

Undoing the Tragic Knot? An Epistemological Problem

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(1.1) Introduction

Tragedy occupies a central part of human life. People die in car accidents, they suffer through diseases, drown in floods, and starve in famines. Every day, children step on land mines and get maimed or torn to pieces. Some are sexually abused and beaten to death. Under classical theism, the existence of suffering (tragedy), especially *unmerited* suffering, also known as the *misery* of the *innocent*, falls in the category of the Metaphysical or Theological problem of evil. Such occurrences represent evil, instead of the good. The philosophical thought of dualism maintains that there is a moral order which helps to explain the seeming paradox of conflict between good and evil, when the good overcomes evil in the end. This is usually thought to imply that in the religious sense, there is nothing like *Tragedy proper*, once a religious explanation is given to an otherwise tragic situation.

Tragedy in drama is a form of art. The conventional view among writers of tragic drama is that there can be no Tragedy as such in a worldview such as the one given by the Judeo-Christian tradition, that the two notions, religion and tragedy, are mutually exclusive, hence what is considered tragic cannot be religious, and what is religious cannot be tragic. Among those who subscribe to this school of thought are notable writers such as A.I. Richards, Karl Jaspers, and Chu Kwang-Tsien. According to Richards, "Tragedy is only possible to a mind which is for the moment agnostic or Manichean. The least touch of any theology which has a compensating Heaven to

offer the tragic hero is fatal."¹ On his part, Karl Jaspers says the following: "Christian salvation opposes tragic knowledge. The chance of being saved destroys the tragic sense of being trapped without chance of escape. Therefore no genuinely Christian tragedy can exist."² Chu Kwang-Tsien draws his conclusions from the Bible, the drama of Christian Europe and evidence from India and China: "With its emphasis on the moral order of the world, on the Original Sin and Last Judgment, on submission and humility, Christianity is in every sense antagonistic to the spirit of Tragedy. Tragedy, as it represents the struggle of man with Fate, and as it often expresses vividly to our eyes inexplicable evils and undeserved sufferings, has always something profane and blasphemous in it."³ For this school of thought, Judeo-Christian tragic art, if Tragedy at all, can only be regarded as pseudo-tragedy.

In this paper, I will argue against the conventional view that the notion of Tragedy is *tabula rasa* in religion as conceived within the Judeo-Christian tradition. I will do this by arguing that the notion of the paradox of tragedy, a necessary ingredient for tragic drama, is sustained in both, i.e., that the paradox of tragedy is unresolved in both secular and religious plays. I will use Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and the Book of *Job* to represent the secular and religious plays, respectively.

¹ A. I. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, (London: Kegan Paul, p. 246, 1924).

² Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy Is Not Enough*, (London: Gollancz, p. 38, 1953).

³ Chu Kwang-Tsien, *The Psychology of Tragedy*, p.236.

What is the paradox of Tragedy? The answer to this question may be expressed initially through another question: Why does Tragedy please? This is one of the fundamental questions asked by Tragic writers who in general answer the question only by appealing to some feature of art as such, for example, poetic language, in virtue of which we can be pleased by tragic drama. For such writers, the (a deeper paradox, a second paradox) paradox is maintained (unresolved) with respect to tragic events themselves which remain unexplained and senseless. By contrast, Judeo-Christian religion in the classical sense resolves the (second) paradox fully by giving meaning to the suffering or explaining it away.

In this paper (section 2.3), I will show that the Judeo-Christian tradition does not undo the fundamental cause or reason for the paradox of tragedy (the second paradox), which is the problem of evil. I will then resolve the first paradox (section 3.1), expressed in the question: "Why does Tragedy please?" and reject a number of standard explanations. My account of why Tragedy pleases has the virtue of connecting the pleasure directly to the tragic action, namely, the sublimity of the tragic hero, rather than invoking features of art as the explanation. I will also show that Kant's notion of aesthetic pleasure (the one I will use), is not incompatible with the pleasure in Tragic art.

(1.2) Towards an understanding and definition of Tragedy

Before proceeding, I would like to make a clarification of the way I have used the word "tragedy" in this paper. In reference to tragedy in its art form, I will be using "tragedy" with a capital "T", hence Tragedy, and in reference to tragedy as an event, I will be using "tragedy" with a small "t", hence tragedy. By the best etymological accounts, the word *tragedy* evolved from a fusion of the Greek *tragos* and *oide*, literally a

"goat-song" (probably alluding to the half-goat satyrs who were sacred to the god Dionysus, in whose honor the original Greek Tragedies were performed, or perhaps referring to the ritual prize goat given to the winning tragic dramatist of the Greek play festivals). In a broad sense of the term, a Tragedy is a play, or an event that conveys "the tragic sense of life". The tragic sense of life is a state of mind in which man's situation is experienced as "impossible", i.e., inherently destructive or dependent on terms that oppose it. So the paradox of Tragic art, I argue, is rooted in a sense of life itself as paradoxical. A good answer to the question, "Why does Tragedy please?" must deal with the paradox inherent in the tragic sense of life. Tragedy takes place in three forms: (1) on an individual whom we refer to as the tragic hero, (2) the condition of the tragic hero, also referred to as the tragic issue, and (3) what the play or the event communicates, referring to its effects on the audience.

(2.1) The Paradox of Tragedy in life and drama

The genealogy of tragic drama dates back to the ancestors of Western philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. From the time when Aristotle answered Plato to the present, a history of contradiction prevails as to what constitutes tragic drama. However, the perennial debate over the essence of Tragedy has been more of an asset than a liability, it has illuminated certain preferred criteria or properties of Tragedy that are neglected, distorted or omitted by other critics.⁴ Most critics are in agreement that the notion of paradox stands out as a preferred concept, and it has neither suffered neglect nor omission, since

⁴ Morris Wetz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*, (University of Chicago Press, p. 309, 1964).

it rarely fails to appear in any serious discussion of the tragic mode.⁵

In my definition of Tragedy, “the tragic sense of life” (“the impossible”) is significant because underlying it is the notion of paradox. Thus, I give recognition to paradox as the criterion⁶ of a tragedy in its three forms: (1) the nature of a tragic figure, (2) the tragic issue, and (3) the effect of tragedy. I will use the play, Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* to show the conflicts in the three forms of Tragedy.

(2.2) Tragedy in the Greek Tradition: Agamemnon

Agamemnon is the tragic figure and hero. He is a character with immense power, virtues and nobility. Yet, it is within his power or virtue that the paradox resides. His strength is his weakness, what makes him good, sympathetic, even admirable is what leads to his fall. Thus, he is identified as both flawless and flawed, undeserving and deserving of his fate, as innocent and as a victim of malignant forces, as a failure and a victor. This is the paradox, it presents an absurdity. Lamenting over this paradox, A.C. Bradley asks, “And why is it that a man’s virtues help to destroy him, and the weakness or defect is so intertwined with everything that is admirable in him that we can hardly separate them even in imagination?”⁷ A similar paradoxical ambivalence is noted by Max Scheler who recalls Madame de Stael’s dictum that “the same traits of character which permitted a man to do his best have brought

him to catastrophe.”⁸ Agamemnon’s courage, decisiveness and desire to secure justice for the state and piety for the gods motivate him to obey Zeus’s command to punish Troy: “Offering no evidence to the contrary, the play also asserts that these same powers which win him victory also lead him to sacrifice his daughter (Iphigenia), and to despoil the alters of Troy, and finally to fall victim of Clytemnestra’s knife.”⁹

Paradox is also evident in the nature of the tragic issue. The tragic issue is a mystery. The tragic figure seeks not evil but good. The good that he seeks and finds destroys him. Here, the moral order seems to engender evil within itself. Max Scheler explains this tragic knot: “it would be most tragic if the same power which has brought either itself or another object to very high positive value becomes its destroyer-especially if this takes place in the very act of its achievement. If we are observing a certain action which is realizing a high value, and then we see in that same action that it is working toward the undermining of the very existence of the being it is helping, we receive the most complete and the clearest of tragic impressions.”¹⁰ In the play, Agamemnon’s goal is to secure justice, which is demanded by Zeus for the rape of Helen. Agamemnon secures justice by defeating Troy. But in order to secure this good, he has to commit the evil but inescapable acts of sacrificing Iphigenia and the devastation of Troy’s altars. For these faults, he must be destroyed. He becomes a victim of his fate at the hands of Clytemnestra, an imperfect minister of justice, who is also executed in turn. In this tragic case, good rewards its seeker with its possession but simultaneously consumes him. Finally, paradox is manifest in the effects of Tragedy. The

⁵ Two works on Tragedy which employ paradox extensively are D.D. Raphael, *The Paradox of Tragedy* (Indiana University Press, 1960), and Herbert Weisinger, *Tragedy and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall* (Michigan State College Press, 1955).

⁶ I am using the word criterion to indicate a way of specifying the content of a concept by reference to paradigm cases of its use rather than to necessary and sufficient conditions for its application.

⁷ A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, (London: Macmillan, p. 33, 1914).

⁸ “On the Tragic,” *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, p.9, 1965).

⁹ Edmund Napieralski, *The Tragic Knot: Paradox in the Experience of Tragedy* (Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 31, no.4, p 443).

¹⁰ Max Scheler, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

paradox invades the intellectual as well as our emotional experience as we see, hear, read or experience a Tragic episode. We are neither comforted nor outraged, our belief in a world of justice and moral order is neither affirmed nor denied, our feeling is neither one of hope nor despair. We are neither reconciled nor opposed to see a good man destroyed by the power of good which he sought and achieved. Hence, the effects are basically pleasing and painful.

There are many plays of great repute which depict the tragic knot as undone. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, and Strindberg's *The Father*, all testify to the breadth, magnitude and anguish of the tragic knot. So far, I have used Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* to represent the rest of the plays.

Perhaps it would be useful to review what constitutes a tragic situation, in the sense argued in this paper. (1) There is the evidence of intense evil and human pain as the tragic hero is devoured by the powers of good that he secures. (2) There is an element of the absurd. There is tremendous waste of the good that not only defies but also insults human intellect. (3) There is the inevitable fall of the hero, where the great power overcomes the hero, and man's fate manifests itself. Here, one is not sure whether good overcomes evil or it is evil that overcomes the good, or whether these notions should apply at all. Briefly put, we are left with contradictions in the content of the tragic knot. In an attempt to grapple with the contradictions in the paradox, some critics of Tragic drama have argued for the resolution of the contradictions in the Tragic scene. These critics' comments are based upon three words attributed to Aristotle, which seem to suggest the paradox can be undone. These words are *hamartia*, *hubris*, and *megalopsychia*. Aristotle introduces *hamartia* in chapter XIII of the *Poetics*. It has been interpreted by most critics as either an error in judgment or a

moral flaw.¹¹ Although *hubris* does not appear in the *Poetics*, discussions of Greek Tragedy since Aristotle rarely fail to mention this notion as a precipitating cause of a hero's downfall. According to Walter Kaufmann, in his *Tragedy and Philosophy*, *hubris* means wanton violence and insolence, sometimes lust and lewdness, but not pride.¹² *Megalopsychia* was interpreted to mean pride or great souledness in the Greek phrase. Aristotle discusses pride in *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1124 a.

In examining these three concepts, they have the notion of some taint, flaw or sin in the tragic hero's character. Since they are all attributed to Aristotle, perhaps his notion of Tragedy will help us resolve this impasse. G.M.A. Grube is one of the translators of Aristotle's *Poetics*. He argues that "we cannot force one of these alternatives on Aristotle since he is concerned not with the tragic figure's responsibility for his fall but rather the probability or inevitability of his fall."¹³ Hence, there is nothing in the *Poetics* to prevent our seeing the protagonist's "mistake" as arising from virtue rather than from vice, from strength rather than from weakness, from good rather than from evil.¹⁴ Moreover, pride for Aristotle and the Greek tragedians was not a sin but an essential ingredient of heroism.¹⁵ And as Napieralski cautions, if we insist on finding some taint, flaw, or sin, then we are left with the threat of poetic

¹¹ In "The Tragic Flaw: Is It a Tragic Error?" *Modern Language Review*, p. 58 (1963), 321-25, Isabel Hyde traces the history of the interpretation of *hamartia* as "flaw" to S.H. Butcher.

¹² Walter Kaufman, *Tragedy and Philosophy*, (NY: Anchor Books, p. 74, 1969). In his extensive survey of Greek tragedies, Kaufmann shows that this word seldom appears.

¹³ Edmund Napieralski, in G. M. A. Grube's *Aristotle on Poetry and Style*, (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, p. xxv, 1958).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Tragic Knot: Paradox in the Experience of Tragedy*, (Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 31, no.4, p. 442).

¹⁵ Walter Kaufmann, *Op.cit.*, pp. 72-73, cites Aristotle's discussion of pride in *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1124a.

justice, something which even Aristotle saw as unacceptable in Tragedy.¹⁶ One needs a different approach to explicating the tragic knot, one different from faulting the tragic hero's character. In another case (the story of Job), I will do just that, and without undoing the tragic knot.

(2.3) Tragedy in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

The question here is whether or not there is *Tragedy proper* in a Judeo-Christian setting, since in religion,¹⁷ there seems to be reconciliation of the contradictions in the paradox. Tragedy is evil and has effects that are evil; the critics of tragedy are disturbed by the conflicts of justice and injustice, and are wondering whether we should still believe in a moral power that governs the world. If we do, then the tragic knot is undone, and we no longer have a paradox since the good overcomes the evil, there is no absurdity. I will use the story of *Job* to show that the paradox is sustained in the Judeo-Christian context as it is in the case of the rest of the plays.

In the Biblical tradition, Judaism and Christianity take it for granted that God must be just, and every act of God, or every form of human experience, good or bad, pleasurable or painful, constructive or destructive, must have a moral solution. That is, under this tradition, we are not left with a paradox because religion resolves it. As I have argued in the rest of the paper, in a paradox, none of our questions are answered, there is no reasonable explanation to resolve the contradictions. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, a similar case prevails, as I will argue. Job's case points us to the paradoxical situation, and leaves it unresolved, even though he accepts God's doings as just.

In the books of *Isaiah*, *Psalms* and *Job*, the central theme is the question of God's justice: for example the Psalmist protests at the injustice of the innocent cast down and the wicked prospering. The Psalmist concedes that he can see the fulfillment of justice in the long run, where the wicked are punished but the righteous prospered, but there remains the problem of the interim suffering of the righteous which to him is not merited, and that presents a paradox.

The book of *Job* pushes this problem further. That Job is not an ordinary man is evident from the text, Job 1:1.¹⁸ Central in Job's account is chapter 13: 15-16,

Behold, He will slay me; I wait for Him:
But I will argue my ways before Him.
This also shall be my salvation,
That a hypocrite cannot come before Him.¹⁹

In this account, there are tragic issues worth noting. One is that Job contends with a great power, God. He makes it known that God's justice does not make sense to him. He is not opposing or challenging God's will, or rejecting the moral order as designed by God. Job questions God's justice, he does not understand it. Crucial here is that he opposes his *understanding* of it, without refusing to *accept* it. As D.D. Raphael remarks, "Job joins the questioning intellect of a Greek with the submissive faith of a Hebrew. The verse matches man with God, in the manner of Greek Tragedy, but at the same time it matches intellectual audacity with submission of the will, this is

¹⁸ "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil." The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible; King James Version, (AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, p. 670, 1984).

¹⁹ As quoted from D.D Raphael's The Paradox of Tragedy, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, p. 48, 1960).

¹⁶ Edmund Napieralski, Op.cit. p. 443.

¹⁷ I am only referring to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition throughout.

itself sublime.”²⁰ Here, the tragic knot remains undone, Job’s question is not answered, either by Job himself or by God. Another issue in this account is the presence of evil. There is intense awareness of evil. Evil is neither ignored nor resolved, its reality is too intense to be ignored. Even when Job is later on restored to prosperity by God giving him twice what he had before, the damage has been done, Job can neither forget nor undo the reality of evil that has befallen him, plus its consequences. Besides, the text gives no solution to the intellectual difficulties or contradictions of evil as depicted by Job. It is a great mystery.

D. D. Raphael reminds us of what the tragic hero’s role should be like, something which is clearly evident in *Job’s* account, “the great tragedians do not inscribe evil under a prepared rubric. Sometimes they are groping their way to an explanation. Sometimes they seem to be denying that there is any explanation. Mostly, however, they are concerned simply to present the phenomenon of evil vividly before us, stamping it with a great question-mark and leaving us to answer the question as we can-if we can.”²¹ Lastly, in the narrative, Tragedy glorifies the hero through his resistance to the great power. That Job resists God’s move by affirming the incomprehensibility of His acts is crystal clear. Even though his fate is inevitable as a human being, he nevertheless earns our admiration. In Kantian terms, in a sense, Job is *sublime*.

In this section, I have argued that the basic ingredients that make a tragic drama are found in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Previously, I showed that paradox is a criterion appealing to critical agreement as to its central place. I showed that one of the ways a paradox manifests itself is the inability to reconcile the contradictions in the episode, for example,

strength and weakness of the tragic hero, justice and injustice in the tragic issue. I also identified the element of absurdity, the waste of the good by the evil, as well as the sublimity of the hero. I have shown that in the story of *Job*, this is exactly the picture one gets. That is, granted that religion attempts to reconcile the contradictions that make a Tragedy what it is, the nature of explanation given to the problems of Tragedy, such as the appeal to God’s justice, do not nullify or erase the contradictions; the paradoxical questions and problems are still there for any one who wants to see them. Hence the religious spirit of divine justice, submission and humility do not answer or solve the questions and contradictions raised in the paradox. *Job* in his humility and submission to the moral order still points us to the problems in the paradox without offering any solutions. To claim that religious dogma resolves the paradox is unreasonable; as I have shown, religious dogma, if we accept it, only quiets our questioning; it has an anesthetizing effect or *catharsis* on the intellect or at least the emotions, but it neither resolves the problems nor answers the questions. It is a mistake to conclude that religious plays lack the spirit of Tragedy simply because religion gives us the notion of the moral order of the world. The moral order provides the basis for a rationalization, not a reconciliation of the paradoxical problems. It only helps us to see the broader picture, when good supposedly overcomes evil, but leaves our questions unanswered, thus, in the strict sense of the term, ends up not resolving or undoing the tragic knot.

In my analysis of the secular plays, I showed that one of the attempts to reconcile the contradictory ideas in the tragic knot was based upon the attempt to fault the tragic hero’s character. This is not a wise move because it is his virtues that make him what he is-our hero. Hence the tragic hero must have some extraordinary powers or virtue which enables him to

²⁰ D. D. Raphael, *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

engage in a significant action, for without such a power or virtue, there would be no action, and without action there would not only be no Tragedy but there will be no drama. Besides, poetic justice as we saw defeats the paradox, essential to Tragedy. Similarly, in the religious arena, the conventional view that the Judeo-Christian tradition is lacking in Tragic drama is based upon the theory that religion gives a metaphysical explanation to resolve the contradictions in Tragedy, by appealing to a moral order in which a wider picture reveals the triumph of good. In the two cases, the difference is that in the former, to reconcile the contradictions in the paradox by faulting the tragic hero's character is self-defeating. In the latter, the case is different in that our attempts at reconciliation become rationalizations, they do not answer or solve the questions posed in the paradox. In both cases, the tragic knot remains undone. The view that secular plays have tragic drama while religious plays are merely pseudo-tragic is a view with less plausibility than is commonly supposed.

Before I begin to address the question as to Why tragedy pleases (first paradox), there are at least two objections that need to be addressed. The general objection is that the steps I have taken to arrive at the view that the paradox of tragedy (the second paradox) is unresolved in the Judeo-Christian tradition are either shaky or infirm, hence, my thesis regarding the nature of tragedy and its manifestations in both secular and religious literature is only *parabolic*.²² Specifically, my critic's problem is with my dichotomy of "secular" and "religious" plays. The charge is that even the Greek tragedies can be characterized as "religious". Hence, Agamemnon could be said to be an agent of the god Zeus, whose struggle with fate should

not be considered as non-religious at all. Conversely, Job's struggle with God could also become a "secular" contest, when the text is isolated from the general text (Bible). Briefly put, the question is this: what is it about Judeo-Christian religions that make them more religious than other religions?

In my introduction (section1.1), I indicated that the metaphysical problem of evil (a fundamental cause for the paradox of tragedy), is a problem only for Classical theism, where there is a monotheistic conception of God. Conventionally, the only monotheistic world religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Here, there is belief in one God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omni benevolent. The conflict of good and evil in a *religious* sense, is sustained only in a religion where the deity is believed to have such attributes. For example, God's goodness and justice requires that the righteous be rewarded with bountiful blessings and prosperity, and the unrighteous with suffering, as a form of God's punishment. Such an act is a display of divine justice, in which the tension between good and evil is resolved, because there is an explanation (a just reason) for the suffering of an unrighteous person. However, when a righteous man such as Job undergoes suffering, a tension is created, causing conflict between good and evil. The point here is that a good God does not take pleasure in the suffering of the righteous or the innocent. Job's suffering is paradoxical because no just reason can be provided as an explanation for the suffering. As I have argued, any attempts to explain Job's situation are not explanations as such, they are merely a rationalization for his suffering. At best, they have the effect of silencing his critical mind. As such, the real tension remains unresolved, and the paradox is untied.

In a religious setting where the deity is believed to lack the fundamental monotheistic attributes named above, it is not

²² These objections were raised by Joseph A. Tighe, in his commentary over my paper, at the 11th Annual Philosophy Graduate Student Conference, at Kent State University, March 13, 2004.

clear where we should draw a line between what counts as an act of god and what should count as a human act. As a matter of fact, the gods in these religions are either man made, or derive their divine status from human recognition. Under classical theism, *every* act of god (good or bad) is a divine act, hence, one of goodness, and is carried out with good intentions, as can be seen from their explanations. Here, there is a divine moral order. Human acts, on the other hand, are not divine, and some of them are carried out with bad intentions, i.e., to harm others. In a religious setting where the deities lack such monotheistic attributes, it is easy to see how some acts might be divine in their origin, but with human intentions. The reason is simply that such deities' actions are not independent of human influence, in one way or another. Alternatively, human acts can easily be mistaken for divine actions. Either way, in the absence of a divine moral order, one's experience of suffering does not present a theological problem of evil as such, it can easily fall in the category of bad luck, fate, or any other reason could be given as a cause.

How about the claim that the book of Job is inextricably linked to the larger picture, namely, the Bible? Is it safe to reason that since *Job* maintains a paradox in itself, so does the Judeo-Christian tradition? My presentation of Job's case is an epistemological one. My point is that even though Job accepts God's will and actions to be just, he opposes his *understanding* of them. As we have seen, Job's questions are not answered, and this is where the problem lies. One can accept the entire Bible story as just, but still oppose certain parts as lacking comprehensibility. Such a stance is not implausible. As long as there is no reasonable explanation(s) to Job's questions, the contradictions in the paradox are not resolved. But such a state of affairs should not inhibit Job's belief in a moral order designed by God. To accept a moral order designed by God is

not inconsistent with opposing one's understanding of certain parts, or even the entire divine moral order. As I have shown in the paper, the tragic hero's role is to present the contradictions as clearly as possible, but leave the rest to us.

(3.1) Why Tragedy Pleases: Kant and Tragedy

"The Pleasure of Tragedy" is an immediately uncomfortable phrase. From the onset, one can see a basic collision between a terrible matter and a delighted response. People seek and enjoy Tragedy as a form of art. But the big question is: "Why does Tragedy please?" Why does one receive satisfaction from seeing the representation of misery? These questions echo the contradictions in the tragic knot. Answering these questions takes one back to Plato, Aristotle, and Kant.

In the *Republic*, Plato's account of Why Tragedy pleases is implied in his views of tragic drama. He is opposed to tragic drama, for the reason that it summons pity as one comes to terms with the anguish of the tragic hero. When faced with the misfortunes of life, through observing the Tragic drama, persons will be liable to pity the hero, just as the hero is liable to pity himself, instead of exhibiting the virtue of self-control; thus, for Plato, the pleasure we get comes from being able to look safely down at the troubles of the tragic hero. Pity here involves a pleasure of narcissism. This, strictly speaking, is incompatible with the account of pleasure which stresses that we look at the tragic hero in admiration. My account of Tragic pleasure takes the latter tack.

Aristotle on his part, contrary to Plato, thought that at least in poetic Tragedy, our emotions are not whipped up but discharged, or purified. The term used by Aristotle is *catharsis*. *Catharsis* involves the notion that through the distress we see in others, we not only identify with their grief but we also learn to fear for ourselves that which we pity or sympathize with in

others. Thus, Aristotle's account of Tragic pleasure relies on two things, (1) the purging of pity and fear and (2) the pleasure of learning. The two views offered in the conception of *catharsis* as purgation or purification of pity and fear as to why Tragedy pleases are in my view inadequate, [except, in one respect].²³ First, they contradict the nature of the tragic hero. The tragic hero is not the type of person that needs pity from us, he is a great-souled man, not one who needs human pity. Second, there is no purging of emotions when one watches or experiences a tragic situation as we have described so far. As F.L Lucas asserts, "we go to tragedy to banquet, not to purge emotions."²⁴ In view of what I have said, the accounts given by Plato and Aristotle do not adequately and positively respond to the question as to why Tragedy pleases.

The experience of Tragedy is hardly comforting, so there has to be another reason for its appeal. I am now going to talk about a third account. This account introduces Kant's theory of tragic aesthetic pleasure: "Tragic beauty is a species of the sublime. What is felt to be sublime is something surpassingly great. It may be physically great or spiritually great."²⁵

The reason the tragic drama pleases is because of our admiration for the hero. When a tragic hero is confronted by the great power he opposes, he is defeated but remains great. The greatness of his opponent is one of physical greatness, whereas his greatness is greatness of spirit. Though the hero

falls, he is sublime in his fall. One of the peculiar satisfactions we derive from tragic drama comes from the feeling that the sublimity of the hero's spirit raises him above the power that overcomes him. The audience is stirred in admiration for the human spirit more than it is stirred to awe for the great powers. This can be well illustrated by the story of *Job*, in which one cannot fail to admire Job's resistance at the unjust suffering God brings his way, his acceptance of God's will notwithstanding. As Raphael puts it, "there is an inner conflict between two forms of the sublime, one is the awe inspiring strength of the Necessity and the other one is the *grandeur dame*. Even though each triumphs on its own plane, the triumph of the human spirit is more elevating. And that is why the tragic fate of the hero gives us satisfaction. Tragedy snatches a spiritual victory out of a natural defeat."²⁶

What would Kant think about tragic drama as a form of aesthetic pleasure?²⁷ A tragic experience cannot be beautiful, it is mind boggling, for one cannot make sense out of the absurdity experienced; at the end of the episode, one has no

²³ That we should look up to the tragic hero in admiration could have been implied in Aristotle's account, when he says that the tragic hero is better than us. But he does not use this account to answer the question as to why Tragedy pleases. By suggesting we learn from tragic drama, Aristotle could be responding to this question. Still, the account he gives fall short of showing why we are positively delighted by tragic drama.

²⁴ F.L. Lucas, *Tragedy*, (NY: collier, p.65, 1962).

²⁵ D. D. Raphael, *Op.cit*, p.27, as he quotes from A.C. Bradley, "The Sublime," in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, (London: Macmillan, 1990).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, The Paradox Of Tragedy, p. 28.

²⁷ It is not easy to know whether or not Kant would endorse tragic drama as a form of aesthetic pleasure. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pleasure and level of reflection on our judgment of it is key to determining what category each pleasurable object would fall. In his checklist, Kant has the following categories of pleasure: agreeable, beautiful, good and the sublime. Given what Kant says on these kinds of pleasure, the only serious candidates for aesthetic judgments are the beautiful and the sublime. Both please without interest in the object, are judgments of reflection (as opposed to sensation or logic), and are singular, yet profess to universal validity. Conversely, the rest are disqualified on the grounds that they lack the qualifications ascribed to the beautiful and the sublime. In our representation of the tragic paradox, the formlessness of the tragic figure's opponents is evident, such as God's power in the story of Job. Besides, the tragic notion is compatible with formlessness in the tragic content, for example, we can neither affirm nor deny our belief in a supreme moral order after such an experience. It is a chaotic experience. To ascribe form to the tragic only serves as an anodyne to the content of Tragedy; form is a threat to the paradox.

renewal of faith in the powers of reason. The sublime pleases because it attracts and repels reason simultaneously. This resonates with the mixed feelings in the tragic scene, in which, we alternate between the poles of identification and detachment, partial identification and objective dispassionateness. In the contest between Agamemnon and Fate, Job and God, the tragic hero is spiritually sublime, whereas Fate is merely a great material power. In this section, I have argued that the reason Tragedy pleases is because of our admiration for the tragic hero. However, there are those who think that there are other reasons, other than our admiration for the tragic hero. Specifically, their view is that Tragedy pleases because it obviates the fundamental human condition, which is itself paradoxical, one in which the "tragic sense of life" prevails, whereby all our human attempts at success, understanding, love, fame, health, honor, truth, etc are essentially futile.²⁸ Hence, the point is that Tragedy pleases because we empathize with the tragic hero. My response is that if the basis for our empathy with the tragic hero is to identify with him, thus admire him for his sublimity, than to identify with his defeat, then this reason is not incompatible with mine. In both cases, the tragic hero's character could still be admirable, we can identify with him in our daily struggles, as we see ourselves reflected in them. We learn not to give up, despite the impending struggle with life's problems. Possibilities of success exist, despite our inevitable defeat. We become *sublime* to life's problems. On the other hand, if this empathy is one that depicts human condition to be *totally* impossible, then I find such a view too strong to be plausible, in which case, our empathy is misplaced. We strive for better political governance because we believe there is justice out there, and with much effort, a just society is achievable. We

seek love and relationships because we believe life can be fulfilling and meaningful if you live and share it with the ones you deeply care about.

In conclusion, I have argued, principally, for two things. First, that paradox is a fundamental criterion for a tragic sense of life, and that this is as applicable in the Judeo-Christian examples such as the book of *Job* as it is in traditionally recognized secular examples like Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Secondly, I have answered the paradox of Tragic art, as expressed in the question - Why does Tragedy please? I have done this by rejecting certain familiar responses to this question (Plato's and Aristotle's views), and I have argued that the reason Tragedy pleases is because we admire the greatness of the tragic hero, that he is *sublime*. As it turns out, Kant's notion of the sublime is compatible with the kind of pleasure derived from tragic drama.

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²⁸ These were additional comments from Joseph A. Tighe, Kent State University.