Tropes of Transport
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Published by Northwestern University Press

Pahl, Katrin.
Tropes of Transport: Hegel and Emotion.
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Pathos

Hegel sometimes distinguishes *Pathos* (pathos) from *Leidenschaft* (passion) and at other times he uses them as synonyms. When one term stands in for the other, Hegel usually wants to confer the ethical prestige of tragic “pathos” upon “passion” in order to argue against the rationalist (Kantian and Socratic) tendency to view passions as by definition irrational and immoral. When the two terms are differentiated, *Leidenschaft* refers to an intense but temporally circumscribed and ultimately selfish motivation to act, whereas *Pathos* is described as a temporally unlimited or categorical identification with an ethical cause.

Pathos clearly has two advantages over the figure of the heart: because it calls for action, it escapes Hegel’s critique of mere interiority; and in that it takes a clear position, it integrates emotionality with rationality. Yet the intractability of pathos—the fact that the passionate stance absorbs the person completely, defines his entire life, and leaves no room for ambivalence—leads to the tragic annihilation of the individual who is under the sway of this trope. Because of this obduracy, I contend, Hegel grows rather disenchanted with pathos and shifts to an analysis of how the theatricality of tragedy affects this trope of absolute sincerity.

Nietzsche exposed the difference between a character-defining passion and a passing passion as one not of essence but of perspective. In retrospect, he points out, we might realize that a passion that seemed absolute to us in the moment was indeed relative and has passed.1 Analyzing Hegel’s account of tragedy in the first section of this chapter, I argue that Hegel, like Nietzsche, reveals the difference between pathos and passion (*Leidenschaft*) as merely one of perspective. I thereby arrive at two different accounts of pathos: the naturalizing or dramatic account from the in-the-moment subjective perspective, and the theatrical or lighthearted account that draws on reflective and ironic distance. My dramatic account of pathos attends to the fact that the dramatic character sincerely believes in the absolute, universal, and ethical quality of his pathos, but my description of this account as “naturalizing” already suggests that the dramatic character produces or constructs his pathos by aggressively gating out other perspectives. My theatrical account of pathos addresses the fact that Hegel merges two realms of reference—real life and theater—in his discussion of the pathos of “ethical life”
(Sittlichkeit). This account attends to the oscillation between these two realms, which renders the passionate character ontologically ecstatic and therefore lighthearted.

Both accounts can be applied to the textual pathos of the Phenomenology. Read dramatically, the pathos of the Phenomenology consists in consciousness having to suffer for knowledge—this is the pathos of experience. Wahl has best articulated the self-dramatizing economy of Hegelian dialectic, arguing that each contradiction has to be sharpened into a tragic collision before the phenomenology can move to the next form of spirit. Yet I will show that experience, understood as a dramatic pathos, cannot effect a transformation of self—it cannot move someone to become a different person or move consciousness to become a different “shape of consciousness.” Instead it leads (quite literally) to a dead end. To transport consciousness to another version of consciousness requires the doubling and duplicity provided by theatricality.

The last section of this chapter introduces “acknowledging” as the Phenomenology’s preferred mode of learning. This mode of knowledge is able to transport the protagonist. “Acknowledging” develops out of the pathos of experience and carries its suffering, but it is also the light-hearted passion that drives the movement of the Phenomenology. This section gives an account of Aufhebung as lifting the weight off of pathos and offers a preview of what I mean by “transport”—something that I will develop more extensively in the second part of the book. I contend that, in the composition and syntax of the Phenomenology, Hegel draws more on his analysis of the theatricality of tragedy than on his theory of the tragic conflict. The Phenomenology’s theatrics build plasticity and ambivalence into the structure of the subject. It constructs the subject of the Phenomenology as a subject to transport by dividing it into a protagonist and a phenomenologist. I argue that the different roles of this plural subject affect, undo, and transform one another, but that they also serve as remainders of one another, so that there is never a complete destruction of the subject in the Phenomenology.

While throughout this book I maintain that the quasi-literary text of the Phenomenology intertwines three different literary spatio-temporalities (complex narrative, theatrical enactment, and poetic rhythm), this chapter focuses on theatrical enactment. The peculiar reality of the theater, which combines the authenticity of present-tense embodiment, feeling, and insight with the self-reflective supplement of an internal spectatorship, doubles the meaning not only of acting, but also of feeling and of thinking. If Hegel’s philosophy is fundamentally a philosophy of Bildung, which maintains that spirit must negate or shape itself into forms of nature and second nature, and nature must negate or educate
itself into the ideality of spirit, then the theater seems to offer the right combination of reality and virtuality, or nature and spirit, to host such a philosophy. This idea of Bildung had one of its earlier champions in Schiller who, in assessments like this one, offered the basic premise behind Hegel’s idea that spirit needs to appear to itself: Man “does not stop short at what Nature herself made of him, but has the power of retracing by means of Reason the steps she took on his behalf, of transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity” (Schiller 1982, 11). If Schiller inspired Hegel, he did so not incidentally by talking about theater.

Ethical Drama

Hegel draws upon Aristotle to develop his rather unusual—I would say Nietzschean—understanding of pathos. Even though he discusses pathos in the context of his analysis of tragedy it is not primarily Aristotle’s Poetics that he consults, nor the Rhetoric, in which Aristotle discusses the different páthe of concern for the orator. Instead, Hegel turns to a work that Aristotle wrote around the same time as the Rhetoric and the Poetics, namely the Magna Moralia. For Hegel, passion does not—and here he agrees with the author of the Magna Moralia—hinder ethical life, but furthers it. In his Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Hegel quotes and comments on Aristotle’s critique of Socrates’ intellectualist notion of virtue:

Concerning Aristotle’s criticism of the principle of Socrates, we should note here that he says, Socrates placed virtue exclusively in logos, in knowing. . . . “He made virtue a matter of insight. So Socrates does away with the alogical [allogike] aspect of the soul, to which belong pathos and ethical custom” [Aristotle, Magna Moralia 1.1.1182a.15–23]. . . . This is a good clarification of virtue. Although virtue consists in self-determination according to universal purposes rather than private ends, it is not only insight or consciousness but also involves the agent’s identifying “heart and soul” [das Herz, das Gemüt] with the insight, and this is what Aristotle calls the alogical aspect of being. (Hegel 2006, 139)

For Aristotle, in order to determine what is good, one needs not only knowledge, but also ethos or character, and páthos or passion. Hegel agrees with Aristotle’s critique of Socrates when he argues that the
good is “not mere thought, but a defining and effective presence” (Hegel 2006, 139). In Socrates’ philosophy “the good as such [with an eye to human actions] still remained indeterminate”; it is “only a universal maxim” (Hegel 2006, 138). The good as universal principle (Maxime)—Hegel contends with obvious allusion to Kantian moral philosophy—lacks the force that drives concrete individuals to take it to heart.

In chapter 1, I discussed Hegel’s rather severe critique of the age of sensibility and its overappreciation of “the law of the heart.” Against this background, the analogy he draws here between pathos and the heart—“We see that what Aristotle misses in Socrates’ determination of virtue, the aspect of subjective reality, is what we today call ‘heart’”—strikes one as imprecise (Hegel 1986, 473, my translation). Given that we are dealing with lecture notes here, I think that we can attribute this imprecision to Hegel’s pedagogical impetus to illustrate the relevance of Aristotle’s position with a contemporary reference. It is certainly true that the ethics of sensibility presents a critique of the intellectualism of Kantian moral philosophy just as Aristotle critiques here the intellectualism of Socratic moral philosophy. Like the sentimentalists, Hegel criticizes Kant’s moral rationalism, but the pathos model of emotionality serves him better than the sensibility model, because pathos desires action and externalization, whereas feeling remains locked in the interiority of the heart.

Like Aristotle, who speaks of virtuous passion, Hegel underscores the ethical value of passion and defines pathos as passion for a cause. Passion, or pathos, in this specific sense, drives a person to put into action what he thinks is good and right. For Hegel, then, pathos has two advantages over the figure of the heart. By “identifying heart and soul with insight,” it reconciles rationality with emotionality and, because it propels action, it escapes the critique of mere interiority.

In a world of pathos, the sphere of the good and the true is not to be located in the inaccessible interiority of the heart, nor in some metaphysical heaven—situated “who knows where” (a typical Hegelian phrase when it comes to exposing some so-called truth as merely imagined). The good and the true find their reality, effectiveness, and presence in the customs of a people and in the passions and thus actions of its heroes: “The individual presence of the universal good [das allgemeine Gute am Einzelnen als solchen] is ‘pathos,’ the universal that drives the individual” (Hegel 1986, 474, my translation). The various universal goods or causes that can drive an individual are imagined as divine forces, but not as metaphysical ones. The Greek gods move among the mortals and participate in their activities. More precisely, the gods drive the mortals to action and the mortals actualize the values that the gods represent:
Regarding their substance, the gods are abstractly universal—this universal is actualized in the act; this actualization belongs to human activity, the activity of subjective individuality. This subjective individuality has as its substantial content the divine matter \( \text{Stoff} \), the \( \text{pathē} \). They are the interests of the human agents, the powers that drive them. (Hegel 1998, 98, my translation)

While each Greek god presents a particular passion to the imagination, Hegel underscores that the gods are part of the human tissue and find their objective realization in the acts of the mortals.

As subjective motivations and as objective gods, the \( \text{pathē} \) constitute accepted reasons for the way things are done. In precisely this sense (of accepted reasons), they are, thus, rational. “Pathos is the power in general \( \text{überhaupt} \) insofar as it moves the human heart and soul, and it should be considered an aspect of the rational and free will,” Hegel contends (Hegel 2005, 96, my translation). While, from a modern perspective, we might feel compelled to find rational only the political pathos of Creon, whereas Antigone, who is driven by the “unwritten laws” of family allegiance, might seem irrational to some of us, Hegel insists that their tragedy develops precisely because they are both motivated by different but equally rational and ethical causes.

As the third characteristic of pathos (in addition to its external reality and its rationality) we need to mention its intransigence: “The individual is what it is; it acts out of this character, this pathos, and it is character because it is precisely this. This is the strength of the ancient characters: that they don’t choose, but are what they do. . . . The figures are this and eternally this, and that is their greatness” (Hegel 1998, 305, my translation). Passionate characters are heroes because pathos leaves no room for ambivalence or critical self-reflection. Without wavering or second-guessing, the hero is absolutely firm in his commitment. Pathos thus refers to an innate character disposition, not a temporary upheaval of passion.

The fact that Hegel uses pathos to refer to the character or ethical calling of an individual who is embedded in the social customs of his community shows once again that Hegel draws upon the \textit{Magna Moralia}, rather than other, perhaps more familiar, works by Aristotle. In the \textit{Rhetoric}, for example, Aristotle discusses various character types (\textit{ethe}) that the orator might encounter in the audience he is trying to convince; these character types are determined by social factors (such as age, class, and fortune) and thus remain relatively constant. \( \text{Pāthe} \), on the other hand, such as anger, pity, or jealousy, can be spontaneously created; the skilled orator can arouse affects in the audience (in order to influence their
judgment) by displaying the signs of the desired affect, that is, by first arousing the affect in himself. Meanwhile Aristotle underscores the importance of the orator’s credibility. To protect his credibility, his speech and his affect must be in line with his character or ethos. Ethos, in this case, means honesty and trustworthiness. Hegel’s notion of pathos, on the other hand, does not allow for the possibility of auto- or hetero-affection, that is, of the conscious and artful manipulation of pathos. For Hegel, pathos is unchanging. The ancient characters are “eternally this.” Their heroism consists in being uncompromising and steadfastly true to their character. Pathos is Hegel’s figure for the authenticity of emotion and for the saturation of a person with substance: “The substance appears with individuality [an der Individualität] as his pathos, and individuality appears as what brings substance to life. . . . Ethical individuality is immediately and in itself at one with its universal; it has existence only within it” (§ 470, trans. modified). The complete congruence of the hero with his cause certainly suggests honesty and trustworthiness. Hegel thus uses pathos as virtually synonymous with character or ethos in the sense of Aristotle’s Rhetoric.

The earlier-quoted passage from the Lectures on the History of Philosophy (where Hegel comments on Aristotle’s critique of Socrates) continues by citing “love, ambition, thirst for glory” as examples of virtuous pathos. Here, it is thus taken for granted that even such morally ambiguous passions as thirst for glory, ambition, or love inevitably (through the infamous “cunning of Reason,” one would assume) serve the good. But Hegel’s discussion of pathos in the Phenomenology of Spirit is embedded in an analysis of ethics played out not in a providential, but in a tragic world. Here, even the righteous passion brings about disaster.

So far we have analyzed the different characteristics of pathos (virtuous, reasonable, intransigent, and driving) from the meta-theoretical perspective of Hegel’s critique of rationalist morality in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy. Now we turn to Hegel’s discussion of pathos in the Phenomenology. In the tragic world of ethical action, two different but equally ethical values collide. The two heroes, each of whom ardently serves his own cause but offends the god who impassions the other, both behave ethically and unethically to equal degrees. But such ambiguity doesn’t fit the heroic sense of self. From the hero’s point of view, things are clear. He sees his own passion as righteous pathos—he genuinely serves an ethical cause—whereas the other’s behavior seems to him an insincere and unnecessary production of pathos—at best a private end posing as a universal purpose. Tragedy ensues from the refusal to recognize the pathos of the other.

The phenomenological approach adds an existential aspect to the
discussion of pathos that will promptly introduce a certain amount of theatricality. In general, the *Phenomenology* enacts the various figurations of consciousness and allows us to identify with them—the phenomenological presentation as such has, thus, something theatrical about it. In addition, the particular figure of consciousness we are analyzing now—ethical passion—is best known from ancient Greek theater. Hegel calls attention to this intertwining of the theatrical and the ethical realms by using the word *Handlung* (action, act, plot) rather than *Tat* or *Tun* (“deed,” or “doing”) to describe the activities of the passionate individual. He thereby suggests that pathos—his trope for absolute emotional sincerity—has indeed something staged about it.

The theatricality of ethical action gives rise to suspicions about the true value of pathos. The need emerges for a line to be drawn between virtuous, substantial, genuine, and right passions on the one hand, and self-serving, insubstantial, phony, and wrong passions on the other. Hegel begins to mark the difference by reserving the word *Pathos* for the former and *Leidenschaft* or *Leidenschaftlichkeit* for the latter. The part of the *Phenomenology* that deals with the realm of ethics from the point of view of religion, for example, states that merely subjective and arbitrary interests are “not the pathos [*Pathos*] of the hero; they have in the hero’s eyes descended to the level of being his passions [*Leidenschaft*]—that is, they have sunken to the level of accidental essenceless moments, . . . which are neither capable of constituting the character of heroes nor of being expressed and revered by them as their essence” (§ 741). The protagonist of the section on “the ethical order” in the “Spirit” chapter draws the line around himself. As the drama of the ethical action unfurls, the heroic perspective multiplies by two. This duplication allows each hero to project the theatricality that has infected pathos onto the other: to experience his own passion as genuine pathos and the other’s as mere *Leidenschaftlichkeit*.

In the remainder of this section, I will discuss how Hegel treats the collapse of the distinction (which is not only problematic but also rather precarious) between *Leidenschaft* as unethical passion, and *Pathos* as virtuous passion. It is the hero’s own action that will precipitate this collapse.

The ethical world knows a plurality of causes or ethical authorities that are personified by different gods. They usually exist peacefully side by side and can be honored as equally valid. Under certain and indeed necessarily occurring conditions, two of these values come to a head in a tragic collision that produces severe physical suffering:

There are different ethical authorities [*sittliche Mächte*]. In a state of calm, they form the circle of the gods and are in harmony with one
another. But it must also happen that they are offended and, thus, called to the scene to act \([\text{zur erscheinenden Tätigkeit aufgerufen}]\); individuals thus appear as the pathos, as the actualization of an ethical power. (Hegel 1998, 302, my translation)

The god appears on the scene as the pathos of an individual. The passionate character fully identifies with his pathos and thus lends reality to only one of the many ethical authorities. The other gods are offended by this exclusivity that defines pathos. The intransigence of pathos then precipitates the tragic collision: “Because . . . ethical life consists essentially in this immediate decisiveness \([\text{unmittelbaren Entschiedenheit}]\), and for that reason only one law is the essence for consciousness, . . . the ethical powers . . . acquire the significance of excluding each other and being opposed to each other” (§ 465). The many ethical authorities are thus reduced to two: “Because it has decided \([\text{entschieden}]\) for one of them, ethical consciousness is essentially character . . . It sees right only on its own side and sees only wrong on the other” (§ 465). Pathos, by Hegel’s definition, determines a person’s character and thus behaves like Ethos as defined by Aristotle’s Rhetoric in that it cannot be manipulated and does not change easily. This resolute character of passion spurs tragedies.

Clearly, the passionate acts that constitute the tragic world of ethics intertwine activity and passivity. The hero suffers his agency. He lives in the service of a higher ethical authority, god, or spirit. He receives his high standing from the fact that he personifies this ethical authority, but he also gives his life, his full existence as an individual, to this one cause. In this sense, his passion for the cause spells suffering.

The existence of the pure concept . . . is an individual which spirit elects to be the vessel for its sorrow. Spirit exists in this individual as his universal and as his power, from which he suffers violence—as his pathos, to which he has surrendered himself, so that his self-consciousness loses its freedom. (§ 704, trans. modified)

The cause drives the individual to action and determines his character. It moves the individual at his core, and yet it enters from the outside:

[The \(\text{pāthe}\) are the agents’ interests, their driving forces. On the one hand, they determine the subjectivity of man; on the other, they are independent determinations existing in and for themselves. As far as they belong to the human being, and are man’s genuine character, and drive him, the conflict arises that the same determinations can be represented as self-sufficient individualities over and against man [for
example as gods], and thus collide with human freedom. (Hegel 1998, 98–99, my translation)

Against common assumption—including the hero’s self-image—Hegel shows the heroic subject to be not fully autonomous, but heteronomous to the extent that the law that rules his character is imagined to have an independent existence in the form of a particular god: “Man in passion is in a pathos, a god has overpowered him, he is not a free subject anymore, he is beside himself [außer sich]” (Hegel 1998, 103, my translation).

In the pathos model of emotionality, inside and outside overlap to the extent that gods and heroes mutually penetrate and actualize one another. The mortals, with their actions, turn divine ideality into concrete external reality. Meanwhile, the gods are the personifications of páthe; the gods are men’s emotionality in exterior form: “The outward appearance must at the same time show something of man’s inwardness. . . . Since the gods are in the heart and soul, even if they exist to a certain extent outside. In Homer, this constantly moves to and fro [geht dies stets herüber und hinüber]” (Hegel 1998, 99–100, my translation).

Pathos, as Hegel understands it, is always interior and exterior at the same time. Structurally, pathos trembles between inside and outside; it oscillates between the literal and the figurative, the staged and the genuine. This flutter blurs the difference between the opposites; each side briefly but repeatedly appears as the other. The inside appears as the outside; the genuine as staged; the figurative as literal. This is to say that pathos renders the passionate character ontologically ecstatic. In an almost literal sense, the passionate is beside himself with passion. With this account of the ek-stasy of passion, Hegel offers a critique of interiority. He shows that it is more productive to understand emotion as pathos than as feeling locked into the interiority of the heart.12

This same ecstasy of passion—the flutter between inside and outside, between activity and suffering, or between the genuine and the staged—suggests another interpretation of pathos—one that attends to its lightheartedness. Naturalizing pathos in his discussion of Greek ethical life as the first—that is to say, the most natural—shape of spirit, Hegel explicitly excludes from the context of tragedy the interpretation of pathos as theatrical and lighthearted. Nevertheless, by superimposing aesthetic and existential concerns in this discussion, he implicitly draws attention to the problems of a naturalizing account of pathos. I think that the problem with the pathos model of emotion is that it feeds on a misguided desire for authenticity and drama. By drama, I mean not theatricality but emotional and existential weight.13 Driven by his
desire for real drama, the passionate character ignores that pathos itself trembles—lest this flutter introduce an air of self-irony. Instead, he reinforces the impression of complete inner coherence, which, as we have seen, leads to intransigence and thus to tragedy. The passionate character insists that “there is neither arbitrary choice nor is there struggle or indecision. . . . Instead, in its eyes, the ethical essentiality is the immediate, the unwavering, what is free of contradiction” (§ 464). Dramatic pathos creates tragedy and tragedy generates dramatic pathos.

So far, we have established that Hegel considers the pathos model more useful than the sensibility model of emotion (with its trope of the feeling heart). At this point, we will turn to the problems—indeed the tragic pitfalls—that the intransigence of pathos poses. Hegel shows that the totalizing gesture of pathos is based on ignorance or, rather, on disavowal. “Now, because . . . ethical life consists essentially in this immediate decisiveness, and for that reason only one law is the essence for consciousness, . . . thereby arises in consciousness the opposition between the known and the not known” (§ 465–66). If he were aware of his trembling, the dramatic character might be able to suspend (aufheben) his resolve (Entschiedenheit) and see that there are gods on the other side as well. Such suspension would open a space for lightheartedness in the midst of pathos. But Hegel presents awareness of the constitutive trembling of pathos, of its movement “to and fro,” as a purely aesthetic concern (Hegel 1998, 100). He discusses the phenomenon in his lectures on the philosophy of art as well as in the section on “Religion in the Form of Art” of the Phenomenology, but not in the section on the “Ethical Order”—as if such flutter had no room in the practical world of ethical decisions. Apparently, the person passionately caught up in the action cannot or should not be aware of his trembling between the literal and the figural. The effects are tragic, we know. The dramatic character doesn’t realize that the position of his antagonist is as justified, as reasonable, and as ethical as his own: “He takes his purpose from his character and knows it as the ethical essentiality; however, by virtue of the determi- nateness of his character, he knows merely the one power of substance, and, for him, the other power is concealed” (§ 737). He doesn’t see that the other also acts out of passion for a good cause.

Only after the fact, after his pathos has driven him to act, will the dramatic character experience his agency as a suffering, and will he have to acknowledge that the other’s position was always as valid as his own:

The accomplished deed turns the point of view of ethical consciousness topsy-turvy. What the accomplishment itself articulates is that the ethical must be actual, for the actuality of the purpose is the purpose of acting.
Acting directly articulates the unity of actuality and substance. It says that actuality is not accidental to essence, but rather that, in league with essence, actuality is not granted to anything that is not a true right. On account of this actuality and on account of its deed, ethical consciousness must recognize its opposite as its own. It must acknowledge its guilt:

*Because we suffer, we acknowledge that we have erred.* [Weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, daß wir gefehlt.] (§ 469, trans. modified)

By acting upon his beliefs, the passionate character shows that external, tangible reality is important to him. He is not satisfied with knowing what is right; he needs to see it realized. He feels justified in altering the given reality in the service of his pathos, and his ability to do so only proves to him the truth and righteousness of his position. Yet, because his antagonist was also able to alter the given and to establish the reality of his pathos and law through action, the other’s action must have ethical validity as well. Because the passionate character believes that “actuality is not accidental to essence,” and that it “is not granted to anything that is not a true right,” he will have to acknowledge his adversary’s act as righteous. We can see more clearly now what I touched upon earlier when I introduced the flutter of pathos, namely how the act alienates the passionate character to a certain extent from his position. Hegel insists that this shift appears only in retrospect. It first requires that the passionate character act authentically, that is, that he fully identify with the knowledge of what is to be done. And yet “action itself is this inversion [Verkehrung] of what was known into its contrary, into what is” (§ 738). The act that fully expresses the agent’s commitment also shows that the agent didn’t fully understand what his commitment truly was. Hegel explicitly values the fact that pathos calls to action and that action turns the character inside out. What he less explicitly thematizes in the phenomenological account is that such an “inversion” (or rather: “eversion”) introduces an incongruity into the character (between the self before the act and the self after the act) that renders him ek-static. We will see in section 3 of this chapter (“Theatrical Lightheartedness”) that this ecstasy of pathos importantly structures the Phenomenology’s mode of presentation. What emerges for our context here, in this section on the dramatic account of pathos, is that the tragic character, because he comes “outside of himself” in his passage to the act, is thus forced to “acknowledge” the relevance of alterity.

The suffering of the tragic hero is his physical experience of the other’s reality. Since the tragic hero’s insight into the other’s relevance is born of suffering, his mode of understanding here is not one of mas-
tery, but one of acknowledgment (*Anerkennung*): “Because we suffer we acknowledge [*anerkennen*] that we erred.”¹⁹ At first, the dramatic character considers all other positions as unjustified, unethical, unreasonable, and emotional without substance. “Since it sees right only on its own side and sees only wrong on the other, . . . consciousness . . . beholds in the other side [either] the violence of human caprice [*menschliche zufällige Gewalttätigkeit*] . . . [or] the obstinacy . . . of inward being-for-itself [*Eigensinn des innerlichen Fürsichseins*]” (§ 465, trans. modified). Whatever the other party says or does the passionate hero deems it as not driven by *Pathos*—since *Pathos* is inherently righteous—but as mere *Leidenschaft* or emotionality without substance. The other is seen as acting out of a temper (*menschliche zufällige Gewalttätigkeit*) or out of narcissistic oversensitivity (*Eigensinn des innerlichen Fürsichseins*), but not out of passion for a just cause. After his passage to the act, the dramatic character is forced not only to recognize the relevance, justification, and righteousness of the other’s passion, but also to acknowledge the subjectivity and arbitrary bias of his own pathos: “The right of the ethical, namely, that actuality is nothing in itself in opposition to the absolute law, learns [*erfährt*] from experience that its knowledge is one-sided, that its law is only a law of its character, and that it has grasped merely the one power of substance” (§ 738). What he took to be universal law turns out to be more like a personal passion: his law is only the law of his own character. What is more, his conviction that the given “is in itself nothing” and that reality should be actively transformed according to the laws of ethics doesn’t allow him to simply accept his character as a natural given. He has to acknowledge that he made a choice among a multiplicity of valid causes and that this choice was, in the final analysis, arbitrary.

In the section on the “Ethical Order,” Hegel reduces the multiplicity of possible *páthe* (evidenced in the multiplicity of gods) to two: a female and a male. This reduction—which is an effect of the tragic collision—lends an air of necessity to these specific alignments of gender and pathos (woman’s pathos: the family, man’s pathos: the polis). In my view, Hegel’s discussion of ethical tragedy offers a critique of naturalized gender and gendered pathos. He shows that the passionate character, who takes the genderedness of his pathos to be natural, is actually mistaken in treating his pathos as a given, rather than as a subjective construction that can be constructed otherwise.

Here we see that the distinction between merely subjective *Leidenschaftlichkeit* and substantial *Pathos* breaks down. The terminological difference does not index a difference in the phenomenon, but a difference in perspective. That is to say, the emotional phenomenon we call *Leiden-
schaft is not inherently evil or irrational and the emotional phenomenon we call Pathos is not inherently good or rational, but the terms we use betray our attitudes toward emotion:

These [universal powers], when they are in men, and are active in them, they are what the ancients called pathos. Our “passion” [Leidenschaft] isn’t exactly the right term for this; “passion” carries the connotation of something that should be subjugated, something base. . . . Pathos is the power in general, insofar as it moves the human heart and soul, and it should be considered an aspect of the rational and free will. (Hegel 2005, 96, my translation)

Pathos is used to express the rational and righteous quality of passions, whereas Leidenschaft is used to reject passions as immoral and irrational. Love, for example, can be regarded both as a danger to virtuous life and would then be called a Leidenschaft, or as a force that compels one to virtuous action, that is to say, a Pathos.

The hero’s passage to the act reveals that righteous pathos and arbitrary temper or sensitivity always overlap. Whenever a person acts emotionally, one can safely assume—without risking life and limb in a tragic crisis—that there is some substance behind it. But we also have good reason to be skeptical about any show of pathos that inflates a personal issue into a “just cause.” Pathos thus loses its nimbus of righteousness, while temper and sensitivity can be recognized as integral to pathos. That is to say, temper and sensitivity no longer need to be projected to the side of the other, but can be acknowledged—in the self and in the other—as displaying the overlap of agency and suffering that constitutes passion.

Tragic Recurrence

With this lesson learned, the world of drama and of tragic pathos has seen its day. Hegel pronounces the death of the gods, thus figuring the end of tragic pathos. Pathos was defined over and against Leidenschaft (passion) as rational, ethical, universal, and firm. Now that it has become obvious that the dramatic character trembles between the pretense of resolute greatness and the reality of unpredictable suffering, tragic pathos is effectively dead. At least it has no future as a life form of spirit on its journey toward self-awareness, that is to say, as a subject of the Phenomenology.
And yet, as usually in the *Phenomenology*, the subject undergoing the experience does not learn the lesson. The same kind of tragedy will therefore repeat itself in different figurations. Spirit will continue to produce figures who are completely certain that truth is on their side, and who are utterly assured of their own righteousness. Let me first explain why the protagonist doesn’t embrace the theatricality of pathos, before I briefly discuss how dramatic pathos repeatedly resurfaces in the *Phenomenology* and thus can be said to structure the phenomenological text. In the next section, we will then discuss the importance of theatrical or lighthearted pathos for the structure of the *Phenomenology*.

Tragedy teaches the spectator and the self-reflective agent that there are just and justified norms other than the one he subscribes to. Rather than a knowledge that is power, or a knowledge in the mode of mastery, tragedy produces a humble kind of knowing that is best described as acknowledging (*Anerkennen*). The other person, whose actions seemed so irrational and unjustified, indeed acted according to his own pathos, that is, to a different, but equally justified, ethical commitment. This experience relativizes pathos. It retroactively introduces negativity—the question mark of self-reflection—into the full and completely positive identification of the passionate individual with his cause.

But—and this is an important qualification—it does so not for the hero. Pathos cannot properly be described as a trope of transport since, far from effecting a transformation, it quite literally comes to a dead end. The tragic hero suffers without learning from his mistakes. He disavows his trembling and the theatricality of pathos because he defines himself as absorbed by pathos and intransigent in his complete identification with it. Therefore his suffering takes the form of complete annihilation: the substance “is a pathos which is at the same time his character. Ethical individuality is immediately and in itself at one with its universal; it has existence only within it and is incapable of surviving the downfall [*Untergang*] that this ethical power suffers at the hands of its opposite” (§ 470). For the dramatic character, to acknowledge the other’s reality is to have his own reality destroyed. If every fiber of my being is seized by a particular pathos, then there is no fiber left to recognize the other’s pathos and to integrate the insight. This is the problem with the desire for authenticity. Tragic heroes do not cultivate the elastic self-negativity that, according to Hegel, constitutes subjectivity. Their fate is that “they do not discern themselves [in the negative power] but rather . . . sink and vanish” in it (§ 742). What is more, the hero would rather kill himself than acknowledge that the temper or oversensitivity that he projected onto the other is actually also his own; he would rather kill himself than
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recognize the other within him and thereby acknowledge his constitutive *ekstasis*. The heroic passage to the act takes the self-alienating or ek-static structure of action to the suicidal extreme.24

With his suicide the tragic hero restores the order he disturbed. The reconciliation of the conflict between the two ethical authorities thus remains, as Pinkard points out, a quasi-natural one: Greek justice follows a homeostatic principle of fighting any disturbance by reestablishing the initial calm.25 Pinkard thus agrees that the shape of spirit that naturalizes pathos learns no lesson—crises will naturally reoccur just as they will naturally be balanced out. Resolution takes place in the mode of forgetting rather than in the mode of acknowledging:

The reconciliation of the opposition with itself is the *Lethe* of the underworld in death—or the *Lethe* of the upper world in the form of absolution [*Freisprechung*]. . . . Both are forgetfulness, the disappearance of actuality and of the activities on the part of the powers of substance, of their individualities and . . . of the abstract thought of good and evil. (§740, trans. modified)

With this vanishing act, Hegel’s text transitions to a new shape of religious worldview, one that doesn’t abstractly oppose good to evil. But the passionate character has learned no lesson. Out of the oblivion to his passage to the act will rise a new dramatic character and a new tragedy like Phoenix from the ashes.

Hegel conceives of the tragic conflict as a collision between individuals, not as a rift within one subject. The interpretation of emotion as natural, which characterizes the pathos model, doesn’t allow for difference within; it only knows difference between (and it casts this difference as one between righteous *Pathos* and impulsive *Leidenschaft*). This means that despite all its advantages, namely its exteriority and its integration of emotionality and rationality, the pathos model—in its naturalizing or dramatizing version—lacks what Hegelian philosophy finds most important: the negativity of the subject. For Hegel, the foremost characteristic of the subject is its power to negate itself and to endure or survive this negation. We will see in the next section that the theatrical account of pathos integrates negativity, but here it is important to note that the dramatic subject doesn’t know that power. The hero is so identified with his pathos that he either literally dies or—if he indeed manages to acknowledge the other’s passion—becomes unheroic and thus irrelevant. Feeding on the individual’s misguided notion of authenticity and on the world’s tendency to forget inconsistencies, tragic drama will therefore reemerge in endless repetition.
This brings us to the question of how naturalized pathos structures the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel’s dialectic is often read as an economy of drama: conflicts are brought to a head in order to provoke a solution; to the parties involved in the conflict, the “solution” inevitably comes in the form of death, perishing (*Zugrundegehen*), or utter oblivion; after that, it is a new day and a new shape of consciousness presents itself.\(^{26}\) As we have seen, this economy of drama—steeped in the Hegelian understanding of tragic pathos—creates suffering without learning.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* sets as its goal to generate spirit’s self-awareness. Telling the story of a representative of spirit—so-called natural consciousness—and of its successive reincarnations, the book models the path to achieving this goal. I argue that the text superimposes three different literary modes: a narrative of *Bildung*, theatrical enactments of the various life forms of spirit, and the lyric poetry of the speculative proposition that syncopates the trembling rhythm of this text. In this chapter, I focus on theatrical enactment. Spirit is the subject, the object and the observer of the various acts and actions that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents; it is the author, the actor, and the spectator of its own drama. In its subject function, spirit is at times compared with God.\(^{27}\) In its object function, it takes the stage as “natural consciousness.” The observer role is played by us, the readers of the *Phenomenology*, in conjunction with Hegel, the author of the *Phenomenology*. Through us—who are struggling to comprehend the text—spirit gains an awareness of itself.\(^{28}\) In all three instances, spirit suffers its agency and therefore—because it suffers—is supposed to acknowledge that it erred. Such an acknowledgment would be one step further on the path toward self-awareness. But to what extent does this acknowledgment really happen? To what extent are lessons learned and is *Bildung* accomplished?

Consciousness’s *Bildung* consists in a series of painful experiences, in the repeated breaking of consciousness’s certainty and existence. It can be more properly described as a *Brechung* than as a *Bildung*, as the breaking and the refraction, rather than as the formation, of an identity.\(^{29}\) Each chapter and each dialectic shows the same pattern, namely, that consciousness’s initial axiom is untenable. Consciousness is forced to acknowledge that it erred. It has a chance to gain this insight only by fully identifying with its epistemological core assumption and acting accordingly. Each figure of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is a dramatic character who realizes its (epistemological) pathos. Its mode of learning and knowing would be that of experience and humble acknowledgment (of actively suffering each and every insight)—if only consciousness were able to learn. Instead, each figure of consciousness—like the tragic hero—“dies” from its self-contradictions. A new figure emerges—
another character in the drama of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—who in turn will, after having exposed its pathos to the ironic negativity of reality, nevertheless cling to this pathos and thus become irrelevant. This scenario of experience without benefit is repeated with each chapter of the book.³⁰

You might wonder: how does this fit with our image of Hegel? Well, it doesn’t, because our image of Hegel is largely skewed by our desire for dramatic pathos. You will answer: it is the phenomenologist who learns from consciousness’s experience; the author and the reader are able to integrate the insights that kill the protagonists. To a certain extent, that is true; yet Hegel warns emphatically of the danger of staying above the action, of avoiding the passage to the act in order to preserve intellectual superiority and control. I am happy to concede that most of Hegel’s lectures evince the detrimental effects of dialectical mastery, of knowing in advance where the dialectical three-step will lead.³¹ But in the *Phenomenology*, things are still fresh, and Hegel still struggles with confusion. Precisely because it acts out spirit’s *Bildung*, the *Phenomenology* has an air of unpredictability to it. It takes place here and now while I read it; we don’t know what is going to happen because the next step is contingent upon the current one. This event character of the *Phenomenology* depends on the reader’s willingness to abandon herself to the action and suspend disbelief, as it were. We are called to identify with the protagonist and to let ourselves be absorbed by the action. As readers, we are asked to make “the effort to give up this freedom, and, instead of being the arbitrary principle moving the content, . . . to immerse this freedom into the content [*diese Freiheit in ihn zu versenken*]” (§ 58, trans. modified). Hegel’s textual practice is designed to draw the reader in.³² In order to avoid mere *Erbaulichkeit* (edification, playing it safe), the *Phenomenology* bets on identification and absorption. It thereby risks that the reader will get lost in the pathos of the protagonist. Indeed, its readers often consider the position of a particular figure of consciousness to be the author’s position; this means that Hegel’s strategy “worked,” that these readers have actually submerged their freedom in the content to the point that they are unable to tell play from philosophy. They have identified with the epistemological pathos of one figure of consciousness—only to “die” with it at the end of the chapter or to save themselves by repudiating it as “false” and to throw in their lot with another figure.³⁵ Encouraged by Hegel’s textual practice, these are mistaken readings: passages to the readerly act, if you will, without guarantee that the reader will learn from the experience.

Hegel even forces God—or spirit as the self-revealing agent of the phenomenological process—into passionate earnestness.³⁴ “The life of
God and divine cognition might thus be articulated as a game love plays with itself, this Idea will be downgraded into edification [Erbaulichkeit], even into triteness, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labor of the negative (§ 19). For Hegel, it doesn’t make sense to conceive of spirit as a transcendent being that is all-powerful. Instead, he locates spirit in the political institutions, the laws, the arts, the philosophical systems, the religious and cultural practices, and the minds (to the extent that they are socially constructed) of the people of this world. In such this-worldly form spirit suffers from alienation. Yet Hegel insists that self-awareness, or being-in-and-for-itself—cannot be gained without being serious about self-abandonment:

*In itself* that life is indeed an unalloyed parity and unity with itself, since in such a life there is nothing serious in otherness and alienation nor in overcoming this alienation. However, this *in-itself* is abstract universality, in which . . . its nature, which is *to be for itself* . . . [is] left out of view. (§ 19)

Hegel rejects the idea of a transcendent spirit that rests assured of itself and engages in reality only for play, secure in the knowledge of a positive outcome. He thus addresses the fear of “divine comedy” that Žižek reformulates in “The Act and Its Vicissitudes”:

When [Christ] was dying on the cross, did he know about his Resurrection-to-come? If yes, it was all a game, the supreme divine comedy, since Christ knew his suffering was just a spectacle with a guaranteed good outcome—in short, Christ was FAKING despair in his “Father, why did you forsake me?” (Žižek 2005)

In response to this anxiety, Hegel insists on earnest pathos and fulminates against irony. Yet, if we buy into his repudiation of irony, the question arises: how is spirit able to attain self-awareness if it identifies completely with its pathos of self-revelation and is dead serious about abandoning itself to the alienating forces of the real? According to Hegel’s analysis of dramatic pathos, it simply wouldn’t be able to gain self-knowledge: the passion of spirit will impede rather than enable it to learn from experience.

I hope to have shown that while it is very possible—even quite attractive—to read the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as organized by an economy of drama, such a reading, by itself, prevents the *Phenomenology* from reaching its goal. It makes the protagonist/s, the reader/s, and the author/s suffer without offering an epistemic gain in return. We will now turn to
an alternative reading, which—Hegel’s rage against irony notwithstanding—attends to the text’s ironic distance from its content, and to the theatricality of its composition.

Theatrical Lightheartedness

While pathos as a thematic life form of spirit becomes irrelevant and the passionate character dies, the mode of knowledge produced by the pathos model of emotionality will remain central for Hegel’s philosophy. With his translation of Antigone’s line, *weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, daß wir gefehlt* (because we suffer we acknowledge that we erred), Hegel offers an epiphonema, a summarizing pithy sentence, for the epistemological pathos of experience that structures the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Experience is, then, a second-degree pathos (a pathos that governs the syntax of the *Phenomenology* rather than determining a particular figure in the *Phenomenology*). Like first-degree pathos, one can understand experience in two different ways—dramatically or theatrically. A naturalizing version of the pathos of experience produces an eternal recurrence of drama, a continuous revival of emotionally intense, passionate figures, and a *Handlung* or story line of suffering without learning. Since a series of experiences without accumulating experience does not conform to the prevalent image of Hegel, this scheme is usually complemented by the logic of *Aufhebung* in such a way that this repetition of experience can be read as progress. I take issue with both components of traditional Hegel interpretations—the dramatic notion of experience and the idea that *Aufhebung* purchases progress—and will argue instead that the logic of *Aufhebung* works to dislocate emotionality from itself and to produce not drama, but lightheartedness.

We will now explore what exactly the theatrical account of pathos entails. I will argue that registering the theatricality of pathos doesn’t curtail but rather enables the existential feel of pathos. Only he who “watches himself act” (*sich selbst spielen sieht*) can feel genuine passion and understand or negate pathos without himself being annihilated by this procedure (§ 747, trans. modified). By contrast, we have seen that naturalized pathos lacks the negativity that Hegel describes as constitutive of subjectivity—the ability to survive its own self-negation. Read in the spirit of the self-reflective version of the pathos of experience, the *Phenomenology* offers an education in acknowledging theatricality and in developing the lighthearted humility necessary for the mode of knowledge that is “acknowledging.” Many have claimed that Hegel’s explora-
tion of tragedy inspires his philosophy in a fundamental way. They see
in the tragic conflict and its resolution a model for Hegelian dialectics.36
In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that Hegel’s analysis of the
theatricality of tragic pathos even more importantly than his theory of
tragic conflict informs his composition of the Phenomenology and his phi-
losophy in general.

The production of dramatic conflicts, the constant need to bring
differences to a head and to sharpen them into a collision, already re-
veals the theatricality inherent in the dramatic model of dialectics.
Drama needs to be produced; thus, it is to a certain extent staged. The
second part of Hegel’s section on “The Ethical Order” is titled “Die sitt-
lliche Handlung” (“The Ethical Act”). The choice of the word Handlung
is striking in that it means “deed” but also “plot” and thus explicitly refers
the deed to the realm of fiction.37 From the very beginning, starting with
the title, and throughout his analysis of the ethical order, Hegel plays the
double register of ethics and theatrics.

Hegel’s language shifts back and forth between real life and theater
to make a fundamental argument about the theatricality of life. For ex-
ample, with a subtle reference to acting—“self-consciousness has not yet
come on the scene [ist noch nicht aufgetreten] . . . as yet, no deed has been
committed”—he suggests that the individual has to produce his pathos
theatrically—that is, as a deed that is performed in front of spectators—
in order to be able to reach an awareness not only of what he has done,
but of what his pathos (his motivation and intention) really was (§ 463,
trans. modified). The agent has no epistemic access to his pathos as a
“given,” and self-consciousness can only be attained after the fact, that is
to say, after having appeared on stage.

Discussing Hegel’s engagements of tragic, comic, and confessional
literature in the Phenomenology, Speight has offered a strong and con-
vincing argument for the retrospectivity and theatricality of agency. Tak-
ing Hegel’s reading of Antigone as exemplary for an account of agency
in general, he observes that “the desire or intention [the proper term
for the tragic context would be “pathos”] relevant for [Antigone’s] un-
derstanding [of] her deed is not to be found in prior deliberation, but
is rather embodied in the deed itself and read off of it retrospectively”
(Speight 2001, 59). Since such a self-understanding must be refracted
through the eyes of the spectators, it drives home the “socially mediated
or ‘theatrical’ character” of pathos (Speight 2001, 70). Speight’s formu-
lation “read off” bespeaks his sense that the deed doubles as a plot or
Handlung that demands to be read like a text. After what has emerged in
the first section of this chapter, we need to add to Speight’s account of
retrospectivity that Hegel proposes not only that we come to recognize
the specifics of our motivating pathos after the fact, but that we must in the same breath acknowledge the ruin of *Pathos* proper in its overlap with *Leidenschaft*. The hypocrisy (of inflating a personal cause into a universal one) that the tragic hero had projected onto the other, whom he therefore accused of mere show and scene-making, in fact characterizes the tragic hero himself. Hegel contends that passionate individuals are driven to show their character and to act out their beliefs. He demonstrates that their deeds alienate them from their pathos when their activity turns into suffering. Because of its inherent link to agency and because of the overlap of ethical pathos and narcissistic passion (temper and oversensitivity), even this suffering has something of an act to it. In the final analysis, Hegel thus argues that pathos compels the person to make a scene.

Uneasy with theatricality’s potential for pretense and hypocrisy, while nevertheless embracing the social mediation that theatricality affords, Speight draws on one of Pinkard’s stipulations for free agency—that one needs to identify with one’s action as one’s own—to argue that theatricality is sublated in the forgiveness plot at the end of the spirit chapter. Whether or not this argument is convincing, I see no need to sublate the threatening dimension of theatricality, especially because the theater is itself the paradigmatic scene of *Aufhebung*. On stage, action is make-belief and genuine reality at the same time: reality is sublated in make-belief and illusion is sublated in the physical reality of the actors’ bodies. Let us therefore further examine the theatricality of pathos that Hegel presents.

As passionately as the heroic individuals identify with their pathos, their cause also exceeds them (it is universal—they are individual, it is divine—they are mortal). It exists before and beyond them: the dramatic characters enact a script—be it written or unwritten. The hero plays a role in the double sense of the phrase. On the one hand, he draws courage from the half-avowed fact that he can rely on a safety net of customs and rules while acting out his role within a canonical plot: “self-consciousness’s action rests on a secure trust [Vertrauen] in the whole” (§ 467). On the other hand, the tragic hero differs from the epic one in that he “steps forth” to deliver his lines himself. He is “the artist himself” and exposes himself in front of an audience. This standing out and standing apart of the tragic hero is another sense of the ek-stasy of pathos that has emerged earlier. It is time now to examine more closely the trembling between inside and outside, between the literal or existential and the figural or theatrical that I have briefly touched on earlier. Doing so, we will get a better sense of the lighthearted version of pathos.

When the passionate character steps forth and feels himself stand
out, he—if perhaps only imperceptibly—begins to tremble. He fears that which drives him: he fears his pathos. The sense that he, as an individual, exposes himself to bear the consequences of acting out his pathos while his god remains whole and his cause remains holy (at least in his eyes) positions him as slightly apart from his pathos: “That of which human beings can truly be afraid is an ethical power, the power of their own bosom. This power is eternal and unalterable...; it stands above the individual, and in comparison with it the individual vanishes” (Hegel 2005, 250, my translation). This slight but fearful distance from one’s own pathos might turn into self-pity or into respect—not only for one’s pathos, but for oneself as driven by this pathos. In any case, the self-difference that trembling opens calls forth an affective embrace of or a sympathy for one’s ek-stasy: “Compassion or sympathy can have two objects: sympathy with distress, ... with the negative. ... The other one is sympathy with the affirmative force in the subject. This affirmative is the brave, ethical, and truthful in individuals; this kind of sympathy also needs to exist, the fear of this ethical power” (ibid., my translation). Apart from lifting Aristotle’s very physical páthe phobos and eleos on the high horse of the moral sublime, Hegel suggests here that there exists a difference within the dramatic character—even an, if ever so slight, dislocation within the structure of pathos itself. As if watching himself act, man pities himself and fears himself as a passionate character. Such sympathy or awe for the self implies the doubling of the emotional subject into one who is overcome by pathos and immersed in the action on the one hand, and one who has reservations about his pathos or embraces and reinforces it on the other. This duplicity introduces an air of pretense into the structure of pathos. When we foreground the theatricality of pathos, we find that the resoluteness and intransigence that defines dramatic pathos becomes unsettled by the interference of such second-degree emotions as self-pity and self-respect. This interference creates emotional plasticity.

Pathos is both reinforced and ruined by the conflicting second-degree emotions layered on top, as it were. If we apply this insight into the theatricality of pathos to the textual pathos that structures the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we can see that the ecstasy I have earlier defined as the ontological condition of “being beside oneself” is better described as a hovering above oneself. It turns out, then, that the logic of Aufhebung has a spatial more than a temporal bent. The subject of the *Phenomenology* is moved and negated by passion, and at the same time it hovers above the scene of its negation. This kind of Aufhebung creates the undramatic and lighthearted pathos of the text. The subject perishes in its passionate passage to the act and, at the same time, it persists and integrates the lesson of the experience, which, in turn, relativizes the passion. To
think *Aufhebung* spatially means to consider negation and preservation as simultaneous movements, and to not distribute them onto different figures who relieve one another in time (in the sense that one figure of consciousness disappears in order for the next more integrative figure to emerge).  

As I mentioned earlier, the subject of the *Phenomenology* is divided within: spirit is the author, the actor, and the spectator of its own drama. The text contains numerous moments of parabasis, where the spectator is explicitly involved in the scene. The endings and beginnings of chapters are preferred times for parabasis. Here, the phenomenologist comes to the fore and uses the first-person plural to communicate something the protagonist does not understand. The spatial movement of parabasis differentiates between an actor in character who participates in the action and an actor who steps out of character to reflect on the situation. At the same time, the phenomenological “we” is also the “we” of spirit (of “the I that is we and the we that is I” [§ 177]). The first-person plural thus mediates between the divisions within spirit: a protagonist becomes phenomenologist and rises above the scene (or steps onto the proscenium) in order not only to communicate directly with the spectators (who share in the phenomenological “we”) but also to indeed become one of the spectators and reflect on the action. Such parabasis can be described as a self-reflection of spirit that is more immediate than the self-reflection via the actions of the protagonist only in the sense that the experience of the protagonist is precisely the material and the result of its self-reflection: protagonist and phenomenologist are only different versions of the same subject. The divisions are far from clean-cut.

The functioning of the *Phenomenology* depends on cross-identifications among its subjects, its objects, and its observers. The different aspects or moments (*Momente*) of spirit are both different from and identical with one another. Each refers to the others in an elastic web of differentiation yet cohesion. Spirit, who is this web, can die and survive at the same time, as can each one of its figurations or shapes of consciousness. Every protagonist and every phenomenologist has the ability to self-negate, that is to say, to die and survive at the same time. This is the negativity that so famously defines the subject in Hegel. This negativity is, in my view, fundamentally emotional because it is the ability to acknowledge and negotiate inner difference. Such emotionality is plastic and theatrical rather than linear and dramatic, because there is always a remainder of the subject in action that hovers above the scene and reflects it. At the same time, the subject is existentially enwrapped in the passionate act. Malabou’s term of “plasticity” helps to bring out the very real exposure and physical commitment that is part of theatrical
embodiment, when she points out that “while certainly in opposition to ‘rigid,’ ‘fixed’ and ‘ossified,’ [the adjective ‘plastic’] is not to be confused with ‘polymorphous.’ Things that are plastic preserve their shape” (Malabou 2004, 8f)—that is to say, they take shape and commit to a shape rather than hovering eternally aloof in a noncommittal version of irony. The genuineness of the Phenomenology’s theatrically emotional subject consists in the humility of abandoning itself to the alienating force of the real, rather than in the arrogance of dramatic pathos.

The lightheartedness of theatrical pathos permeates the Phenomenology. At each instant, the text combines the gravitas of pathos with the levity of irony. If the thematic discussions of pathos—in the section on the ethical order, and in the section on religion as a work of art—both end with tragedy turning into comedy, the book as a whole is suspended at the tipping point of tragedy into comedy or—since the suspension ruins linearity—of comedy into tragedy. Therefore, if I make a case here for the lightheartedness and theatricality of the Phenomenology’s pathos, I do not want to simply exchange pathos for irony, or tragedy for comedy. The Phenomenology’s emotional syntax is characterized by the oscillation between the two; I will describe it as a syntax of trembling back and forth, and as a syntax of bouncing up and down.45

We could say that the Phenomenology’s lightheartedness imitates the bouncy joyousness and serenity (Heiterkeit) of the Greek gods that Hegel—according to Hotho’s notes—described in his lecture on the philosophy of art: “The gods must remain eternally serene. . . . To pursue a particular aim with rigor and single-mindedness and to perish going to the bottom of it [darin zugrundegehen], this cannot happen to the gods” (Hegel 1998, 98, my translation). Even though the Greeks knew many gods and each one had therefore a finite character, their life was indeed infinite and divine suffering thus never took the form of natural death. As immortals, the gods do not take the pathos they personify all too seriously—they do rage or love in earnest, but they also rise above the action for a break: “They interfere here and there, but just as well they abandon their business and amble up [wandeln empor] to the Olympus” (ibid.). I read this Emporwandeln as a form of Aufhebung. Breaking with and taking a break from natural existence is the Greek gods’ mode of negativity or of self-reflection. Hegel indeed describes it as a form of irony, as “the irony that is spread over the Homeric gods” (ibid.). The Greek gods are swathed in an irony less abstract than the one Hegel in other contexts harshly critiques. Hegel usually attacks irony for its arrogance and lack of commitment, its tendency to dissolve into wit everything but the superiority of the self. Such self-aggrandizing is not part of divine irony. The Greek gods tremble. They personify the trembling of pathos when
they move back and forth between negating their Olympic existence to participate in finite life and withdrawing from human reality to the Olympus. They even die (as we have seen at the beginning of the last section). As tragic pathos, the Greek gods die, but, we will see now, they return in comic levity. Their irony covers both ethereal and earthly existence.

While the gods of the Homeric epics assume an ironic distance from their actions, the noble humans of the tragedies are left to suffer and perish. The tragic hero sticks to his dramatic pathos; he remains faithful to his god even when the god has abandoned him to take a break. Since the gods are figures for pathé, Hegel’s comment about the gods taking off in mid-fight, as it were, suggests that pathos is less unambivalently substantial than originally defined. As Aristophanes’ comedy suggests to Hegel, the gods “are clouds, a disappearing vapor” (§ 746). Divine passions control the atmosphere but, in this capacity, they are anything but firm. To us who are concerned with a theory of emotionality, Hegel here offers a most interesting account of emotion as not without self-negating irony. Tragedy ensues from the hero’s not understanding this reflexivity and lightheartedness of emotion and instead essentializing or naturalizing pathos, that is, considering his pathos an unchangeable given. The tragic hero is stubbornly attached to his pathos even when the feeling has dissipated and the god who moved him has dissolved into thin air. With the substance of passion gone, the firmness of character becomes a selfish vanity because it is stripped of content.

The tipping point, when virtuous pathos inevitably turns into self-serving pretense, is relentlessly exposed, mimicked, and mocked by the “eternal,” that is to say, the uncontainable and immortal or divine “irony” of the feminine (§ 474). Under the direction of “the feminine” (I propose to include women, comedians, and Hegelian phenomenologists in this category), the (male) youth gives performances in which “the posturing of the universal essentiality is betrayed” (§ 744). On the stage staffed by womankind and youth, the gods appear naked (“those essentialities still have . . . merely the nakedness [Nacktheit] of their immediate existence,” § 746) and the privileged members of the polis make fools of themselves:

That demos, the universal social sphere, which knows itself to be master and regent as well as being the understanding and insight which are to be respected . . . exhibits the laughable contrast between its own opinion of itself and its immediate existence, between its necessity and contingency, its universality and its ordinariness [Gemeinheit]. (§ 745, trans. modified)
By embracing the lightheartedness of emotion, “the feminine” threatens the ethical order with “the consciousness of the dialectic which these pathetic maxims and laws have in themselves and . . . thereby with the consciousness of the disappearance of the absolute validity in which they had previously appeared” (§ 746). What the dramatic character tried to repress, the secret that he labored to keep (from himself)—to the point that he would rather die than watch his claim to unconditional validity dissolve—is revealed.

The theater of womankind and youth features self-ironic subjects who come to know and divulge their secrets. The self-ironic subjects act and watch themselves act passionately. They experience and learn from their experiences (i.e., negate their experience); they can do both because they are agent, actor, and spectator at the same time, in an elastic identity of differences:

The self, which comes on the scene here in its significance of being actual, plays with the mask which it once puts on in order to be its “persona.”—However, it just as quickly makes itself come out from this illusion and once again come forward in its own nakedness and ordinariness, which it shows not to be distinct from the literal self [eigentlichen Selbst], from the actor, nor from the spectator. (§ 744, trans. modified)

In parabases and asides to itself, the self-ironically passionate subject reveals its secret lightheartedness by slipping in unsettling ways between “significance” and “ordinariness.” It shifts from putting on the mask of the protagonist to putting on the mask of the actor to putting on the mask of the spectator. Meanwhile all of the identities are acting as genuine or “literal” selves. And so tragedy turns into comedy:

The pure thoughts of the beautiful and the good thus give a comic spectacle: emancipated from opinion [Meinung]—which provides their determinateness as content and also provides their absolute determinateness in that consciousness resolutely clings to this content [i.e., the intransigence of pathos]—they become empty, and precisely as a result, turn into a game played by the opinion and the caprice of contingent individuality. (§ 476, trans. modified)

The negation of opinion (Meinung), which always carries the overtone of the first-person possessive pronoun mein in Hegel, allows the subjective to bounce back and play with the objective. This circularity of
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self-negativity gives grief to some; others take pleasure in it. The ethical order used to provide security: the dramatic character could trust in the righteousness of his cause. But his own action has broken the promise; it has refracted the ethical order in the ironic lightheartedness of self-negating emotion, and has thrown the crestfallen hero, who used to occupy the center of the ethical world, into an uneasy eccentricity: “Since its trust is therefore broken, and since the substance of the people is therefore shattered [in sich geknickt], spirit, which was the mediating term . . . henceforth now stands out as the extreme [in das Extrem herausgetreten]” (§ 701). This is the ecstasy of “spirit . . . which mourns over the loss of its world” (ibid.). Others enjoy the fact that the naturalized order is not set in stone: “Actual self-consciousness, . . . in employing what is natural for its adornment [Putz] . . . , shows itself to be the fate to which the secret is betrayed, namely the truth about the self-essentiality of nature” (§ 745, trans. modified). The secret is betrayed. The gods the heroes worshipped, the passions they considered natural are now taken as whimsical properties of the subject, rather than authorities that require subjection. “The subject is . . . elevated above that sort of [abstract] moment as it would be elevated above an individual property [the God as universal moment or the pathos as abstract substance], and, wearing this mask, the subject articulates [spricht aus] the irony of something that wants to be something on his own” (§ 744). With a light heart, womankind turns the gravity of moral pathos into frivolous ornaments and adornments (Putz and Schmuck): “The feminine—the polity’s eternal irony—changes the . . . universal purpose into a private purpose, transforms . . . universal activity into this determinate individual’s work, and . . . inverts . . . universal property into the family’s possession and ornament [Putz]” (§ 474).

This passage from the Spirit chapter has often been read as decrying womankind’s resentment and petty egotism: because they are weak, women have to erode all greatness.48 Apart from the fact that Hegel attributes a similarly strong resentment to older men (they engage in fraud and deception because they are “preoccupied [with] and anxiety-ridden [by] . . . the individual details of life”), it is fundamentally unclear that this should be the straight sense of the uncontainable irony at work here (§ 746).49 I therefore want to propose a different sense: the eternal irony, when it “transforms” and “inverts” pathos, actually compels pathos to “come forward in its own nakedness” (§ 744; 744). While dramatic pathos, in its naturalizing thrust, interpellates mortals into bearing the fate of the reversal of their acts, this irony turns the tables of fate on pathos. It reveals that pathos, which cloaks itself in the mantle of ethos (of a substantial cause with a claim to universality), has always also an aspect of private passion or Leidenschaft, of self-serving individuality to it. This irony means
that pathos “lets the mask [of gravity] drop” and that subjectivity floats with comic levity (§ 744):

The consummation of ethical life in free self-consciousness and the fate of the ethical world is therefore . . . the absolute lightheartedness [Leichtsinn] of ethical spirit which has dissolved within itself all the fixed distinctions of its stable existence and the social spheres of its organic structure, and, being perfectly sure of itself, has achieved a boundless joyfulness [schrankenlose Freudigkeit] and the freest enjoyment of itself [Genusse seiner selbst]. (§ 701, trans. modified)

This apparent victory of subjectivity has nothing in common with the idea of the supremacy of any one human subject, or of a group of human subjects (let’s say women) or even of the human subject, in general. What has emerged here is what I referred to in the introduction as the non-human subjectivity or impersonal subject status of emotionality. Pathos has become reflexive; it behaves like a self-relating, self-dividing, and self-negating entity and in that sense it acts as a subject. The tragicomedy of pathos might involve human beings, but, if so, then always in the plural, that is to say, always as inwardly divided and ontologically dependent on others. Human subjects or characters might come on the scene, play a part, show up for an act, but they are neither a sufficient nor even a necessary requirement for emotionality.

Subjects to Syntax

Impersonal emotion, emotion as self-reflective subject indifferent to the human subject, is to be found on the level of textual performance. With the second part of this book, we will move away from an analysis of the different models of emotionality that Hegel discusses (heartfelt feeling, dramatic pathos), which tie emotion to the human subject, and embark on the analysis of Hegel’s emotional textuality. It has emerged from our discussion of the theatricality of pathos that passionate individuals are indeed texts—self-differential entities—who as such, and only as such, can tremble and be emotional. In the next part of the book, we will move beyond the compulsion to attribute emotions to humans and instead explore the emotionality of texts. We will be concerned with the syntax of Hegel’s philosophical moves and with the emotional tropes that shape this syntax. I will describe these tropes as “transports” because they divide and connect the different moments and figures of Hegel’s text,
transporting spirit from one to the other by way of an emotional mode of registering and negotiating incongruity.

The composition of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* reflects Hegel’s critical analysis of dramatic pathos and it remedies the shortcomings of the dramatic model, namely its lack of ambivalence, irony, and reflexivity. The theory of tragedy has often been thought of as constituting the core of Hegel’s philosophy, because the tragic conflict and its resolution are seen as a model for Hegelian dialectics. I contend that his philosophy in general, and his composition of the *Phenomenology* in particular, are more deeply informed by his analysis of the theatricality of tragic pathos than by the drama of the tragic conflict. The theatrics of the *Phenomenology* builds ambivalence, irony, and self-reflection into the subject structure of emotionality. It does so by elastically dividing the subject of the *Phenomenology* (spirit) into a circle of protagonists and a virtual assemblage of phenomenologists, all of whom are singular and plural at the same time. Their connection is maintained and forged by the fact that they all serve as (emotionally and intellectually involved) spectators of one another: they all read one another, identify with one another, and, in doing so, figure one another.

At the end of this chapter I compared the structural pathos of the *Phenomenology* to the Greek gods moving up and down between the ether and the earth. Against the common reading of the Hegelian narrative as progressively elevating (*Aufhebung*) consciousness from one shape to the next and thus perfecting its education (*Bildung*), the text turns out to repeatedly negate (*aufheben*) the ethereal moment of spirit, bringing it back down to earth, and recurrently form (*bilden*), embody, and actualize spirit. Dramatic pathos—as we have discussed in the second section of this chapter—thwarts the teleology of education because its naturalizing mode of negation doesn’t allow for learning. But theatrical pathos—with its spatialized and virtualizing mode of *Aufhebung*—doesn’t do any better in serving such a presumed teleology. In this case, the development does not advance because linear time has been ruined, and because the trembling between ether and earth takes place within each formation of consciousness/spirit. Such movement in stasis or trembling within bends the series of shapes (*Gestalten*) of consciousness, which we usually imagine as organized into a progressive line, not back into the circle of internal teleology, but into the circle of the Greek gods, that is to say, a relatively loose group of figures. Each shape has its own epistemological pathos and plays the part of a particular god. In the moments of transition, though—from one pathos to another, one shape of consciousness to another, one truth paradigm to another—the relativity of pathos becomes particularly palpable. Here, in this in-between space, pathos is seen to be
as much private and fickle passion (*Leidenschaft*) as it is *ethos* or absolute firmness of character. Nietzsche has pointed out that this ambivalence of pathos can come into view only after the fact:

> While we are living each phase of our lives we rarely recognize its true pathos, but always see it as the only state that is now possible for us and reasonable and—to use some words and a distinction of the Greeks—thoroughly an *ethos* and not a *pathos*. (Nietzsche 2001, § 317)

With his theatrical composition of the *Phenomenology* and its elastically self-differentiated subject, Hegel anticipates the Nietzschean deflation of exalted values through genealogy. Above all, he contests the value of sober and unchanging, objective, and timeless truth.

Like Nietzsche, Hegel needs both: irony and sincerity, tragedy and comedy. While the experience of relativity generates lightheartedness, it also (re-)creates the danger that the subject may collapse into the complete unity of self-identity, that one may be absolutely at home in appearance, and that Spirit may lose its restlessness and find repose in well-being. Again, it is the structure of the text that safeguards against this collapse. The different personae of the *Phenomenology*’s plural subject trouble and undo, transport and shape one another. They serve as supplements and remainders of one another, so that no one shape, character, or moment is ever fully one with itself or ever completely eliminated.

Most interpretations of the *Phenomenology* see only one side of the supplemental relation between “natural consciousness” and “phenomenologist.” When one of the heroes of the *Phenomenology* perishes, received wisdom has it that Hegel meant for the trembling afterimage of its pathos to ascend to the memory of the phenomenologist. I find it rather impossible to decide who resides on the Olympus in this text: the phenomenologist or the protagonist. Who suffers his pathos dramatically and who has the serenity and lightheartedness not to get too attached? Does the cunningly ironic world spirit ascend to the heavens dropping shape after shape of consciousness into the pit of memory? Or does the protagonist blissfully amble from incarnation to incarnation only to leave the phenomenologist ruminating on each and every crisis? Any reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that wants to get a sense for the particular emotionality of this text needs to retain this fundamental ambivalence. The self-dividing and self-relating negativity of the *Phenomenology*’s textuality creates both earnest pathos and lightheartedness.

Our analysis of the theatricality of Hegel’s composition has brought into view the transport model of emotion that we will explore in further
detail in the second part of this book. A transport can be strong or slight, but it lifts one out of oneself. Because transports move one beyond oneself and render one ekstatic in a rather matter-of-fact way, they cannot be located inside the self as parts of an inner life. Transports thus differ from heartfelt feelings. They unsettle the distinction between inside and outside as much as that between within and between. Transports generate a subject that is transient and multiply divided. In contrast to dramatic pathos, the transport model shows that ambivalence, reflexivity, and irony are constitutive of emotion itself. Following Hutcheon, who wants us to see the affective dimension of irony, I am foregrounding the ironic dimension of emotionality.52 In keeping with her argument against an irony that cynically evades all affective engagement, I don’t want irony to be confused with evasiveness and lack of commitment. Instead, I insist on taking seriously irony’s ambivalence, that is, the fact that despite all her self-negations the ironist does take a stance. And if she manages a “generous irony,” this stance will transport her across the region where sympathy and distance overlap.53

Transports produce instances of acknowledging (Anerkennen) as their particular kind of rationality. Acknowledgments are movements toward knowledge or cognition that involve a certain amount of passivity or suffering, and that are constitutively incipient or underway, never definitive or complete. Highlighting the overlap of rationality and emotionality, the transport model brings into view a syntax of emotion over and against the prevalent focus on pre-linguistic affect.