aristotle would take up the debate over the primacy of ethics over politics. Unfortunately, for this essay, time and space prohibit me from going into this issue into adequate depth.

4 Since *Antigone* was the first drama composed in the Oedipus trilogy, I will pay little attention to the other two plays, *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. I will thus read *Antigone* on its own terms and as Sophocles wrote it – first.

5 It should not go unobserved that the ancient Greek concept of the human individual was a social being, through and through. The human (*anthropos*) is a civic being, contends Aristotle. Seeing autonomy as separate from empathy is a thoroughly modern construction, and we (post)moderns would be wise to rediscover this notion of human independence and human interdependence as co-constituting one another. Neither Kierkegaard nor Levinas would disagree with this sentiment.

6 Throughout his writings and interviews, Levinas observed that "love" is a worn-out and ambiguous concept, as is the above phrase. However, the liberating aspect of love originally gave rise to that saying, and it is this original meaning that I wish to reveal, or disclose (*aletheia*).

7 Another translation of this line reads as follows. "Antigone [to Creon]: I have no enemies by birth, but I have friends (*philos*) by birth" (Lloyd-Jones, line 524).

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