

## Heidegger, Death and *Originary-Ethics*: The Finite Venture of Antigone's Heroic Act in Sophocles' Tragedy

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**Abstract**

*Outside the claim that Antigone's blood relationship is a primal incentive towards her transgressive act, Heidegger's readings of Antigone couch an overarching insight, which dovetails with the terrible (deinon) in Introduction to Metaphysics. For Heidegger, the deinon as the 'terrible' reconciles the historical role of Antigone with the utmost of risk of death. Antigone is able to preserve the essence of dikē through death's radical negativity. In a remarkable passage, Heidegger says that the deinon is 'the terrible in the sense of the overwhelming sway'. Instead of claiming that the deinon is transgression or kinship, and thereby reduce the terrible to an objective experience. I argue that the deinon resides precisely in the relationship between death and dikē. Death's insurmountable risk is what preserves the deinon between fittingness and un-fittingness; between homeliness and unhomeliness. I concur that this confrontation can only occur if Antigone's impulse is neither her brother nor the gods. Both of these affirmations attenuate the risk of dikē since their essence reifies the inarticulate character of Antigone's impulse. Antigone's impulse carries that which cannot be named, or more acutely, that which elopes articulation. Antigone's act is a consequence of a 'risk' that keeps itself more risky, more transgressive, and more terrible. As we ponder Heidegger's understanding of death, it becomes clear that the 'more terrible and distant' is the limit beyond all limits. Death fulfills Antigone's heroic venture in that her act is a concretion of the inarticulate nature of the deinon. The aim of this essay is to ascertain that neither familiar kinship nor transgression cohere with Heidegger's claim on Antigone's individual act. It suggests that dikē is the non-metaphysical risk that allows Antigone to envisage death's radical negativity as the utmost limit that cannot be extinguished. The conclusion of this study ascertains that death's radical negativity allows Antigone to perceive the finitude of her historical role as a citizen without naming her individual impulse, chiefly because she realizes that transgression is not a final resolve.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION: Death and the Ethical Venture of Antigone

Death is the most salient feature of Heidegger's studies. Thus, it seems indelibly superfluous to rehash its acute facets. However, for the sake of this essay, there is a reconcilable feature between Heidegger's early treatment of death and his later discussion of ethics and the *deinon*. For the early Heidegger, death is the possibility that cannot be surpassed. In "Overcoming the Fear of Death", Isaac Chidi Igwe (2021) maintains, along these lines, that "Insofar as I exist, I am running ahead of myself, because I am related to a futural possibility that is essentially always a "not yet," namely, my death" (p.2). Death is a possibility that is guided by anticipatory resoluteness – that is, death is the highest form of possibility since it evades any calculable actualization.

Such a possibility understands itself better and more truly *as* a possibility in life. As a possibility, death uncovers the inescapable finitude of human concerns. It allows for the unfolding of life as finite. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger (1962) perceives death as the possibility of existence:

if Being-towards-death has to disclose understandingly the possibility which we have characterized, and if it is to disclose it *as a possibility*, then in such Being-towards-death this possibility must not be weakened: it must be understood *as a possibility*, it must be cultivated *as a possibility*, and we must *put up with it as a possibility*, in the way we comport ourselves towards it. (p. 306)

This reconcilable feature resides in the way Heidegger interprets the *deinon* as the terrible that cannot be named. In this sense, the *deinon* cultivates the possibility of death more intently. This realization has a profound impact on how we envisage the contingency of our day-to-day roles in a shared *ethos*. The *deinon* cultivates the unhomey nature of human dwelling, so much so that death imbues life with the errancy of existential possibilities. To be unhomey is to allow the errancy of historical possibilities to permeate the stable order of the homely. This errancy can help us escape the value-ridden maxims that permeate human roles and decisions. Antigone's heroism is indicative of how – contrary to the polis – death liberates her from the shackles of moral certainty. She confronts Creon since she realizes that death is the only authentic possibility. This starts by embracing the finite and historical role of the Greek citizen.

My reading of *Antigone* posits death as the *deinon* that cannot be articulated. Death remains an ever-pressing concern that allows Antigone to comprehend the failure of bestowed roles. Antigone's audacious act engenders two responses: first, a response to the shattering of *dikē* against the 'fitted-order' of the polis; second, a response to the utmost risk of death that keeps the *ordering* of *dikē* alive. *Dikē* divulges the fallible historicity of human situatedness. Both of these responses affirm that Antigone's individual act is a consequence of being overtaken by the overwhelming power of Being rather than by some transcendent imposing category. Instead of framing her individual act under a universal value, Antigone uncovers the historical sense of conflicting roles. Her role as a citizen of Thebes is conflicted with her role as a sister, which is also in deference to her role as a finite being. This conflict arises out of her historical venture, chiefly as a mortal whose resolve dovetails with the abstemious order of Greek life. Our reading of Antigone's daring venture emphasizes the *ethos* of one's historical role and the ethical responsibility of finitude.

## 2. Heidegger's "Antigones"

Heidegger's reading of *Antigone* undergoes development, if not to say a salient deviation from his early thought. His first reading of the choral ode in *Introduction to Metaphysics* underscores the conflictual nature of the human being. This conflictual nature delineates how *dikē* shatters the tendency of knowing beings in terms of (*technē*). In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger (2000a) claims that "Dike is the overwhelming fittingness. *Technē* is the violence-doing of knowing. The reciprocal relation between them is the happening of uncanniness" (p. 177). Human beings live amid a temporal-historical reality that always exceeds the practice of technical knowing. While knowing (*technē*) is a human faculty, *dikē* is a knowing that has been already meted out historically.

By the same token, Antigone's act is a consequence of how *she* allows her customary situatedness to shatter against the primal ordering of Being. She realizes that there is more to her situatedness in the polis than merely complying with Creon's rule. Shattering is an instance of allowing the *ordering* of Being to guide Antigone's knowing in the city-state. In "The Catastrophic Essence of the Human Being in Heidegger's Readings of *Antigone*", Scott Campbell (2017) asserts that Antigone's kinship with the gods and her family captures how customary situatedness shatters against the *ordering* of *dikē*. Campbell (2017) sees this individual attitude in how "honoring gods, family, and city means something different to Antigone." (p. 89)

It happens that though Antigone fares outside the order of the polis, she keeps the risk of *dikē* alive. Shattering does not terminate with an embrace of familiar and godly reverence. However, and as I surmise in the article, shattering is overwhelming — that is, it does not restrict Antigone's transgression to a definite maxim. Antigone is able to shatter Creon's rule by attending to the unfamiliar call of justice. Her heroism evades the partisanship of customary rules and embraces the broad spectrum of *dikē*. Amid what is familial and godly, the conflictual nature of what is godly and what is political, what is communal and what is familial, does not allow Antigone to settle for beings. Antigone allows Being to bespeak what is overwhelming in the precinct of her tragic transgression.

The risk of *dikē*, thus said, pairs significantly with the nature of Antigone's venture. One can proffer that it is not the difference between Antigone and the polis that makes her ethical. However, Antigone cannot affirm the goodness of her act because she is overwhelmed by the conflictual nature of *dikē*. That is why she utters the word "reverence" (*Sophocles*, 1938, p. 431) twice while defying Creon's accusations. The word 'reverence' is expressive of how Antigone's godly deference and familial devotion are not final resolves. If they were final resolves, Antigone's knowing would embrace a definite character. On such basis, Campbell (2017) maintains that "To say that Antigone's actions are moral would be to say that others ought to follow suit" (p. 97). Antigone is the unhomey one since her transgression evades the snag of moral absolutism.

If Antigone is ethical at all, it would be by virtue of letting *dikē* envelop her communal existence. She dares to accept the primal *ordering* of Being as opposed to adopting a communal truth. While *ethos* sees Antigone as a citizen that has a primordial relationship with the gods, the rulers, and the city-state, *dikē* is an ordering that divulges what is godly and what is ungodly, what is ruly and what is unruly, what is communal and what is individual. This inherent negativity is expressive of how *dikē* enjoins Antigone's city-less state. Antigone is the knower *who* knows how to preserve her godly reverence in the 'fitted-world'. Central to this insight, Heidegger (2000a) claims that "the knower is thrown this way and that between fittingness and un-fittingness, between the wretched and the noble." (p. 171)

*Dikē* grants Antigone a venture into the overwhelming. Antigone is unable to utterly decide on what is just and unjust. However, she is able to understand that what is just has been communally avowed. This realization prompts Antigone to transgress what is communally just and prevent it from tainting her ethical judgment. She understands that there is an *ordering* that is covertly embedded within the 'fitted-order' of the polis. This *ordering* incorporates a 'not', which is

an inherent consequence of Being. This is what Clare Geiman understands by the inevitable 'errancy' or 'negativity' of *dikē* in "Heidegger's Antigones." In this convoluted sense, *dikē* binds beings to "errancy, to the loss of order and home in confusing and mistaking beings, and on the other does offer a measure and a genuine "rest" and "home", but only as absent, and in the human relation to what is absent." (Geiman, 2001, p. 177-178)

This genuine insight is what thrusts us towards Heidegger's second reading of *Antigone*. Being is no longer violent. Human beings are called to embrace the restlessness of living in the midst of errancy and negativity. This shift towards negativity is particularly distinctive in Heidegger's second reading of *Antigone*. To err is not to purposely make a mistake in beings or to be over-smitten with guilt by reason of an immoral act. Erring is a commitment to how our response to beings is overwhelmed by the excess of Being, leaving us vulnerable to loss, risk, defiance, and finite wandering. Antigone's welcoming of death frees her from the onus of customary life. As Chinedu Ifeakor (2022) emphasizes in "Analysis of Death in Heidegger's Philosophy", death "frees us from the limitations of life and enables us to realize out full potential" (p. 154). Death's counsel allows Antigone to embrace the inherent errancy of communal rules and rebuke the persistent call of moral absolutism.

Heidegger's second interpretation of *Antigone* is found in the 1942 lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*. In his commentary, Heidegger emphasizes the creative capacity of being unhomely. In some sense, the early shattering against Being becomes an indubitable facet of embracing the *ordering* of *dikē*. Heidegger addresses the counterturning of homeliness in a way that responds to how *dikē* renders the homely unhomely and the unhomely homely. In support of this claim, Heidegger (1996) purports in "*The Ister*" that "humankind emerges from uncanniness and remains within it-- looms out of it and stirs within it" (p. 72). The uncanny divulges the capacity of being more than the citizen whose duties are framed by the polis. Antigone's defiance of Creon couches a tacit embrace of the unhomely character of the citizen. The citizen is homely in the sense of pertaining to the Greek community; yet the citizen is also unhomely by virtue of being open to other historical possibilities.

Embracing the unhomely path is indicative of how the ordinary is disrupted by the very nature of uncanniness. To be unhomely is to let one's historical situatedness envelop the 'fitted-order' of customary living. Antigone is able to rise out of the polis because she recognizes that her unhomeliness is a precondition of the Greek polis. As Heidegger (1996) puts it, the 'fitted-order' "is what is intimately familiar, homely, the extra-ordinary is the un-homely" (p. 71). This unhomely disposition arises out of an excess of Being that is inextricably prevalent. This merit of excess resists all attempts at mastery and familiarity that emanate from *technē*. It follows that death's utmost limit fulfills the excess of Being and makes it possible for the unsettling character of *dikē* to shatter every limit and order.

This said, what resists the familiarity of Being is death. Death is the utmost limit that cannot be surmounted. In doing so, Geiman (2001) says that "death reconnects human Being to the essential forces of Being and so to the essential human activity of violent disclosive creation...in a sense that is mindful of the excessive power of Being" (p. 170). From this primal ordering comes what I perceive as death's terribleness. The word (*deinon*), seen as death's terribleness,



fulfills the constant overwhelming of *dikē*. In fact, death as the *deinon* dovetails with the constant unhomeliness that is attained in becoming homely. That is why Antigone cannot name, for “in such passage the homely is precisely not attained.” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 73)

The homely is precisely not attained since each act shatters against the *ordering* of *dikē*. It is also here where death responds to Antigone’s inability of affirming the homely amid the unhomely venture into what is city-less. Antigone’s passage is strictly a transgression of the ‘fitted-order’, and precisely in such a passage, the *ordering* of *dikē* is not attained. *Dikē* remains inhabital, for venturing is in some way a return without limit and mastery. Antigone’s overarching insight is that her venture does not terminate with a mastery over the polis. This is true insofar as Diego D’Angelo (2021) purports in “To Be or Not to Be at Home” that “the place in which humans dwell must be left again and again, and this is so because the human being speaks and thinks” (p.115). As a consequence, un-fittingness is not extinguished since death’s utmost risk fulfills the overwhelming expression of *dikē*.

It happens that Antigone’s homeliness is sought by transgressing the ordinary and customary order of the polis. As the unhomely, Antigone is never contented, for she is unable to ward off her transgressive state into some form of final homeliness. Even more so, she *cannot* because the unhomely is by definition ‘inhabital’, ‘violent’ and ‘unattainable’. That is why, Antigone’s “seeking...at times does not know itself” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 74). Even in her individual venture, the *ordering* of *dikē* is never conquered or surpassed, for every ‘affirmation’ might rescind the counterturning of Being. Seeking, as such, is a homely venture into what is unhomely, which prompts Antigone to shy “at no danger and no risk” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 74), aside from the utmost risk of death.

What interests me in this reading is to show how death’s radical finitude fulfills Antigone’s unwavering desire to bury her brother Polyneices and defy Creon’s rule. Death fulfills the negativity of Antigone’s communal role and the constant unhomeliness of Antigone’s place in the polis. Unlike what previous commentators on Antigone’s edict presume, I associate the terrible (*deinon*) with death’s utmost risk – the risk that cannot be consumed and extinguished. In his reading of *Antigone*, Campbell (2017) affirms that “Antigone is motivated by Being itself. Her tragic fate is to shatter against Being” (p. 91). Antigone’s individual act is a consequence of allowing her finite reverence to be tainted with errancy and negativity.

Campbell is right in affirming that Antigone’s act is motivated by Being. This is rightly what the *ordering* of *dikē* grants Antigone, i.e., an instance to perceive the shattering of the ‘fitted-order’ against Being. This occurs as a consequence of encountering what cannot be named. Instead of Being itself, as the totality of what is manifest, death’s utmost risk fulfills such an individual venture. Death is non-being or not being *this* or *that* entity. Admitting so, Antigone’s stable role can be shattered and altered for another affirmation, chiefly because, as Stefan Bolea (2015) claims, “Nonbeing is the beginning of progression, the evolutionary impulse, the caesura which pierces being and forces it to react and create itself” (p. 25). Antigone preserves the inescapability of the un-said and the inarticulate. More than embracing the counsel of the gods, Antigone’s tragic fate is to accept, amid all what is reverent and pure, the unhomely nature of her transgressive act.

That which is left without a name determines the terrible that cannot be extinguished. In other words, death's limitless nature is what has priority over Antigone's individual act. This limitless nature preserves the risk of *dikē*. It does so by rescinding the customary nature of the 'fitted-order' and the homeliness of godly reverence. This said, death's terribleness resides in keeping the 'uncanny' alive and preserving the *ordering* of *dikē*. Heidegger (1996) confides something of analogous resonance when he claims that "What determines Antigone is that which first bestows ground and necessity upon the distinction of the dead and the priority of blood. What that is, Antigone and that also means the poet leaves without name." (p. 117)

Outside of familial kinship and courageous will, death is the utmost risk. Death preserves the order and disorder of *dikē*. Not only this, death remains concealed, as that which recedes from any attempt at a definition. The indefinability of death is what preserves the unhomely character of Antigone's act. It follows that the risk of *dikē* resists the possibility of fixed naming. This risk is Antigone herself, or precisely so, Antigone's relationship with death's radical negativity. As Heidegger (1996) purports, "What that is, Antigone, and that also means the poet, leaves without a name" (p. 117). It is the *ordering* of *dikē* itself that disavows any attempt at naming the risk, since it preserves the revelation of what is viable and the concealment of what *might be*. This revelation is what first allows for it to *be* brotherhood and custom. Antigone rebels against the revealed and allows the concealed to guide her ethical crusade. The risk, as it were, is nameless since it is the utmost risk.

### 3. Antigone and the Finitude of *Dikē*

It is known thus far, among the Heidegger circle, that the reading of *Antigone* is meant to ascertain that the human being is the strangest (*deinotaton*). Detailed arguments spurned, let it suffice to say that my reading of Sophocles is above all ethical. My reading maintains that Antigone's conflict is to *re-write* her own ethical fate. It also positions death's counsel as giving rise to this conflicted situation. It is through this embrace of death as the terrible (*deinon*) that Antigone becomes "apolis, without city and site, lone-some, uncanny, with no way out amidst beings as a whole, and at the same time without ordinance and limit, without structure and fittingness" (Heidegger, 2000a, p. 163). Though commentators proclaim that her *violence-doing* happens 'without ordinance' or arising from the risk itself, I contend that her embrace of *uncanniness* is prompted by death's *terribleness*. Antigone's *uncanniness* can only be seen as a risk if human beings "step out, move out of the limits that at first and for the most part are accustomed and homely, because as those who do violence, they overstep the limits of the homely, precisely in the direction of the uncanny" (Heidegger, 2000a, p. 161). This *stepping out* is characteristic of death's *terribleness*, and only through this *disruptive* character, can Antigone live up to the model of the creative one.

Death's *terribleness*, as my reading underscores, determines how Antigone's conflict is in fact a desire to disrupt the polis' mores and embrace the finite possibilities of dwelling under the *ordering* of Being. Antigone accepts what Maurice Blanchot calls *l'existence du terrible*. Death's *terribleness* disrupts the polis' mores with the aim of *creating* a singular form of justice. First, *dikē* can only be viable in the midst of Antigone's historical living in her Greek community – that is, justice does not assume the position of a moral law, and surprisingly so, justice

is brought as an event that guides Antigone's individual act. Second, Antigone's *ethos* accomplishes itself in how her enownment of finitude allows her to step outside the normative understanding of justice.

Following this argumentation, two important moments unfold in relation to Sophocles' *Antigone*. Overtaken by *dikē*, Antigone accepts her unhomely situation, so much so that her position in the polis demeans the conventional order. This conventional order is precisely what *dikē* dis-orders by virtue of its primordial *ordering*. Antigone realizes that her order is more primordial than that of the polis. But how can this realization re-write her justice? First, the risk of *dikē* rests on how Antigone transgresses the law of the polis. This transgression allows Antigone to ascertain what death is and how it *occurs* in life. That is, for the first time, Antigone knows that her situatedness unveils a plethora of possibilities. Knowing this, as Heidegger (2001) purports in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, she learns to re-write what is just "in certain and changing degrees" (p. 51-52) and thus disclose the concealed counsel of the gods.

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger interprets a passage from the earliest Theban saga of Sophocles' *Antigone*, which I concur, cultivates the *uncanny* experience of death. As Antigone individualizes her death, battling for Polyneices' proper burial, she cultivates her capacity to die by heeding the higher law(s) of the gods. Antigone illuminates the ethical by remaining attuned to the counsel of her mortality, manifesting as such the concealed counsel of the gods. She says, addressing Creon, "But if thou wilt, be guilty of dishonouring laws which the gods have established in honour" (Sophocles, 1938, p. 425). Antigone dismisses the mores of the city-state and thereby discloses the concealed law(s) of the gods.

Preserving the revered laws of the gods, Antigone gives a proper burial to her brother Polyneices and even perishes in performing such a daring deed. Accepting her doomed fall, Antigone welcomes her death as she soothes her sister Ismene "Be of cheer; thou livest; but my life hath long been given to death, that so I might serve the dead" (Sophocles, 1938, p.438). Embracing death's counsel, Antigone's individual act "illuminates the primacy of dwelling in nearness to the gods" (Swazo, 2006, p. 441). In disrupting the laws of the polis, Antigone understands that *what is just* responds to the dictates of custom rather than the concealed counsel of the gods. While Creon conforms to his kingly seat in executing the commands, he is oblivious to the highest honor of what is truly just. Following such an ordeal, Swazo maintains that "Creon may learn (*mathein*) the lesson (*didaxomestha*) manifest first in Antigone's deed and then in Haemon's good counsel and just word, but only if he takes leave of his "seat," his "customary" and "familiar" path<sup>12</sup>" (p. 445). For Creon, *ethos* adheres to what mores dictate, and thus to what custom considers to be just.

Even Haemon knows that Creon values the seat of kingly power and foolishly adheres to the conventional dictates of custom. In conversing with his father Creon, Haemon exclaims, almost lamenting about his betrothed, "deserves not *she* the need of golden honour?" (Sophocles, 1938, p. 442). However, Creon is blind to Antigone's highest ordeal. Swazo claims that "A ruler is really a ruler only when he ventures beyond the customary, thereby to be a ruler alone, in so ruling preserving the *ethos* of the *polis* via a venture that "stands out" (*metastasin*), transcends the customary" (p. 455). This *standing out* is concomitant with *da-sein's ek-sistence* in its dwelling site. Even with the *disruptive* character of death, *finite*

*relationality* exposes Antigone to her *ek-sisting ethos*. In *The Fourfold*, Andrew Mitchell (2015) asserts that “To think the finite is to think the limitation of a thing as the surface of its exposure to the world beyond it” (p. 4). Conversely, for Creon to *stand out* to the manifestness of the gods, he needs to experience the collapse of his own customary adherence, so that the liberation towards the ethical counsel of the gods can manifest itself more authentically.

Antigone's cultivation of *finitude* mediates her daring decisions as she re-writes her *authentic-ethos*. For, as Swazo maintains, “Antigone wins an authentic self [*eigentlich Selbst*]; she does so having from the outset apprehended her act in view of her uttermost possibility-of-being, i.e., her death” (p. 454). In winning her ‘authentic-self’ by heeding the *unwritten* laws of the gods, Antigone *stands outside* herself, chiefly because she realizes her own mortality. In *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, Heidegger (2000b) claims that “the poet must think this “mortality”, which concerns the sons of the earth follow... Thinking like a mortal, he puts the highest into a poem.” (p. 145). Elucidating Hölderlin's line ‘It is not good/ To be soulless with mortals/ Thoughts’ from the poem *Remembrance*, Heidegger discloses the source of soul/heart, as it denotes the person who strives for the highest. For Heidegger, this highest duty can be embraced through mortality; not as a transient whim but as a capacity for illuminating the traces of the gods by harboring the limitedness of death. Heidegger names this dwelling site the *holy* (*Heilig*), for it gathers to itself the gods' sway and the mortals' longing. In battling for her deed, Antigone brings the *unwritten* laws to stand in relation to her finite venture.

Commenting on Hölderlin's departed gods, Mitchell asserts that “What Heidegger calls “the holy” is here tied to a thinking of the intermediacy, i.e., the blueness, of the dimension” (p.55). For Heidegger, blueness is not a symbol for another being or a metaphorical abstraction; however, blueness is the essential essence of the dark sky in its darkness. More aptly in nature, it is the *shining* of the sun and the *fruiting* of the plants that constitute the *holy*. Mitchell maintains that “The holy is nature insofar as this names the emergence of the clearing wherein something each time appears” (p.193). Swayed by the *holy*, Antigone does not heed the *written* laws but experiences the *givenness* of the laws. As such, she manifests their inherent negativity rather than how Creon perceives them – notably, as customary commands. By providing a proper burial to her brother Polyneices, Antigone allows the *unwritten* laws to disclose themselves. By cultivating the capacity of finitude, Antigone *stands out* to the *unwritten* (*concealed*) laws of the gods and illuminates their *givenness* as the *holy*. This illumination is what Antigone discloses by heeding the *unwritten* laws of the gods.

As Heidegger admits, the *holy* cannot be theoretically wrested since it gives itself in a selfless mood, granting the entry into what is essential. Mitchell claims that “what is holy is no longer replaceable by equally valuable means to the same end” (p. 191). The *holy* recedes from object-oriented consciousness to a sending that encounters what gives, so that Antigone's laws are not objects for command. Instead, they are *unwritten* and thus illuminate the *giving* nature of the gods. Although Swazo asserts that Antigone's act preserves the concealed laws of the gods, he fails to account for the *existential impulse* towards such a *standing out*, i.e., *finite relationality*. Antigone's individual act, I contend, only becomes what it



is because she discloses her own finitude in relation to the gods. For Mitchell, this finite mediation “is the very opening of relationality as such.” (p. 224)

Consistent with this claim, it is finitude that fulfills the individual act of Antigone, which calls to itself the ‘beyond’ and the ‘excessive’, i.e., the *unwritten*. In *The Time of Life*, William McNeill (2006) asserts that “What Antigone knowingly takes upon herself is her Being-toward-death, the dying that is a belonging to Being” (p. 194). By harboring the *relationality* of finitude, Antigone embraces her *unhomeliness*. Finitude exhorts Antigone to *stand outside* herself, searching for the traces of the gods as they imbue the *unwritten* laws with their fugitive presence. Antigone’s just act illuminates the capacity of *finite relationality*. As she pledges her own deed, Creon inquires, “And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law? (Sophocles, 1938, p. 433). Reflecting on her deed, Antigone’s justification remains utterly concealed:

Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth. (Sophocles, 1938, p. 434)

Almost enigmatically, Antigone’s justifications fall asunder. Neither Zeus nor even the *unwritten* laws can condone her edict. Those who are fallen into the public decree of the polis follow the paths that are advocated by what custom dictates. Swazo is right when he claims that “Everything that is “ethical” (*in the sense of fitting norms for living*) or the “political” (*as the established jointure of ruler and ruled*) represents any number of “paths” all in the polis have laid out, wittingly or unwittingly, be they ruler or ruled” (p. 450). Even beyond this claim, Antigone’s motivation could not be the *unwritten* laws, for her sister Ismene is familiar with the presence of the gods – albeit her whole community as well. Antigone’s individual resolve emerges from her nearness to death, because it is the only thing that she *knew well*. She talks about death as her companion when she exclaims, conversing with Ismene, “Be of good cheer; thou livest; but my life hath long been given to death, that so I might serve the dead” (Sophocles, 1938, p. 438). These intimations belong to Antigone alone, for she cultivates what Ismene cannot – notably, the enownment of death’s counsel. Antigone’s conflict is *tragic* and her unhomey experience of death keeps the *tragic* alive.

Unable to name what motivates her, Antigone keeps death’s *terribleness* alive. That is, it is not the absence of ordinance that averts Antigone from naming; rather, she simply cannot. She knows that any naming can actualize the *terrible* into a calculable event, and thereby annul her finite venture. That is why, she must keep death (*deinon*) “only *more* terrible and distant” (Heidegger, 2000a, p. 160). It is this disruptive finitude that prompts Antigone to transgress the law, embrace the unhomey, and *be* the creative one. As Ismene dismisses death’s *terribleness*, she fails to experience the collapse of customary roles and succumbs, almost inadvertently, to the wallowing temptations of ethical custom. Antigone, however, harbors death into herself by heeding the *unwritten* laws of the gods. Her strife brings the concealed sway of the gods into manifestness – that is, as Heidegger (2000a) upholds, “It lets gods and human beings step forth in their Being” (p. 153). More so, her adamant resolve, prompted by the capacity of finitude, heeds what is

beyond her homely precinct. It happens that Antigone fulfills her finitude by cultivating death's *terribleness* in the pursuit of her ethical feat.

#### 4. INTERMINABLE CONCLUSION

What my reading has shown thus far is that the ultimate deed of ethics resides in re-thinking our discourse on goodness and evil. More so, Antigone's act cannot be considered moral since death does not allow for the infallibility of values and maxims. With Heidegger, we are beseeched to embrace Antigone's *historicality* and the multifarious possibilities of *dikē*. That is, meaning – as a fugitive category – is gleaned from what is holy and what is unholy, what is ruly and what is unruly, what is communal and what is individual. Considering Antigone's venture, we are led to dismiss the evil characterization of Creon, and as a consequence, affirm that the *ruler* is not a definite truth, however valid it may be. However, truth is only a facet of what the polis conjunctures in the Greek community. Thus said, this shining irrupts as a consequence of concealing other modes of being, notably Antigone's clearing. This shining is inherently darkened by reason of radical negativity, which death obfuscates as the mirror of Being. This is what Antigone realizes; she embraces the finitude of *ethos* as an historical expression rather than a moral maxim administered for normative conduct. She understands that her clearing is a shining of a customary role. From this, we are led to disentangle the binary thinking of truth and un-truth that ensnares ethics in a miscellaneous space. Truth is a clearing and un-truth is a concealed possibility, proving thus that there are no pure truths or universal rules, only 'response', 'risk', and oftentimes 'creative singularity'.

Can we think of ourselves this way? This re-thinking of ethics has profound implications of human behaviour. Embracing one's embedded role in a particular community, and by consequence, its finite motility dispels the kind of morality that advances universal appraisals. To behave is to first unveil one's historical role and its normative demands. No one expects an individual to act outside the finite frame of historical life, lest the human being alters into a *thing* whose values become world-less, nihilistic, and void. Only at this juncture, it becomes possible to fulfill personal individuality, chiefly by re-defining the role alongside the allotment of tradition. This allotment, though lacking a definite site, allows the human being to participate in the unfolding of roles and decisions. This embedded practice reverses the theory-based morality, for it starts from a space of concrete involvement. Opting for the theory-based morality would enforce generalizations and abstractions. Nevertheless, embracing the call of *ethos* would reinforce ethical responsibility in the unfolding of historical life.

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