

**FOUR FACETS OF THE RELATION OF TRAGEDY TO DIALECTIC AND THE
THEME OF CRISIS OF EXPECTATIONS**

A Dissertation

by

MUHAMMAD HARIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2008

Major Subject: Philosophy

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee, John J. McDermott

Committee Members, Scott Austin

Robert W. Burch

Theodore George

Larson Powell

Head of Department, Daniel Conway

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ABSTRACT

Four Facets of the Relation of Tragedy to Dialectic and the Theme of Crisis of Expectations.

(May 2008)

Muhammad Haris, B.E., NED University of Engineering and Technology;

M.E., Texas A&M University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. John J. McDermott

As a whole, this work serves to illuminate the tragic as a fundamental human phenomenon and an objective fact that is distinct not only from comedy and irony but from other forms of calamity and modes of failure. I consider three distinct sources of philosophical knowledge on tragedy. The first is tragic drama and literature, the second is the theory of the tragic and the third source consists of the employment of the concept of tragedy to discuss events or characters that one encounters in life. I carefully draw upon the first two sources to thicken the elaborations of four different facets of the third. In this process, I extrapolate Szondi's notion that tragedy is a specific dialectic in a specific space. In the course of this work, I place a greater emphasis upon this general concept of the tragic as opposed to a poetics of tragedy. The dissertation bears out, however, that it is ultimately poetics - and not the dialectic as general concept - that provide us with the richer insights into tragedy as it unravels in life.

The specific dialectic of tragedy unravels so as to cause the irreplaceable loss of something of great value. This provides me with a structuring element that ties the four central chapters together. In terms of content, I emphasize also upon the tragic flaw as a set of character traits (manifested by an individual or some form of collective) which keep tragedy in place. The consideration of the figure of Willy Loman allows me to examine the tragedy of failure of expectations which is a distinct category of the tragic and yet it oscillates such that ties together the other themes. A central idea that emerges from an analysis of the overlapping themes is that prior to tragedy is the investment of the deepest inner resources into a process. This investment gives rise to identity and to expectations. As a tragedy unfolds, the source of the identity or of expectation becomes also the birth place or the generator of all threats to this identity and the collapse of long nurtured expectations.

DEDICATION

I dedicate the dissertation and the doctorate to my father, Anwar Hussain, my mother Shamim Anwar and sisters Naureen and Mehreen who live in Karachi, Pakistan. I can never forget their unstinting love towards me as I remained away from home for a long time. I hope to be able to reciprocate all that they have borne for my sake.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no doubt in my mind that my dissertation in particular and my doctorate in general would not have been possible without the caring presence of my advisor Professor John J. McDermott in my life. He is an educational genius of the first order, an institution in himself. I like to think that intelligence, as a real virtue of character, corresponds with a great resource of kindness. All else is, in my view, cold, heartless cleverness. I have been Professor McDermott's student for more than six years and during all this time, I have seen him live out a kind intelligence, not only in his writing but also in the way in which he forms and maintains relations with his students, colleagues, friends and family. I would like to say that the most important lessons that I have learnt from him center upon the practice of a kind intelligence in forming relations with the intellectual life and with other people. These lessons go beyond what I have expressed in my dissertation.

I also like to draw a distinction between credentials and intelligence for in my mind the two are not dependent upon each other. When I first wandered into Professor McDermott's existentialism class at Texas A&M University back in the fall of 2001, I was completely ignorant about his credentials. I was a graduate student in engineering then and I simply wanted to learn in depth about existentialism and philosophy and that is why I stepped into his class. There was no prior conditioning in that I was not aware of Professor McDermott's high rank at Texas A&M or his fame in the field of philosophy. I realized during the first fifteen minutes of class that I was in the presence of a serious man whose heart and mind were full of emotions and ideas that had concrete global significance. Briefly stated, I was moved. He gave me the courage to think with passion and always with a sensibility driven by a persistent question – what is the consequence or purchase of my thought?

Thank You Professor McDermott.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In terms of content, the underlying focus throughout the dissertation remains upon formulating connotative responses to the following questions – What are the traits that keep tragedy in place? Or what is the tragic flaw that lies at the root of the forms of human tragedy under consideration? The dialectic is the structural element which provides the bare skeleton on which the contents of tragedy are placed as flesh. I am investigating the relation of various aspects of dialectic (as in Hegel, Szondi, Simmel, Sartre, Nietzsche) to tragedy in life and also in life as represented in drama (as in *Antigone*, *Oedipus*, *King Lear* and *Death of a Salesman*). I rely upon Hegel's definition of the processes in dialectic, that is, the unification of opposites, the sudden transformation into one's opposite, self-division and the negative positing of oneself¹. I am however, not embracing Hegel's full metaphysics. Neither do I adhere to any form of necessitarianism, Hegelian or otherwise. In particular, I do not follow any notion of *Aufhebung* or Sublation (Hegelian or not) which implies a resolution or reconciliation of tragedy. It can be argued that a tragic process moves dialectically towards a dignified, teleological end, but my primary aim is to gain philosophical insight into the processes of tragedy and not the end. Moreover, I will demonstrate in this dissertation that the tragic dialectic consumes something of great value which cannot be recovered. One can present arguments to justify the loss but these arguments do not lead to a revival of what has been definitively lost. Speaking in terms of structure, the second chapter is about diremption and conflict in the dialectic; the third chapter is about objectification and alienation in dialectic and the fourth is about self-deception in dialectic. The upshot of chapters II, III and IV is to appear in the fifth chapter which is about the crisis of identity or the failure of persons' expectations.

There are certain basic premises on which this dissertation is grounded. Firstly, tragedy is an objective fact, event or phenomenon that has the potential to unfold in human experience; it is not a take or perspective on a situation. Secondly, tragedy is exclusively a human phenomenon and the destruction caused by tragedy is felt as a real and irreplaceable loss by human persons. Not all of human life is tragic; I am not embracing any kind of existential pantragism. The tragic

This dissertation follows the style and format of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed.

¹ See Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, translated by Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 55.

is rather very specific and it may or may not become an experience for a person or group of persons. Having said this, I need to assert clearly that in my mind the tragic phenomenon can and does express itself in a variety of ways. We cannot say that there is only one form or category of tragedy. On the contrary, the tragic is multifaceted and different people can and do experience different forms of tragedy based on varying social and historical contexts. This means that the tragic is not a universal essence or concept that can be applied across differing situations. I think that the tragic is intractable in its concreteness. A tragic event undoubtedly unfolds in time and is subject to transience. In the perspective of one looking at a past tragic event, it may change and get transformed into something else. Thinkers can justify a tragedy on the basis of the discovery of a causal relation between the destruction and future human progress. Also, philosophers and theoreticians have dealt with and understood the tragic with reference to metaphysical concepts or notions of transcendence. However, I think that it is important also to speak about the tragic so that the focus remains only on the dialectic within the event or phenomenon and not on metaphysical systems or an interplay of ideas and concepts which can be applied to tragedy. My approach to the matter can be termed pragmatic because my main interest is in attaining some insight into the relational factors at play in a tragedy as it unfolds in concrete human experience.

The structure and content of this inquiry into the tragic are motivated by two different sources. The structure is inspired by my understanding of the central arguments in Peter Szondi's "*An Essay on the tragic*"². The content is based upon my immersion into certain forms of tragedy which I think are a part of shared human experience. The dialectic, as structuring element, prevents the latter from lapsing into mere autobiography. My position is that the tragic is not only an objective fact but it also has a meaning that is objectively present and not simply perspectival. I will now speak in some detail about my understanding of Peter Szondi's book.

At the beginning of his book, Szondi makes a clear distinction between the philosophy of the tragic and a poetics of tragedy. In my mind, the basic questions driving Szondi's project are of the following sort – What is the tragic process in its entirety? How does it unfold? What is the origin of the tragic process? What is the idea of tragedy? I agree with Szondi in that these questions are very different from the questions raised in Aristotle's *Poetics* and the body of

² Ibid., p. 1

theoretical literature that is built upon it³. Szondi points towards Schelling as the founder of the philosophy of the tragic, which is radically different from a poetics of tragedy. Poetics is concerned with determining the formal laws of tragic poetry so that the art work (tragic drama) extracts feelings of pity, fear and the catharsis that follows from these. Aristotle's notions of imitative instinct (origin of tragedy) and catharsis (affect of tragedy) lie at the foundation of poetics of tragedy. The philosophy of the tragic, on the other hand, concentrates upon the phenomenon of the tragic itself and not upon the formal laws of drama or upon the affect that the tragic has on an audience.

After making the point that the formulation of concepts of the tragic is an inquiry distinct from poetics of tragedy, Szondi extracts definitions of the tragic from out of the writings of thirteen thinkers (Schelling to Benjamin). I think that the central tension in Szondi's book emerges from two sources. The first source of tension can be located in Szondi's effort to see as to how the definitions of the tragic given by the various thinkers can "take the place of tragic poetry" and "describe tragedies or even their models"⁴. What does it mean to say that a particular idea of tragedy can replace tragic poetry? I think that in Szondi's philosophy the tragic is a fundamental phenomenon or event in life. It is a mode of destruction or a process of unraveling which is either underway or has the potential to unfold. The various thinkers' definitions of the tragic fundamental phenomenon are modes of the tragic. Just as there is a Sophoclean and Shakespearean mode of the tragic, there is also a Nietzschean or Hegelian mode of the tragic. The various formulations of the idea of the tragic and the various representations of the tragic in drama and poetry are all manifestations of one specific process of destruction. The tension here emerges from the fact that most of the thinkers that Szondi delves into are not interested in reaching towards a general conception of the tragic (which is Szondi's project). It is rather the case that they encounter the tragic as they build their own metaphysical systems (German Idealist Philosophers) or concepts that terminate systems (Post-Idealist thinking). The philosophers whom Szondi looks at are asking the basic questions about the tragic but solely within the context of their own philosophies. Szondi approaches all of these different concepts in order to extract a structural element common to them all – the dialectic. This approach creates stresses because the philosophers themselves were never interested in general concepts or the

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 2

dialectic (barring Hegel, of course) for that matter. Szondi seeks to show, however, that even as the tragic plays itself out in the life of the intellect or mind, it follows a dialectical pattern.

I see openness in Szondi's approach to the subject. He wants to posit the dialectic as a valid criterion for conceptualizing the tragic. And yet, he extricates the dialectic from its formal-logical properties and its adherence to systems. I think that for Szondi, the dialectic provides us with a framework grounded in reason through which can attain deep insights into the realm of the tragic, a phenomenon that characterized by ineffability and ambiguity. The dialectic gives us a point of reference for speaking about a phenomenon that is multifaceted. Szondi's basic point is that the tragic is a mode of destruction which unfolds dialectically. The content of a tragedy can vary from case to case but the structure is dialectical. Moreover, Szondi seeks to study the tragic in such a way that the focus remains only the dialectic of the elements (concepts, phenomenon, and events) which constitute the tragic process itself without having recourse to sources of explanation that lie outside the tragic event. I think that in Szondi, we can observe a resistance to all attempts to justify tragedy or provide consolation for the toll it takes by making an appeal to indestructible absolutes or to concepts. Most significantly, for Szondi, the dialectic of the tragic needs to be reevaluated as it makes its appearance in different tragedies. There is not one single, definite form of the tragic (dialectic), it would change form in differing tragic events.

Now, in my view, the openness of Szondi and his concern for the tragic for its own sake comes into tense conflict with one aspect of most of the philosophical theories that he examines—their emphasis upon a teleology rooted in the triumph or assertion of a universal or sublime, above and beyond the particulars of tragedy. In the philosophy of Schelling, for instance, the tragic dialectic consists of a conflict between freedom and objective necessity. The end of the tragic process is signaled by the sublation of this conflict into a transcendent sphere where the oneness (identity) of freedom and necessity is restored. It seems then that for Schelling the teleology of the tragic process is the assertion of human freedom. Freedom is destroyed during the process and yet asserted precisely through this destruction which comes from the objective world.

In Nietzsche's philosophy, the Dionysian represents the universal or sublime which is unified, one, whole. In the Nietzschean form of the tragic, the dialectic consists of a tearing apart of the Dionysian as it enters into a world of individuation, which (in Nietzsche) is the Apollonian realm

of images. At the end of this process of destruction (or self-destruction) Dionysus emerges once again as a unified whole. So, in Nietzsche Dionysus represents the highest value and it determines the telos of tragedy, which, is the preservation of this value at an even higher level. In Holderlin's philosophy, I think that Nature is the sublime universal and the teleology of the tragic process is the revelation of Nature. In Holderlin's tragic process, the sacrifice of the tragic hero leads to the revelation of Nature. The conflict here is between divine infidelity and human infidelity. This contradiction is sublated when Nature or God is revealed as a result of the sacrifice of the sign (tragic hero).

In the thought of Schopenhauer, the tragic dialectic consists of the "autosublation"⁵ of the Will, which is the absolute or universal principle upon which the world is founded. In the Schopenhauerean form of the tragic process, the telos is the self-destruction of the Will as it battles against itself. The sublation in this process also occurs immanently because there is always a possibility that a subject can see through or attain knowledge of the self-destructive activities of the Will. This knowledge leads to resignation from the world of appearances or representations of the Will. In Solger's philosophy, the dialectic consists of a conflict between the Divine Idea and Existence. The Idea is human destiny but humanity is grounded always in existence so the Idea appears to be destroying itself as it emerges in existence. I think that the sublation in Solger also occurs immanently. The telos of tragedy is the realization that human nature consists of a split between divine idea and existence and the former is preserved always in an ideal realm.

Hegel is the philosopher from whom Szondi extracts the dialectic and yet once we approach Hegel's writings on the tragic in search of an open, general or pure dialectic of tragedy, we face a genuine struggle. In Hegel's dialectic, the whole or one of universal is the dynamic ethical life. The tragic conflict is a tussle between two embodiments of right and this contradiction is inevitably sublated as the opposing sides become reconciled with ethical life. Kierkegaard, being an existentialist philosopher, posits that the tragic contradiction or conflict is not an objective fact rooted in reality but a despairing perspective that occurs at each of the three stages of existence. In Kierkegaard, the conflict is sublated immanently, that is, tragedy can be overcome by changing one's perspective and thinking about it from an ironic, comic or religious

⁵ Ibid., p. 28

perspective. The point that I want to make here is that most theories of tragedy are resistant to an open ended dialectic of tragedy that focuses only upon the configuration of the elements within it. I learn from Szondi that the dialectic is indeed a common structural element in all major theories of tragedy, but, nevertheless, in most of these theories there is sublation and telos which is grounded in a universal that lies beyond tragedy – a universal which remains whole and is not destroyed by the movements of the tragic.

My understanding of the questions that Szondi pursues is as follows – Is it possible to have a dialectic for gaining deeper insight into the tragic such that we avoid sublation (immanent and transcendent) and telos? Can we think of the tragic dialectic in a secular way, that is, without reliance on a sublime or universal? Is it possible to give concepts of tragedy such that these concepts do not cover over the phenomena that constitute tragedy? I feel that Szondi’s dilemma can be encapsulated in the following text drawn from his essay:

“The history of the philosophy of the tragic is itself not free from the tragic. It resembles the flight of Icarus. The closer thought comes to the general concept, the less that the substantial, the source of thought’s uplift, adheres to it. Reaching the height of insight into the structure of the tragic, thought collapses, powerless. At the point where a philosophy, as a philosophy of the tragic, becomes more than the knowledge of the dialectic around which its fundamental concepts assemble, at the point where such a philosophy no longer determines its own tragic outcome, it is no longer philosophy. It therefore appears that philosophy cannot grasp the tragic – or that there is no such thing as *the* tragic.”⁶

I think that an acute sense of the finitude of rationality underlies Szondi’s work and I share this sensibility with him. Despite this sense of limits though, Szondi does seek for a point of reference, a general structure that would yield insights into a fundamental phenomenon. Now in this context, what does it mean to say that a philosophy of the tragic must progress with a sense of its own failure? To me, this means that the best we can do is to pursue insights into the relations that form the pattern or dialectic of tragedy. We can deepen our insights into the tragic while yet avoiding telos and sublation. My position is that the tragic as it appears in social and historical life is meaningful by virtue of the processes that go on within it. My take on Szondi’s

⁶ Ibid., p. 49

basic point is as follows - the tragic is a dialectic that results in the irreversible destruction of something valuable and this destruction does not lead towards the sublation of the original conflict or the healing of the wound, so to speak. In my mind, “valuable” does not have to be something of the “highest value”, the Nietzschean Dionysus or Schelling’s Freedom. What is lost in tragedy does not necessarily have to be framed within the context of a unified whole (universal) or an overarching concept. The meaning of tragedy does not have to be based on the assertion of a universal or a concept. I am with Szondi until this point but where I certainly disagree with him when after laying out the dialectic as a valid structuring criteria, he fails to supply the required substantive content. The value of my project lies in the substantive content which I place in relation with the dialectic.

The tragic, as it appears in social and historical life leads to concrete human suffering, why can we not speak about tragedy from that perspective? This loss is irreversible, so is it necessary to think in terms of sublation? Most significantly, the tragic dialectic as it makes its appearance in the life of a “common man” is also tragedy. This is something that needs to be framed right here, at the beginning of this dissertation. The last chapter of my project is based on the tragedy of Willy Loman. Not being a Hamlet or an Oedipus, he is certainly not the embodiment of a universal. His tragedy is that of failure of expectations and broken promises. Content-wise this is a theme that would bind all four chapters of my project. There is dialectic at play in Willy Loman but it does not have a telos and neither is Loman’s tragic loss sublated into a transcendental or immanent sphere. My position is that the tragic in the common life of Willy Loman provides us with a model for exploring substantive themes like the displacement of identity and the investment of all of one’s inner resources and expectations not in a void but in a process that involves other people who have now turned away.

In above quoted text, Szondi says that the “closer thought comes to the general concept, the less that the substantial, the source of thought’s uplift adheres to it”. Szondi seeks to introduce the dialectic in his analyses of the plots of various tragic dramas. I think that the search here is for the “substantial” and one purpose of this search is to look for ways to strengthen the thesis that the dialectic is a valid criterion for analyzing forms of tragedy. An even more important purpose, in my view, is the deepening of our understanding of various forms of the tragic. My dissertation is an effort to carry the project outlined by Szondi into a different direction. My

position is that forms of tragedy in philosophical systems and in drama are reflections of the tragic as it unfolds in social, historical life. In my project, I explore as to whether or not it is possible to supply the required “substantial” element through images and themes drawn from social and historical life and then see how much the dialectic and content of forms of the tragic in philosophy and literature can help us understand the former.

The concern with the idea of tragedy and not the poetics, dialectical process, openness, resistance to systems and teleology are all structural elements derived from my reading of Szondi. These themes would bind all four chapters of my dissertation together. I hope to have provided enough clarification of this point. I hope also to have shown that my work can be placed in the tradition of theorizing on the tragic that begins with Schelling. In terms of content, my emphasis upon the notion of tragic flaw is one of the elements that hold the entire project together. I think that a tragic process is undergone by a human person or persons. Even when speaking about the tragedy of culture in chapter II, I work according to the premise that culture is embodied in human persons even though it has now attained autonomy. The tragic flaw is that aspect of a person’s character which leads to tragic unraveling. The term tragic flaw may bring forth some negative moral connotations but that should not be the case. Tragic flaw as an aspect of character is very different from piety and impiety or other such morally laden notions. I understand tragic flaw as the adherence and refusal to give up on a role and all of the expectations that emerge from it even as it is precisely this role which becomes the source of tragic unraveling, that is, the failure of expectations. In my view, tragic flaw is the complex of character traits which keep tragedy in place. Another factor or complex of factors is the power of the objective. It is difficult for me to move away from the subject-object dualism, particularly when I think about tragedy.

In each of the four chapters I consider a different form of tragedy having a specific and concrete social meaning. The second chapter is about irreconcilable differences that destroy harmony. From a formal perspective, this chapter is on diremption and conflict in the dialectic. The substantial content which provokes the investigations in this chapter is a tragic event or image of the following sort. There are two (or more) sets of obligations which are equally justified and yet irreconcilable different from each other. These conflicting obligations may lie at the basis of one single community or society or they may be part of a broader sphere of relations among

different societies or segments of the world. Now let us say that fateful circumstances arise whereby groups of persons embodying the different obligations come into conflict with each other. Persons constituting each of the two groups adhere to their respective obligations with such fierceness that they become blind towards the position of the other side and refuse to accommodate and recognize opposing concerns. The situation moves to a point where the persons belonging to the two groups call out for the physical elimination of the other. In fierce adherence to their respective positions, the persons undergoing the tragic process manifest the tragic flaw. It is evident that the adherence to inherited and assumed roles and obligations is necessary for this tragedy. In other words, the tragic flaw loses meaning in this thematic context if there are no deeply felt obligations. Also, the dialectic is at play here because either one community is being ripped apart from within or two entirely different groups of people have come together in a state of opposition. It is the former case, which, in my view is more acutely tragic.

In this chapter I turn to the Natural Law Essay where Hegel posits that tragedy is the dialectic-diremption and reconciliation - of ethical life. After careful textual analysis of this text and struggling with the teleological inevitability therein, I move to the Spirit of Christianity text and then devote considerable space to the Aesthetics, a text in which Hegel relies least on his metaphysical system. In addition to the philosophical texts, I center also upon the American Civil War, an event tested on the anvil of history and other events that are more current. This latter group includes the civil confrontation in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I also explore the dialectic of law and love in the Antigone of Sophocles. In this chapter I struggle with Hegelian inevitability and give, what I think is a secular and ameliorative understanding of the notions of ethical life as the source of rational obligation, tragic fate and guilt and reconciliation. In my view, Hegel has a deep concern for the vitality of the ethical life. I understand ethical life as a complex of rationally and historically grounded obligations. Broadly speaking, the vitality of the ethical life is based on the elimination of the inorganic, which is the complex of factors which threaten to disrupt this unity. The one main source of the emergence of the inorganic is the creation of a situation where the embodiment of one obligation is suppressed for sake of the ascendancy of the others. Another source of the inorganic could also be obligations that are no longer justified in a specific historical context and they only play a disruptive role. All of the justified obligations have to be kept alive and respected for the sake of

the vitality of a single community or in the sphere of relations among different communities. The ethical life is also the ground or source from which people derive their political roles and obligations. The roles assumed by a current generation have already been molded or remolded by the actions of the previous generation. In assuming their respective, conflicting roles, current generation carries the burden of ignorance and blindness coming from the past. This is one aspect of tragic fate in the dialectic of ethical life. My position on reconciliation is that is ultimately only an affect or emotion that emerges when we see the conflict through the lens of, what for Hegel is the philosophical spectator. From this context it can be clearly seen that all of the colliding obligation have some strong force of justification on their side. However, for the vitality of the ethical life, we either need mutual recognition or the persons embodying one of the complexes of roles needs to be sacrificed. Reconciliation that comes out of mutual recognition is the only way in which the harmony among opposing particulars can be restored. Otherwise, one of the sides in the conflict would need to be destroyed as an inorganic, disruptive element. The thrust of my arguments in this chapter is that it is possible to understand diremption without recourse to metaphysical necessities even as we work within the framework of Hegel.

The theme of the second chapter is the tragedy of culture. From the formal perspective of this dissertation, this chapter is about alienation or objectification in the dialectic. The most important conflict here is between institutional certitude and individual freedom. The original purpose of any genuine cultural product – is to motivate growth in the mind that engages with it. In other words, culture is not an essence but a process which consists of the engagement of the human mind (subject) with the creation of and extraction of intellectual and spiritual nourishment from objects of culture. Now, it can and does happen that as a cultural product develops through history, it deviates from its original purpose so much so that it becomes alienated from and is a source of the decline of precisely that human mind which it was supposed to enhance and nourish. This is the basic premise on which this chapter is grounded. Just one of the concrete images that come to my mind is the ongoing transformation of Islam into a reactionary force characterized by denial of the creative capacities of the individual.

Now, if the process of culture consists of dialectic between subject and object then this dialectic assumes a tragic form when the subject (mind) is alienated from the object of culture. So a split occurs within one process, that of culture. Moreover, the tragic dialectic plays itself out over

here also in the sense that the objects of culture which represent a good turn into their opposite and cause damage. The tragic flaw also comes through in the course of this chapter. When the dialectic of culture turns into tragedy, it continues to adhere to a process that has lost its value. Great expectations were built around the objects of culture but even as the human mind becomes alienated from them, it is still drawn towards them and these objects continue to diminish the life of the mind leading to the failure of all of expectations. Here too, the crisis of expectations emerges from the source that was supposed to fulfill them. Both Georg Simmel and Nietzsche have written about the way in which the dialectical process of culture turns into a tragedy, that is, as culture becomes autonomous in its historical development, it misses and subverts the goal that it was programmed to achieve. I develop this theme of objectification and alienation on the basis of the texts these two thinkers while laying much more emphasis upon Nietzsche. I draw a distinction between objective and cultural value on the basis of my study of Simmel. However, it is Nietzsche notion of culture as an activity which engenders the capability of making and keeping either some specific promise or promises in general that provides me with the foundation for inquiry.

Chapter III is about the tragedy of self-deception - I investigate the relation between self-deception and the tragic dialectic. Speaking with reference to structural continuity, we can say that this chapter deals with objectification in the dialectic. I understand objectification as the replacement of reality with abstractions. The tragic flaw in this thematic context consists of two factors. First, there is a strong consciousness and robust affirmation of a role and all the expectations and obligations that come with it. This consciousness comes paradoxically into conflict with a complete lack of consciousness towards the self and towards concrete reality. That the self is a unified whole is a basic premise on which this chapter is grounded. This blindness drives a wedge through the person undergoing this tragic process. The tragic figure in self-deception knows that he needs to fulfill certain promises. He affirms these obligations and is driven by a desire to fulfill them. However, his actions only drive the tragic dialectic forward. This dialectic consist, mainly of two elements, actions carried out with the intention of healing wounds and these same actions yielding precisely the opposite, that is, destructive results which serve to intensify the crisis of expectations. Once again, at the centre of this dialectic is objectification of that which lies within the self – (Lear’s “darker purposes”) - and that which is concretely present in the world. This chapter is built upon Oedipus Rex and Sartre’s Analysis of

Bad Faith from Being and Nothingness. I draw a distinction between tragic self-deception and ordinary self-deception to show that the former leads to irreversible loss and more crucially, it cannot be overcome by an exercise of will and freedom.

In the fourth chapter I focus upon tragedy as the failure of expectations and the question of human dignity. In terms of the structure binding together all four chapters, the focus here is on the relation between identity crisis or crisis of expectations and the dialectic. I think that thematically, the upshot of the first three chapters appears in this, the final chapter of my dissertation. The tragic process undergone by Willy Loman is the locus of this chapter. This is a relatively less explored topic in the philosophical literature on tragedy. It would in fact, not be inaccurate to say that in the eyes of most scholars, Willy Loman is not even a tragic figure. I am assuming that this bias towards Loman is provoked by the fact that he is simply an ordinary person, a common man, so to speak, whose life is falling apart. In the context of my project, it is precisely the commonness of Willy Loman which makes his tragedy so significant. As I have asserted before, the tragic process results in an irreparable or irreversible loss of something of great value. The term “loss” here could denote a complex of factors but what it ultimately boils down to is the failure of persons’ expectations due to broken promises. I have been stressing upon this theme throughout my dissertation but it is only here that it gains real prominence. It is the bareness of Willy Loman’s character which makes it possible for us to zero in on the crisis of expectations and establish that this is a tragedy in its own right in addition to being general enough so that it can encompass other tragic themes that have a social and historical meaning. In the previous three chapters, there are factors which prevent us from focusing upon the crisis of identity for its own sake. This is because the human persons at the center of those chapters are always at the helm of something “big”. In chapters II and IV, the focus really is on Antigone and Oedipus respectively – both are embodiments of obligations towards the state. In the third chapter, the focus is on culture, which is once again something that goes above and beyond individual human person even as they undergo its tragedies.

Yet, Willy Loman presents us with a very different understanding of the toll that a tragic event can take on the people who undergo it. I show how the tragedy of Willy Loman provides us with a mythological model or path for gaining insight into crises of expectations undergone by the common man. I think that the dialectical pattern of this form of tragedy is also quite evident.

Basically, Loman's crisis is generated when promises are broken in precisely those relations where he invested himself with his deepest inner life. The tragic flaw of Willy Loman is his refusal to relent, to give up on the relations that are the source of his deepest expectations and define his place or identity in the world. In the contrast between Willy and his son Biff, we also see the difference between tragic and non-tragic characters. It becomes clear that the potential for tragedy is manifested only in those who strive to form a place for themselves in the world by assuming a role, fulfilling responsibilities and expecting reciprocation.

CHAPTER II
IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES OR DIREMPTION AND CONFLICT IN
DIALECTIC

Irrespective of the radical differences between various philosophers who have written about the tragic, this is a point on which all of them would agree - The tragic conflict consists of a clash of forces, all of which have some strong justification on their side. I think that the justification of each force in a conflict can be located in many different types of ground. To say that the grounding consists purely of ethical right – in a narrow, abstract sense - is to be blind to the plurality inherent in a tragic conflict. The grounding for a force may well be in the realm of ethical norms or religious beliefs but then people are willing to die for other types of principles. There are forces of nationalism, race, ethnicity and economic class and then there are forces of religious ideology. There are also more hidden, mysterious forces whose grounds lie perhaps in the murderousness, violence and will to dominate that lies beneath the surface of human civilization or they may well be the product of the project of rational human enlightenment. These two grounds are still not totally outside the grasp of human sight but I think that there can be a ground of conflict which is more inaccessible and mysterious. In short, to say that the tragic conflicts in political and social life can be approached purely through means of normative social inquiry is to be blind to the multifaceted nature of the subject matter.

Before moving on to a discussion of philosophical texts, I would like to further delineate my subject matter and to show what motivates me to do what I am doing. My subject matter is the tragic strife in human life that leads to the rupture of communities, loss of life and the destruction of culture and value. The definition of tragic conflict that I started with comes through a study of Sophoclean tragedy in western culture. However, my position is that the actual locus of the tragic conflict is not drama or philosophical system, but life. A very important question that can be raised at this point is as follows – Why take the route of the philosophy of the tragic to address a matter that ultimately calls out for very practical inquiry? I think that every situation of tragic political strife is unique with its own set of apparent and hidden conflicting forces. Such a situation does indeed call out for practical, scientific inquiry with a conciliatory focus. The aim of such an inquiry is to appease as many of the apparent forces as possible and to perhaps even make forays, on the basis of creative intelligence, into what remains hidden.

Granting that, there is a crucial element that the study of the philosophy of tragic conflict can bring to the inquiry and make it richer in insight. This crucial element consists first of all of the concrete sensibility of our limits in reaching a total resolution of the conflict. Whether we place it in the conceptual realm or in the situation on the ground, there is bound to be an unassimilated remainder that would always persist. There is a fierceness with which the forces in conflict adhere to their respective grounds and this is revealed by the philosophy of the tragic. Speaking from within a situation, there are limits that all parties in a conflict have to recognize and abide by in order to maintain equilibrium, albeit a tense one. There is nothing deeper than tragedy to teach us lessons about the recognition of difference and the limits of self-assertion. The study of the philosophy of the tragic also brings into question the very idea of reconciliation. It opens up the issue of teleological ends by asking the following types of questions: Is there an end towards which all this strife is moving? Will all this bloodletting ever lead to something great? If the inquiry into conflict has to maintain its integrity and authenticity, there must be recognition of the possibility of failure and its various modes.

The subject matter of this dissertation is exploration of the concrete meaning of tragedy at a very broad political, social and historical level. After surveying the literature on the philosophy of the tragic, I have decided to devote this chapter to texts drawn from Hegel. I feel that for this specific topic, the employment of other great writings on the tragic would require too much of an extrapolation. Hegel, in my view is the one who addresses the subject most directly. This chapter is based on historical, textual analysis - I start with selections from the *Natural Law* essay, devoting considerable space to it after which I move on to a shorter discussion of quotations from *Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* and then spend the most amount of time delving into the *Aesthetics*⁷. It is important to note that broadly stated, in his philosophical oeuvre Hegel employs tragedy as a model for explaining conflict and for explaining historical progress or change. The chief examples of the latter model are *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. In both instances, Hegel remains consistent with the notion that tragedy is the dialectic of ethical life, however, these are two radically distinct philosophical uses of tragedy and we must avoid any undue conflation of the two. In my mind, Hegel's references to tragedy as a model for conflict are more pertinent in the context of this

⁷ See Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, translated by Paul Fleming (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). pp. 15 – 24. In writing about Hegel in this chapter, I have often taken guidance from and relied upon Peter Szondi's analysis.

chapter and it is this consideration that has led me to turn to the *Natural Law* essay and the later texts which, in my view, are more direct continuations of the view on conflict presented in the earlier work.

Hegel understands tragedy as the dialectic of ethical life. This is a basic position that he consistently maintains throughout his work. I will first be looking at Hegel's exposition of his basic stance on the tragic as it appears in the *Natural Law* essay⁸. As we know, in Hegel's view the task of philosophy is to overcome dualisms. The *Natural Law* essay is directed chiefly against the formalistic dualisms that Kant and Fichte bring into philosophy. In the realm of ethics, Kant and Fichte leave us with rigid separation of positive law and individual morality and the universal and particular. Hegel confronts these dualisms with the dialectic and self-consciousness. With his concept of "ethical life", Hegel seeks to unite into a single, living whole all the splits between duty and free, inner self-conscious moral life. Let us look at some quotes from the natural law essay surrounding this issue:

"Fichte wants to see every action and the whole existence of the individual as an individual supervised, known, and regulated by the universal and the abstraction that are set up in opposition to him."⁹

"Formalism disrupts perception and its identity of the universal and the particular...the real, however, is a sheer identity of the universal and the particular."¹⁰

Hegel has problems with the abstract, artificial distinctions and oppositions that have been created between the universal and the particular. The real, in Hegel's philosophy consists of the total identity of the universal and the particular. The universal can be extracted from the particular and vice versa. In Hegel's ethics, the ethical life of the individual (particular) and the universal absolute ethical life are presented in their identity. "The essence of the ethical life of the individual is *the* real and therefore universal absolute ethical life; the ethical life of the

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences*, translated by T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

⁹ *Ibid.*, Knox, p. 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Knox, p. 125.

individual is one pulse beat of the whole system and is itself the whole system.”¹¹ This unity of the two is, however, defined by dialectical confrontation; this identity of the universal and the particular is not a stable, perpetually harmonious state. Hegel may have done away with abstract distinctions but in their place he brings in a dynamic opposition. The oppositions are not done away with; rather, based on the notion of *Aufhebung* from Hegel’s logic, these oppositions are uplifted into the center of the concept of identity and retain their dynamic interaction therein. Hegel understands the relation between the opposing components of identity as relations between powers. So there is struggle between the powers of vital individuality and inorganic law, that is, between living particular and abstract universal. The conflict between the powers is immanent, that is, it suffuses the unity and it is precisely that which gives vitality to this unity or identity. The power that tends towards diminishing the ethical life of the whole is separated and sacrificed. Inorganic law as an abstract universal is a power that the ethical life rigorously separates from itself and sacrifices it.

For Hegel, both the state of nature (absence of law: anarchy & lawlessness) and the law in its institutional form are inorganic elements of concrete ethical life and are also present in the Idea of ethical life. In opposition to formalism, Hegel’s “absolute Idea of ethical life...contains both majesty (of law) and the state of nature as simply identical”¹². It is important to note that Hegel places law in the inorganic part of ethical life and sees it as an abstract realm where the universal and particular are set in rigid opposition. “The whole state of law” is “alien to individuals” and is a “supreme power” that is “single and particular” and keeps the individuals under subjection¹³. It is crucial also to note the distinction between the Idea of Ethical life and Ethical life itself. In contrast to its ideality which is characterized by unity ethical life in existence is rife with fragmentation or difference. For Hegel tragic conflict occurs precisely because the Idea of ethical life as an absolute universal – the Divine - enters into a reality that is subject to the principle of particularization.

Hegel says that “absolute ethical life” or “absolute ethical totality” is “nothing other than a people” and the individual proves his affiliation with an ethical totality (a people) by necessarily

¹¹ Ibid., Knox, p. 112

¹² Ibid., Knox, p. 66

¹³ Ibid.

exposing himself to the risk of death¹⁴. The impulse of the absolute, the infinite, is to unite the ethical totalities into an identity. The various individual ethical totalities are thus pitted against each other because they have radically different positions and struggle against the absolute which is characterized by indifference. Hegel wants to give a notion of substantive ethical position and individuality that is rooted in concrete reality. Individualities, says Hegel, are not simple rational entities. They are instead in relation with totalities (peoples) and also with the Divine universal. All relations in Hegel have both a positive and a negative aspect and the same applies to relations amongst individualities. On the one hand, individualities can co-exist in relative independence from each other and even flourish together. On the other hand, however, individualities do bear negatively on each other and are impelled to cancel each other out. This negative aspect of the relation between individualities is expressed in the virtue of courage. For Hegel, this negative interaction of one individuality with another establishes the necessity of war¹⁵. At this point, Hegel gives his own take on regenerative strife. In Hegel's philosophy war is necessary for the maintenance of a healthy ethical life, not only of people but also of ethical institutions. The ethical health of a people demands that the institutions do not become static and lifeless, that is inorganic. An active, dynamic relation has to be always maintained between the individuals and the ethical institutions. Even devastation of the most immense sort is a necessary sacrifice for the Absolute and the people. "Just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would result from a continual calm, so also corruption would result for peoples under continual or indeed 'perpetual' peace."¹⁶ It is evident from this that Hegel seeks to justify the sufferings of war and destruction because for him they are necessary for the progress of absolute ethical life.

As has been discussed above, Hegel's natural law essay is directed against the abstract divisions between universal and particular that Fichte and Kant bring into philosophy. Hegel's discussion of absolute ethical life also reveals another attack on formalism. Kant wrote a famous essay on "perpetual peace" and he along with Fichte proposed that human history is progressing towards universal harmony where all peoples in the world would live together in a cosmopolitan order and that they would all agree upon set principles. For Hegel, this is not so. The necessary plurality of ethical individualities is rife with conflict at many different levels. Towards the end

¹⁴ Ibid., Knox, p. 92.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

of his essay, Hegel emphasizes upon the necessity of the negative relations between individualities. He asserts moreover that individuality (particularity) has a living relation with the spirit (universal). Individuality, for Hegel, is the living embodiment of the spirit (universal). At the same time, this individuality, even if totally subsumed - in all its vitality - into the absolute spirit does not constitute the totality of this spirit. That is why, says Hegel, there is “always an incongruity between absolute spirit and its shape”¹⁷. This vital, ethical individuality cannot attain absolute shape by simply being placed under abstract universals. Hegel here refers to the following as escapisms – “the shapelessness of cosmopolitanism”, “the void of the Rights of Man” or “the like void of a league of nations or a world republic”. Hegel, as we know, wants to affirm individuality in all its vitality and violence as part of absolute ethical life. The Absolute Idea, for Hegel, possesses intuition (*Anschauung*) in which it sees both the universal and the particular. It sees itself in its individualities that is, in its objective form and fully recognizes it before returning to itself in its totality. And this is what makes it absolute spirit and “perfect ethical life”¹⁸. This absolute spirit in its ethical life disengages itself from negativity but not before recognizing that negative as a part of itself, that is, its fate. The absolute spirit purges itself of the negative and this process is a tragic sacrifice because that which has been sacrificed was always a part of the absolute spirit. This sacrifice can be a sacrifice of certain principles that deviate from the organic ethical life, for instance principles based on pure economic expediency or it may be a sacrifice of entire individualities (a people) themselves. The elements that are being sacrificed are those which have either isolated themselves totally from the process in which the whole ethical life flourishes or they have become dead and inorganic - institutions, for instance. These elements, which could potentially have been positive, thus become negative and their sacrifice is necessary for the progress of ethical life towards increasing freedom.

Hegel’s notion of the “inorganic” is multi-faceted; however, focus on one aspect of it will take us closer to Hegel’s definition of tragedy. Following the model of Plato’s *Republic*, Hegel also divides society into three classes and explains the virtues belonging to the respective classes¹⁹. There is, however, a crucial difference in the criterion that Hegel adopts for the assignment of virtue. This criterion is freedom and Hegel assesses how free a class is based on how much the individuals belonging to that class are willing to risk their own lives for the life of the ethical

¹⁷ Ibid., Knox, p. 132

¹⁸ Ibid., Knox, p. 133

¹⁹ Ibid., Knox, p. 99 - 103

totality. For Hegel, the universal ethical life permeates the individuals in a very organic manner. The very identity of individuals belonging to an ethical totality is inextricably bound up with this whole and therefore the highest class lives and dies to maintain this identity and to let the whole flourish. The aristocrats and nobles belong to this highest class and their work consists of giving their lives for the whole and also the development of political life. The virtue of the aristocratic class is courage. The second class consists of traders and businesspersons. Individuals belonging to this class adhere to their own subjective interests, remaining always at the level of understanding and never proceeding to the level of reason where ethical life dwells and which demands the sacrifice of one's life and purely personal interest. This second class adheres to "bad infinity" because they are engaged in an unreflective and empty pursuit of wealth. The virtue of the traders is honesty. There is a third class that consists of laborers working on the land. The virtue of this class is loyalty and they never hesitate to serve in the armies run by the nobility.

Hegel sees the necessity of the second class for the flourishing of the whole. The existence of the class of traders – which is not an organic part of ethical life - is justified as long as their perspective on things as it were does not dominate the social whole. This existence, however, is also seen by Hegel as a sacrifice given by the ethical life to "subterranean powers" in order to appease them and this sacrifice is necessary, it is fate. For Hegel, fate consists of what he refers to as the inorganic part of ethical nature. This inorganic nature is not apart from ethical life; it is intrinsically involved with it and must be recognized as such.

*"Tragedy consists in this, that ethical nature segregates its inorganic nature (in order not to become entangled in it), as a fate, and places it outside itself: and by acknowledging this fate in the struggle against it, ethical nature is reconciled with the Divine being as the unity of both."*²⁰

In our discussion of the class schema in Hegel, we saw how the business class deviates from the ultimate goals of ethical life. However, Hegel recognizes this class as necessary. The commerce class is not detached from ethical nature. It is very much a part of ethical life and created by it in its movement towards freedom. This class is nevertheless "dead" and "inorganic" and is to be recognized by the individual as fate. There is a necessity to this process where ethical life

²⁰ Ibid., Knox, p. 105

engages with its inorganic nature and keeps itself pure. The economic necessity within the ethical whole is only one type of necessity. There can be other types of inorganic necessities. The point to be noted is that this is the way in which ethical life necessarily progresses through history and towards freedom. Ethical nature, which here includes both the individual, the ethical totalities and the Absolute undergoes division within itself whereby it recognizes its fate. This recognition, in Hegel's view, is a crucial step towards reconciliation where the inorganic element (fate) is ultimately united with the Divine.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have focused on one aspect of necessity or of the inorganic. It is clear though that the concept of fate has a much broader application for Hegel. We need only to revisit one aspect of Hegel's metaphysics and see how it builds into his theory of tragic conflict. Ethical Life, for Hegel, is organic (alive) and is a "sheer identity of the universal and the particular"²¹. Due to this, ethical life always has an "individuality and shape"²². The ethical life assimilates within itself living individuality which is subject to chance and necessity. This, Hegel says, is the inorganic side of ethical life albeit it is organically immersed in it. In this connection, Hegel speaks of "world-spirit" as it manifests itself in different shapes in different peoples. There is an element of necessity to the way people belonging to different cultures and different geographical regions of the world determine the shape of their ethical life. However, despite radical individual differences, the world-spirit does move through all individual groupings of ethical life. For Hegel then, this individuality which is both accidental and necessary is something that would lead to tragic conflict. This individuality leads precisely to an enrichment of the ethical life even though this is often achieved through war and destruction.

"As a result of the supersession of this confusion of principles, and their established and conscious separation, each of them is done justice, and that alone which ought to be is brought into existence (i.e., the reality of ethical life as absolute indifference, and at the same time the reality of that indifference as real relation in persistent opposition) so that the second is overcome by the first and this compulsion itself is made identical and reconciled."²³

²¹ Ibid., Knox, p. 126

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., Knox, p. 104

This above text appears in the Natural Law Essay after the discussion of class schema. The conflict of principles that Hegel here speaks of are those that are adhered to by the various classes. The courage of the nobility and the loyalty of the laborers are pitted against the private self-interest of the bourgeoisie. I would extrapolate at this point and say - in the light of the other parts of the essay – that this conflict of principles can occur at many different levels of the ethical life precisely due to the radical plurality that it holds within itself. There are radically different systems of belief and not just belief but also things like ethnic and clan affiliations that come into conflict with each other. After all, if the identity of the individual (as Hegel sees him) is organically connected with a whole then he or she will fight for this whole (whether it is a city, a country or just a group) at various different levels. Returning to the text, we can see how, for Hegel, the conflicting principles are individual and specific and yet each of them is done justice and not because one or the other attains ascendancy over the others. It is just that what ultimately attains ascendancy is the ethical life in its sheer identity of the universal and the particular. The ethical life has two aspects, absolute identity or indifference and the oppositional conflicts that play out between the particulars that are a part of this identity. All strife ends in reconciliation at a higher level where the conflict itself is reconciled with indifference or unity. Hegel continues thus:

“This reconciliation lies precisely in the knowledge of necessity, and in the right which ethical life concedes to its inorganic nature, and to the subterranean powers by making over and sacrificing to them one part of itself. For the force of sacrifice lies in facing and objectifying the involvement with the inorganic. This involvement is dissolved by being faced; the inorganic is separated and, recognized for what it is, is itself taken up into indifference while the living, by placing into the inorganic what it knows to be a part of itself and surrendering it to death, has all at once recognized the right of the inorganic and cleansed itself of it.”²⁴

The world-spirit divides itself into various ethical totalities (peoples) having specific individual characteristics. These characteristics are a product of necessity. The world-spirit would pervade through all ethical totalities nevertheless every totality is conditioned by geography, culture and ethnicity. It seems to me that for Hegel, this element is something that cannot be resolved by philosophical reason. It is rather something that needs to be confronted and honored for its

²⁴ Ibid.

intractability. Necessity and the inorganic are linked with particularity. According to Hegel's notion of intuition, this aspect of particularity has to be seen together with what is universal and absolute (ethical life). Thus, there is a self-division within ethical nature whereby the element of necessity and the inorganic are sacrificed. After this sacrifice, the division is cancelled out and both parts – as seen in the definition of tragedy – are reconciled and united with the Divine.

“This is nothing else but the performance, on the ethical plane, of the tragedy which the Absolute eternally enacts with itself, by eternally giving birth to itself into objectivity, submitting in this objective form to suffering and death, and rising from its ashes into glory.”²⁵

This essay contains echoes of Hegel's philosophy of history. I think that for Hegel, the Absolute or Divine or Universal is ultimately history. It is well-known that Hegel gives us a theodicy of history. The Absolute pervades through history. It has two natures or attributes. The first is ethical nature, which is the realm where the progress of history towards human freedom takes place. The second is what can be called physical nature. This is the part that is rife with necessity, plurality, death and suffering. The Absolute enters into the physical, objective world and is torn apart. However, precisely as a result of this tearing apart, the Absolute re-emerges from the process with greater self-knowledge and freedom. Hegel thus gives a system that would reconcile all the tragedies of history. There is a teleological end in Hegel and the movement towards this end is based on a dialectical logic, however, Hegel fully affirms the tragic conflicts that occur in the journey towards this end.

Hegel further illustrates the tragic process of self-division and reconciliation by reflecting upon the dual nature of the Divine²⁶. The Divine, as it makes its appearance into objectivity is always dual natured (ethical and physical) and its movement herein is the absolute unity (opposition) of these two natures. The Divine is always gaining self-knowledge and in this movement of its conflicting natures, it comprehends (intuits) itself as courage. As we know, knowledge, for Hegel is freedom and in the tragic process the Divine frees itself from the necessity and death that is intrinsic to the physical part of its nature. The Divine achieves knowledge of courage as an ethical principle that is necessary for progress. The courage that the Divine displays in

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

sacrificing its inorganic or physical nature is reflected in the courage shown by those noble individuals of ethical totality who risk their own life for the enrichment of the whole. Now this liberation comes at the cost of the life of the Divine because this life is inextricably linked with the inorganic nature. However, death itself is a part of the inorganic nature and once the latter is sacrificed, “death is mastered” and the Divine emerges victorious and indestructible. The physical, inorganic nature possesses a power of abstraction that is purely negative. This means that the inorganic nature is constituted such that there is a compulsion to remove its particularity from the universality of the Divine. In the tragic process, however, which is the process in which the Divine becomes objective, the pure negativity of the physical nature is cancelled and this nature is shown as being a part of the living unity of the Divine. The Divine flows into the physical nature as spirit and becomes one with it in ideal unity. Hegel says that physical nature is the “living body” of the Divine, in other words, the Divine is reconciled in this living body. The tragedy here is that the living body is rife with plurality and difference and therefore, through spirit, the living body always experiences the Divine universal as alienated from it.

Hegel uses his interpretation of the conclusion of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* as an illustration of his notion of tragedy as the dialectic of ethical life. Towards the end of the drama, there is a legal conflict, as it were, between the Eumenides “as powers of law in the sphere of difference”²⁷ and Apollo “the god of indifferenced light”²⁸ over the destiny of Orestes. The conflict unfolds in front of the “organized ethical order, the people of Athens”²⁹. The Eumenides represent the inorganic part of ethical life. The Divine appears and acts in both the human mode – as the Areopagus – and in the Divine mode as Pallas Athena. In the human mode, the council of Areopagus recognizes both particulars of the conflict but does not reconcile the two. The Divine then appears as Pallas Athena and brings about “a reconciliation in such a way that the Eumenides would be revered by this people as Divine powers, and would now have their place in the city, so that their savage nature would enjoy (from the altar erected to them in the city below) the sight of Athene enthroned on high on the Acropolis, and thereby be pacified.”³⁰ The conflict between Apollo and the Eumenides represents the self-division of ethical nature and the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

recognition of the Eumenides first as an inorganic power and then as fate shows the sacrifice that is to be given so that Orestes is fully restored to the ethical totality (city of Athens).

From the preceding discussion, we learn that for Hegel the historical process in general and ethical life in particular is suffused with tragic conflict. It is the element of Fate that makes a conflict tragic. This fate appears as inorganic necessity. It would be interesting to consider Hegel's discussion of comedy in the Natural Law essay because in comedy there is an absence of fate or necessity. This, for Hegel is not the way in which conflicts that produce progress in history unfold:

“Either it falls within absolute vitality, and thus presents only shadows of clashes (or mock battles with a fabricated fate and fictitious enemies), or else it falls within non-life and therefore presents only shadows of self-determination and absoluteness; the former is the old, or Divine comedy, the latter the modern comedy”³¹.

When speaking of the first type of comedy, Hegel refers to Dante's Divine Comedy. This drama unfolds in a medieval world where God will always be dominant; no serious questions or oppositions can be raised against His authority even though there is much conflict as to what this authority means. There is “absolute vitality” here because the inorganic elements of necessity (death, suffering, war, plurality) do not create any ruptures within the Divine. All wars and struggles are fought not against a concrete inorganic nature that creates real hurdles in the road towards greater freedom and consciousness. The battles are, in a sense, stylized struggles fought amongst enemies that are all fictitious. The other type of comedy is that where the ethical life is basically dead and there is no longer even an imaginary fate. The tussles over here take place between self-centered individuals. The Absolute, in Hegel's terms is now an illusion and is replaced by shallow principles of self-determination. There is no ethical totality to which the individuals belong in any real sense and they create their own identity. The people struggled with one another on a purely individual basis and the Absolute is nowhere in the picture.

In Hegel's writings after the Natural Law essay, he presents us with a theodicy of history but the oscillations of this theme are already present within the exposition of tragic conflict in this early

³¹ Ibid.

work. In the context of the natural law essay, we can say quite fairly that the Divine or Absolute or History has an ethical nature which is the realm of freedom and progress. This ethical nature is, however, always enmeshed in a dynamic relation with an inorganic element of necessity. If ethical nature in its purity is universal then the inorganic nature is the realm of particularity, necessity, death and suffering. The inorganic nature provides an opposition to the ethical that is necessary for progress to occur. The “world-spirit”, on the ethical level, divides itself into “ethical totalities” or peoples who are organically associated with this totality. The vitality of a people requires some to always be ready to lay down their lives and many others to be loyal to the whole. The particularization inherent in ethical totalities always leaves them open to ruptures within and also conflicts with other totalities. This element of particularization or inorganic necessity provokes growth. The movement of ethical life is always towards the flourishing of the whole. If a society becomes very individualistic in that the impulse towards the whole weakens or if institutions lose their organic vitality then the people enter into a stage of decay. Such trends can only be reversed through the action of those who are going to risk their lives and embrace death. All such sacrifice and violence is ultimately reconciled with the progress and freedom that is attained due to it.

Before moving on to Hegel’s writings on tragedy from the Aesthetics, it is important to delve briefly into Hegel’s exposition of ethical life and tragic fate from an earlier work, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate”³². The text on Christianity was written in 1798 - 1800 and here too, Hegel sketches out a critique of Kant’s ethics, but unlike the essay on Natural Law this critique is placed within the structure of a study of the philosophy and the history of Christianity. Hegel sets up his critique within the framework of the clash of Christianity with Judaism. For Hegel, the spirit of Judaism is similar to that of Kantian ethics or of law. As we have seen before, Hegel thinks that Kantian ethics creates rigid, irreconcilable opposition between the universal and the particular, life and law and the human and Divine. The particular is totally subjugated to and governed by the universal. Through his description of the spirit of Christianity, Hegel seeks to bring forth his own dialectic. The spirit of Christianity overcomes the dualisms through the figure of Jesus. Jesus is the power of love that mediates between the human and the Divine. He, being both the Son of God and the Son of Man, creates an identity of the human and the Divine,

³² Hegel, G.W.F., *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, in *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992)

reconciling both forces through a dialectical movement and His resurrection is the mediation between life and death. In Kantian ethics there is the notion of duty which corresponds to the objective Divine command in Judaism. Hegel seeks a notion of ethos that is not based on objective commands; rather, it is grounded in human subjectivity in its identity with universality. The figure of Jesus binds together subjective disposition with universality. This Identity, not unlike that posited in the Natural Law essay, possesses an inner, dialectical movement of the powers that are in it. Identity is not a static form; it contains within itself the movement of self-division and reconciliation. What gets split from the Identity is fate and reconciliation with fate occurs through love. Judaism, in Hegel's view, is devoid of fate because the individual is subject to the objective, divine commands. For Hegel, it is Christianity that establishes the possibility of tragic fate. It has to be kept in mind that Hegel's notion of fate, even as it is expressed in the Christianity essay, can be linked with ancient Greek philosophy. It is a powerful notion with important repercussions for understanding political conflict.

Hegel chalks out the difference between consciousness of punishment and consciousness of fate³³. Consciousness of punishment consists of fear of or obstinacy towards a power that is alien to me. Consciousness of fate consists of the recognition of a part of my own self as being in opposition to me. This means that I have performed certain deeds which emerge from my subjective disposition. These deeds are a part of me and they have alienated me from my own self. The only authentic bad conscience or guilt is the one that is evoked by the recognition of an opposition within the self. There is an aspect of the self that has become hostile and the recognition of this constitutes consciousness of fate.

This hearkens back to the idea of absolute ethics. Ethical life faces a rupture from within and sees its inorganic nature as fate. In the Christianity essay, fate is the fear not of an alien being (punishment) but a hostile aspect of one's own life. This fear or bad conscience is not evoked by an objective law. It is evoked rather by a law that one creates for oneself as life is lived. Fate is thus a product of one's ethos. In Absolute Ethics, guilt does not emerge from the transgression of an objective law but of a law that one had created through one's subjective disposition or ethos.

³³ Ibid., Knox, pp. 231-232

The consciousness of fate opens up the possibility of reconciliation which is absent when there is mere punishment due to violation of an objective law. In the latter case there is absolute opposition between the doer and the deed, hence there is always something that evades the punishment. In Absolute Ethics or Christianity, consciousness of fate is really consciousness of one's own life as being hostile. There is an opposition here but it takes the form of a dialectical relation. Recognition of fate would eventually lead to reconciliation with it, through love. It is thus that a new harmony is restored within life or ethical life, to be more precise.

In the Christianity essay, Hegel's concern is to illuminate the origin of fate and with it the origin of dialectic. Both these seem to stem from the spirit of Christianity. However, it can be seen that Hegel's discussion of tragic fate can be applied above and beyond the borders of just Christianity. In both the Christianity essay and the Natural Law text, tragic fate is the embodiment of the instant at which ruptures occur within ethical life. In the Christianity essay, tragic fate is the recognition of an element of one's own life as being hostile to life and in the Natural Law essay the recognition is that of something that is an inorganic part of ethical life. There is a clear correspondence here and in the Natural Law essay we can see the general concept of tragic fate. Hegel's discussion of Macbeth in the essay on Christianity can be seen as his explanation of tragic fate as such:

“The illusion of trespass, its belief that it destroys the other's life and thinks itself enlarged thereby, is dissipated by the fact that the disembodied spirit of the injured life comes on the scene against the trespass, just as Banquo who came as a friend to Macbeth was not blotted out when he was murdered but immediately thereafter took his seat, not as a guest at the feast, but as an evil spirit. The trespasser intended to have to do with another's life, but he has only destroyed his own, for life is not different from life, since life dwells in the single Godhead. In his arrogance he has destroyed indeed, but only the friendliness of life; he has perverted life into an enemy. It is the deed itself which has created a law whose domination now comes on the scene; this law is the unification, in the concept, of the equality between the injured, apparently alien, life and the trespasser's own forfeited life. It is now for the first time that the injured life appears as a hostile power against the trespasser and maltreats him as he has maltreated the other. Hence

punishment as fate is the equal reaction of the trespasser's own deed, of a power which he himself has armed, of an enemy made an enemy by himself."³⁴

We can understand this passage by starting with what we have already written about Hegel's disagreement with all theories that create an ineradicable gulf between the universal and the particular. We are working here in the realm of ethics. So in objective law, there is the law itself which is a universal and this is in opposition to the deed of the individual, which is a particular. If the deed has violated a law, then it is abstractly translated into universal terms and the doer is punished accordingly. Hegel counters this notion of objective law by positing life as a unity of universals and particulars. Through a particular deed, the doer has created a rift within life. The results of the deed are seen as an alien, hostile form of his life by the doer. Life is life, as Hegel says, there is no escaping it. Macbeth is an example of an individual who has externalized his fate, that is, he is totally alienated from it. His act, that is, the murder of Banquo has created a hostile element within his own life. In a state of bad conscience, he refuses to recognize that his deed is embodied as Banquo's ghost and is the hostile incarnation of an element of his own life. The tragic fate of Macbeth is the split that he has created within his own life. He has acted in such a way that he has "forfeited" the unity and refuses to recognize this. Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost as something external to him whereas it emerges from his own acts, his own life. Even though Macbeth has escaped from the objective law, his actions have created a rupture within his own ethos and the alienated element extracts vengeance upon him. Fate, in short is never external, it is a product of one's actions. In Macbeth's case, justice is served on the basis of a law that he himself has created. The possibility of reconciliation is open to the criminal if he strives to restore unity by first recognizing that he himself is responsible for a disruption. The world of objective law, on the contrary remains devoid of such a possibility because the law itself remains permanently disconnected from the individual.

The passage about Macbeth is ultimately aimed at explaining the dialectical process of subjective fate, however there is another provocative passage from the Christianity essay that can be seen as a projection of tragic fate on to entire communities or groups:

³⁴ Ibid., Knox, p. 230.

“The fate of the Jewish people is the fate of Macbeth who stepped out of nature itself, clung to foreign Beings, and so in their service had to trample and slay everything holy in human nature, had at last to be forsaken by his gods (since these were objects and he their slave) and be dashed to pieces on his faith itself.”³⁵

Now Hegel’s notion of ethical life, as our discussion of its characteristics may already have made evident, is beyond Kantian notions of duty or to take this point further, it is in a sense beyond good and evil. Ethical life is the Divine in Hegel and yet it is inextricably bound up with inorganic nature and fate. This fate is produced as a result of actions. The unity of ethical life is broken up through a dialectical process and this same tragic process also restored the unity. Ethical systems which consist of inextricable divisions – Kant and Judaism – are rigorously differentiated from what Hegel calls ethical life. In objective law there is no room for the tragic dialectic. The oppositions within objective law are always maintained. It seems to me then that what “Evil” means for Hegel, is any tendency towards disruption of the unity.

In the above quoted text, I would like to point towards two things. First of all, there is at work in this passage, the notion of tragic fate and the affects of its externalization and lack of recognition. Macbeth, as we have already discussed, is alienated from the fate that he has created for himself. Alienation from fate on a subjective level can occur also at the level of communities. Setting aside the controversial aspects of the above quoted passage, one has to pay homage to its explanatory potential. A community, a state or religious group can act in such a manner that it creates for itself a fate that emerges precisely from its actions. Now, according to the natural law essay, tragic reconciliation with this fate can occur only with the recognition and sacrifice of the inorganic. From the essay on Christianity, reconciliation with fate can occur through love. This fate is created through the operation of ethos, which at the broader political level is nothing but the sum total of all activities that are carried out to preserve identity and life. Some of these activities can create ruptures within the totality of ethical life.

Next, I also want to point towards the conflict between the world of love and world of law that is such a central theme in the later Hegel. I interpret the passage as saying that it is possible for a powerful individual -and thus the group he leads- to be subservient only to the objective or the

³⁵ Ibid., Knox, p. 205

inorganic. The objective world in general is beset with ineradicable difference. Universals control particulars in that realm. In this passage, we can see the conflict between this objective world and the world of love which is ethical life in its purity. Subservience to the objective removes the possibility of reconciliation with fate which can occur only through love. If we go back to our earlier analysis of passages from the Natural Law essay, it can be seen that such subservience can lead to the ossification of ethical life at the level of peoples. This combined with the notion of externalized fate shows how destruction unfolds upon not just the leaders (Macbeth in this case) but those whom they lead.

Now that we have set out Hegel's notions of tragedy as the dialectic of ethical life and tragic fate, we can delve into his discussions surrounding tragic conflict from the *Aesthetics*³⁶. I would like to begin with an exposition of the following text:

“The primary requirement for a dramatic poet as an author is that he shall have a full insight into the inner and universal element lying at the root of the aims, struggles, and fates of human beings”³⁷.

This statement shows, first of all that even though Hegel's discussion of dramatic poetry (and tragedy as one of its modes) occurs within the context of an Aesthetic Theory, it is directed towards explaining conflict in the much broader socio-historical human sphere. Now what is this “universal element” that the dramatic poet needs to fully grasp? To respond to this question, we would need to trace relevant aspects of Hegel's argument from the beginning of the section on dramatic poetry³⁸.

Hegel, as we have discussed before, replaces dualisms with dialectical relationships. In the realm of Aesthetics, the dialectic is between content and form. For Hegel, dramatic poetry reveals the “most perfect totality of content and form”. In drama, Content and Form bleed into each other. Drama is a portrayal of a complete, substantive action and if the content is provided by the aims of self-conscious individuals then form is supplied by the character or dispositions of these individuals. The action of a drama is stripped of externality and it has a dual focus – on the

³⁶ Hegel, G.W.F., *Aesthetics*, translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Calderon Press, 1975)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Knox, p. 1163

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Knox, p. 1158

hand, it originates and is executed by self-conscious individuals, on the other hand, it has a specific end that is determined by the substantive nature of aims that are involved. The action in its completeness consists of collisions of opposing aims and obligations and their eventual reconciliation. In dramatic poetry, the will of the individual coincides with action and the former is determined by substantive aims, interests and dispositions that are specific to the individual.

For Hegel, drama has to be the reflection of what actually takes place in human affairs and action. The conflicting circumstances in drama are produced by the inner life of individuals. I understand that in Hegel's thought, there is no lag or gap between inner life and action. This inner life consists not only of will and disposition of character but also of substantive aims and motivations. The individual at the center of the action is self-determined but not self-contained and purely independent therefore the aims and obligations of one individual come into conflict with those of another individual. Every action has consequences but these emerge not only from the inner life of the individual but their repercussions are absorbed by the individual. The reality of the drama is produced by the individual and it is he who eventually absorbs this reality. This is where the notion of fate comes in. Action is produced by inner intentions and aims and its realization is evident to the actor. This action constitutes the entire reality and the individual must identify himself with it for after all, it emerges from the willed actualization of inner aims. Action which makes the external world is the actualization of inner aims and therefore the individual takes responsibility for what has transpired. There is a sense of total participation here in that there is no gap between disposition of character, impulse, will and action.

The individuality of a protagonist in drama is determined totally by his action. Hegel goes so far as to say that the action is the hero of the piece. Now this action is carried out under specific circumstances and it has a "specific end as its universal soul"³⁹. It is action which forms the drama and the sole ground of this action is the inner life of the individual with its complex of will, intention and disposition of character. This inner life or individuality consists not of objective things but of aims and their accomplishment. Every action has a specific end and it is produced by the self-determined individual and yet, the scope of this end lies above and beyond the particularity of the individual. This means that the wills, obligations and intentions that motivate an action have something substantive about it. These are rooted in the inner life and yet

³⁹ Ibid., Knox, p. 1162

that inner life is “only its living instrument and animating sustainer”⁴⁰. Hegel’s notion of fate once again plays its role here. Aims are self-consciously established and yet their outcome and goal are outside the power of the individual. The end of an action opposes not only the intention and will behind it but also the aims of other individuals and it is in these conflicts that the essence of human affairs is revealed.

If we step back for a moment and examine what Hegel is up to here, we find that in his view of human action as it appears in the Aesthetics he is interested not only in overcoming the dualisms of traditional philosophy but also to provide a genuinely experiential basis for his theory. Actions have outcomes that were not intended by the actors. There is a dual collision at work here, the first being the lack of harmony between the motivating inner life and the end itself and then between the various different motivations that are in play. I think that what Hegel aims at giving us here is a very open-ended dialectic that is not dependent upon a metaphysical system per se. We will see this as we go along.

What gives dramatic character to an aim, objective or pathos is that it comes on the scene in such a way that it calls forth another distinct and opposing pathos. There is something very specific in the nature of every aim which can be traced back to the circumstances in which the individual decides to put his will into action. The situation calls forth opposing obligations in the individuals who are involved:

“This driving ‘pathos’ may indeed, in each of the actors, derive from spiritual, moral, and Divine powers, such as law, patriotism, love of parents, relations, spouses, etc., but if this essential object of human feeling and activity is to appear dramatically, it must come on the scene separated into different and *opposed* ends, so that the action has to encounter hindrances from other agents and fall into complications and oppositions where both sides struggle for success and control”⁴¹.

There is a specific context within which a conflict develops. This conflict is nothing but a conflict of specific aims directed towards specific ends. There are forces that drive the aims.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Knox, p. 1162

⁴¹ Ibid.

These forces or obligations are grounded in concrete obligations towards different aspects of what Hegel would call the living ethical order or ethical life. Different and opposing obligations are evoked within a specific context and the action is a direct expression of these obligations or deeply, vitally felt obligations. The individuals in conflict are expressions of the obligations that they harbor. They are vital instruments of these obligations such that these obligations define the individuality of the agents. There is a very strong adherence to the forces that evoke these obligations among all parties in the conflict. Each party is driven specifically by a particular force and struggles to impose itself on the other party or to simply overcome it. There is one context which evokes different, opposing aims and obligations. The separation of these obligations from within one context points towards a tragic human blindness. For Hegel, the forces that drive the aims towards their opposing ends take full control of the individuals so much so that they are blind to the obligations felt by opposing individuals.

The element of tragic finitude comes fully into the picture. I have self-consciously affirmed the forces or loyalties that drive me. There is something very substantive about these forces; these are not simply lyrical outpourings of whims and fancies. A set of specific circumstances provide the impulse whereby I form aims and will them into action in a way that I am my action and the world that is thereby formed is a product of my action. The action has a specific end or outcome that is beyond my control and so also were the self-consciously enacted obligations. I may not intend it but my actions come into conflict with other actions. The substantive powers that drive me are fully justified but they also leave me in a state of blindness. My obligations are also my limitation. The radical difference within obligations place limits upon our capacity to live in harmony.

“The real thing at bottom, the actually all pervasive cause is therefore indeed the eternal powers, i.e. what is essentially moral, the gods of our actual life, in short what is Divine and true; yet the Divine does not appear here in that tranquil might in which, instead of acting, the unmoved gods remain blessedly sunk in themselves like peaceful statuesque figures, but on the contrary it is the Divine here in its community, as the substance and aim of human individuality, brought into existence as something concrete, summoned into action and put in movement.”⁴²

⁴² Ibid.

In our discussion of the Natural Law essay, we have seen how Hegel replaces rigid oppositions with dialectical relations. The ethical life of the individual is immediately the ethical life of the absolute or Divine. I think in the Aesthetics, what Hegel means by the Divine is less of a metaphysical principle. The conflict still occurs when the Divine (universal) enters into the human community (world of particularization) however this relation has now been further subjected to the rigors of contingency and specificity of circumstances. What needs to be stressed here is that Hegel's Divine does not have to necessarily be understood as a metaphysical substance. It is the totality of ethical life as constituted by the substantive pathos of individuals. The forces of all the obligations sacred to the people, so to speak, together form the Divine. This totality does get separated into distinct aims but nevertheless there is something absolute that remains despite all the ruptures that it undergoes. In actual human conflicts, the ethical totality is necessarily separated into distinct actions that come into opposition with one another.

“But if in this way the Divine is the inmost objective truth lying in the external objectivity of the action, then in the third place, a decision on the course and outcome of the complications arising from the action cannot lie in the hands of the single individuals who oppose one another, but only in those of the Divine itself, as a totality in itself. Therefore the drama, no matter in what way, must display to us the vital working of a necessity which, itself self-reposing resolves every conflict and every contradiction.”⁴³

The material ends of actions form the objectivity of dramatic conflict. The subjective element is provided by the way in which the individuals decide to act upon aims and then absorb the consequences of these actions. The Divine is the truth that lies at the center of both the objective and the subjective aspects of an action. For Hegel, it is necessary that the Divine or totality would return to itself after undergoing collisions through the individuals which are its instruments. Hence it is the totality itself which always inheres through conflict and determines the reconciliation that occurs at the end. The self-conscious individuals assume responsibility for the outcome but they will always be guilty because they have, of necessity violated some aspect of the sacred whole. This sacred whole or Divine totality is what emerges intact. It is this totality which contains all obligations that define what the opposing individuals are.

⁴³ Ibid., Knox, p. 1163

In our discussion of Hegel's text from the Aesthetics we started by asking what the universal element is that lies at the core of human struggles and fates. Hegel tells us that what lies at the core is the totality of all the differing or opposing obligations that humans hold as sacred. The dramatic poet for Hegel must have an all encompassing vision that penetrates to the core of conflict. He must be able to discern not only the specific obligations that are evoked by circumstances but to also understand the way in which they would come into conflict with other obligations. It seems that for Hegel the dramatic poet holds the position of the philosophical spectator.

"He must be capable of recognizing what those powers are which apportion to man the destiny due to him as a result of what he has done."⁴⁴

We have already elaborated upon Hegel's notion of tragic fate. This fate is not something external to the individual; it is rather a product of the actions that he has carried out. For Hegel, the pathos that drives action has both an objective and a subjective aspect. The innermost objective aspect is the Divine or the totality of all possible vital obligations. There is also something objective about the specific powers that the individual adopts from within the totality of powers or obligations. The pathos or aims are nevertheless self-consciously affirmed and the responsible individual fully absorbs the outcome that results from the individualized realization of pathos – this is the subjective aspect of pathos.

"The right as well as the aberration of the obligations that rage in the human heart and impel to action must be equally clear to the dramatist, so that where to the ordinary man's eye it is obscurity, chance and confusion that prevail, there is clearly revealed to him the actual accomplishment of what is absolutely rational and true."⁴⁵

In Hegel's thought, dramatic poetry is the reflection of what unfolds in actual human conflict. Individuals become action which is determined by the obligations that they carry. These obligations can be clearly discerned by one who has the vision of totality. The conflict is a conflict of aims individualized in action and these opposing aims are distinct from one another

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

because they are drawn from different sources. The conglomerate of these aims, which is the Divine, is what is absolutely rational and true. There is something very specific and pure about the aims that have been individualized in drama. These aims are rooted in specific spiritual powers and they are not to be confused with other types of objective properties.

I think that I need to provide one brief but concrete example from History to show what this dramatic conflict is that Hegel speaks of and what constitutes a philosophical spectator or dramatic poet. The American Civil War is without doubt a tragic, dramatic conflict and for me, Abraham Lincoln is more than a philosophical spectator, in a sense he is the Hegelian world-historical individual. In the theatre of the American Civil War, Lincoln clearly discerned the opposing aims that were in conflict with each other. There were those who were driven by the obligation to abolish slavery even at the risk of the destruction of the Union. Then there were others who were against slavery but they were driven primarily by the obligation to preserve the union. There were some who were motivated by the progressive ideals of the North which wanted to see America as an industrialized nation. All of these groups came into opposition with the confederates whose aims and objectives were driven by a obligation to maintain agrarian society and aristocratic nobility which demanded the continuation of plantations. As a philosophical spectator Lincoln clearly discerned the presence of the central conflicting aims. He could also see how the obligations driving the two sides made them totally blinded to each others' points of view. What mattered most to Lincoln was the preservation of the Union and individual liberty therefore he recognized the aberration in the pathos that drove the confederates. As an actor, Lincoln worked to preserve his two most cherished principles while at the same time he recognized with much pain that the pathos of the South must be overcome and sacrificed. The civil war as a tragic conflict of opposing aims emerged from within a single ethical order.

“In drama they (spiritual powers) enter in their simple and fundamental character and they *oppose* one another as ‘pathos’ in individuals. And the drama is the dissolution of the one-sidedness of these powers which are making themselves independent in the dramatic characters,

whether, as in tragedy, their attitude to one another is hostile, or whether, as in comedy, they are revealed directly as inwardly self-dissolving.”⁴⁶

The actors become their pathos through their action. Each actor is the individualization of a specific pathos or aim. Drama reveals most clearly the pathos in their pure, original form. Pathos produces one-sidedness, blindness towards the pathos of the opponent. The characters, in their adherence to their pathos think that they can gain independence from or overcome the opposing pathos. However all pathos are part of one ethical order or totality and therefore it is necessary that in drama this one-sidedness is eventually merged into that original totality or the Divine. In terms of tragic drama, Hegel’s favorite is the *Antigone* of Sophocles. For Hegel, Antigone is the individualized expression of the “spiritual power of family piety”⁴⁷. Her opponent Creon is the independent expression of another pathos that emerges from the legal constitution of the state. Sophocles’ play for Hegel shows that the tragic flaw of both is their blindness to the opposing pathos. Their hostility towards each other is a result of their adherence to one, albeit justified pathos. The movement of the drama shows, Hegel says that the two opposing obligations are complementary and necessary for the enrichment of the ethical order. The conflict itself was necessary, I think, in order to fully revive for the human community of Athens, the two central spiritual powers. However the two need to work together for the flourishing of the ethical life of the community.

What keeps tragedy in place, according to Hegel, is the total seriousness of the characters about the pathos or obligation that they embody, which is what lies at the root of the conflict. This is the way in which conflicts unfold in history. In comedy, at the opposite of tragedy, there is a self-dissolving seriousness about pathos which prevents the outbreak of deadly conflict. Not only are Tragedy and Comedy are two opposing modes of dramatic poetry but also reflections of two radically distinct ways in which obligations are understood and adopted. I think that our discussion has prepared us to delve into Hegel’s definition of tragedy as it appears in the *Aesthetics*.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

It should be evident by now that the tragic, whether in history or in dramatic poetry brings forth what Hegel calls “absolute truth”. The term has a transcendental-metaphysical ring to it but I think that what Hegel means by this is the eternal ethical order which forms the vital basis of all of the substantive obligations, aims and actions that individuals harbor. The other aspect of tragic action is of course human consciousness or subjectivity. The obligations are carried through into action by fully self-conscious and self-determined individuals. Hegel has the following to say about tragic action:

“The true content of the tragic action is provided, so far as concerns the *aims* adopted by the tragic characters, by the range of the substantive and independently justified powers that influence the human will: family love between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters; political life also, the patriotism of the citizens, the will of the ruler; and religion existent, not as a piety that renounces action and not as a Divine judgment in man’s heart about the good or evil of his actions, but on the contrary, as an active grasp and furtherance of actual interests and circumstances.”⁴⁸

For Hegel, the Divine is rooted in human consciousness. It is the ethical order in its totality. This order consists of spiritual powers some of which Hegel has already enumerated. What makes tragic action tragic is that all of these powers are equally justified. When Hegel speaks of justification, it is quite clear that his focus is not on good and evil. The substantive nature of an aim is precisely its justification. It is an obligation that is deeply felt in ethical life; it is not imposed from without as in the case of religious commands. Hegel wants to capture the vitality of conflict and I take him as saying that all forces in conflict emerge from within those who are acting. Even religious beliefs are evoked by circumstances and they must coincide with pathos. Ultimately, a vital force that originates from within the ethical order is actualized in the subjects which are its instruments. This force aims at subduing or canceling out another force that has equal justification.

In speaking about “genuinely tragic characters”⁴⁹ Hegel says that their entire being is determined by the one aim that drives them. Their character is not an ensemble of differing qualities; instead

⁴⁸ Ibid., Knox, p. 1194

⁴⁹ Ibid., Knox, p. 1195

they are solid like “works of sculpture”⁵⁰. They have strong individuality which demands that they self-consciously adapt and follow one substantive aim from out of the ethical order. The aim gets fully actualized in the being of the tragic characters.

In terms of Aesthetic subject matter, Hegel, when speaking about tragic characters and the obligations that form the ethical order, is referring to the world and poetry of the Greeks. I think, however, that these elaborations can yield powerful insights about massive political tragedies that unfold in front of us every day. Before going further, I would like to express my understanding of Hegel’s view of the justification of the various aims. This justification emerges not from external benchmarks but inheres precisely in the very substantive nature of the aims themselves.

If we look briefly at Iraq from this perspective, we can see several conflicting aims and obligations. The Americans are driven by the cause of liberty and the furtherance of national interests. Among Iraqis there are many who clash with the American troops. Some of these insurgents are driven by nationalism which is a substantive interest. Then there are others whose fight against the American army on the basis of values deriving from religion. These values are fully actualized in their action through which they are furthering their own interests.

The most intense tragic conflict occurs however amongst the people of Iraq. In Hegelian terms, there is a free self-consciousness among the people whereby they have independently adopted aims which have little to do with the broad national life. I think that Shia and Sunni Islam can be seen as two substantive sources of spiritual power within the ethical order that is Iraq. Leaders belonging to the two sects have totally adopted those aspects of the teachings of their sect that are most in conflict with the other side. This adoption of ideology is totally passionate and one-sided to the extent that the individuals driven by it are blind to the substantive nature of aims adopted by the other side. We can see how leaders of the two sects are ordering the destruction of people from the other sect. This slaughter of the innocent is a tragic situation in Hegel’s terms because both parties draw not only upon the same ethical order but also the same religion from within the ethical order. All religions teach tolerance and respect but we can see that in a tragic conflict what is most at stake for the actors is the furtherance of the interest of the specific

⁵⁰ Ibid.

community to which they belong; they are in no mood to observe or recognize any objectively framed and external notion of duty. They have become their obligation, Shia obligation or Sunni obligation and these obligations were evoked by specific events in history. Moving back to Hegel:

“The proper theme of the original type of tragedy is the Divine; not, however, the Divine as the object of religious consciousness as such but as it enters the world and individual action. Yet in this actual appearance it does not lose its substantive character, nor does it see itself there as inverted into the opposite of itself. In this form the spiritual substance of will and accomplishment is the concrete ethical order...Everything that forces its way into the objective and real world is subject to the principle of particularization, consequently the ethical powers, just like the agents, are differentiated in their domain and their individual appearance. Now if, as dramatic poetry requires, these thus differentiated powers are summoned into appearance as active and are actualized as the specific aim of a human ‘pathos’ which passes over into action, then their harmony is cancelled and they come on the scene in *opposition* to one another in reciprocal independence. In that event a single action will under certain circumstances realize an aim or a character which is one-sidedly isolated in its complete determinacy, and therefore, in the circumstances presupposed, will necessarily rouse against it the opposed ‘pathos’ and so lead to inevitable conflicts. The original essence of tragedy consists then in the fact that within such a conflict, each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has *justification*; while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and infringing the equally justified power of the other. The consequence is that in its moral life, and because of it, each is nevertheless involved in *guilt*.”⁵¹

In this passage from the Aesthetics, Hegel aims at giving an expansive definition and explanation of tragic conflict. I have already elaborated upon many of the ideas that are being discussed here but some further reflection upon central notions is needed. I would like to begin with Hegel’s notion of tragic guilt which corresponds directly with the notion of tragic fate which we discussed earlier. I think that in the Aesthetics Hegel has secularized the notion of tragic fate, almost completely freeing it from overarching metaphysical and religious systems and rooting it in lived human experience. The tragic characters become the embodiment of a

⁵¹ Ibid., Knox, p. 1195-1196

specific, well-justified ethical pathos. In being this pathos, the tragic hero lives his ethical life. However, it is precisely in living this ethical life that he infringes upon another tragic hero who is the embodiment of an opposing pathos. The tragic fate of the hero is that through one and the same action, he fulfills a deeply felt obligation but also infringes upon the execution of another equally justified obligation. The tragic hero or actor in carrying out his action fulfills one aspect of the ethical order but that same action leads him towards creating a division within the ethical order. This guilt is tragic because it is incurred by carrying out an action that is fully justified. The hero's guilt emerges from his fate which in turn is created by the action that he has carried out willingly and knowingly. The judgment of guilt is not based upon abstract notion of morality, law, good and evil. It stems rather from the accomplishment of an action which was necessary for the revivals of a specific aspect of the ethical order. More importantly, it is necessary that the execution of the action would result in the infringement or violation of those who are vital instruments of other aims. So the tragic guilt or suffering or fear is not in front of a power that is external to the hero. It emerges rather from the ethical order which is a determinant not only of the freely chosen and legitimate act but also of the resulting collision. The tragic individual as embodiment of one power of the ethical order bears full responsibility and guilt in front of the totality.

By speaking in terms of the Divine and its particularization, Hegel undoubtedly brings in a metaphysical context but I think that this metaphysics is experiential. What I mean by this is that the pathos of the individuals is not rooted in a transcendental sphere; rather, it is founded upon their concrete history and the actions that they and their ancestors have carried out. Hegel makes it clear that this Divine is not the Divine of religious consciousness. Tragedy deals with concrete human action and the consciousness at work here lies outside the ambit of religious consciousness. In the Natural Law essay, the tragic conflict is linked essentially with the Divine but here in the Aesthetics the Divine is surrounded by concrete, contingent circumstances. The Divine, as we have discussed before is the ethical order and it is precisely the ethical that undergoes division during tragic conflict. However, the manner of division instead of being based on Substance metaphysics is determined by the concrete, specific circumstances in which the ethical finds itself. The ethical universal is expressed only through human action, in concrete particularization. As a particular substantive element of the ethical order it provides the motivation for action and is actualized in the accomplishment of the action. Once again, it is

very important to note that this ethical order as a universal is the totality of substantive, strongly justified obligations. In the realm of Ideas, there is a difference that prevails amongst these obligations, as constituents of the ethical order; however, this ethical order is not confined purely to Ideality, it appears only in the real world whose nature is such that the obligations come on the scene in opposition to one another.

Tragic conflict then presents us with irresolvable contradictions and guilt which occurs precisely on the basis of actions that are fully justified. I think that Hegel's schema gives some insight about irresolvable political conflicts in the world around us. For Hegel, the full truth of the ethical order can, however be revealed not through conflict alone but also through the necessary reconciliation. The reconciliation that Hegel speaks of in the Aesthetics does not emerge of necessity out of his metaphysical system but well grounded in human experience and as tragic as the conflict itself. Reconciliation, for Hegel is a state where the individuals with conflicting obligations learn to engage with each other in harmony. This reconciliation, as is evident from our discussion of tragic action, does call for the sacrifice of what Hegel calls "the one-sided particular"⁵². I understand this as the individual who fails to recognize the validity of the opposing claims and continues to act in a way which makes it impossible for harmony to be achieved. The one-sidedness or blindness towards harmony needs to be annulled in order for harmony (or truth) to shine through and this is the deeply tragic aspect of reconciliation. It results from the sacrifice of a one-sided individual who embodies a spiritual power which is a necessary element of the harmonious ethical order that eventually comes into view.

Reconciliation is that part of the unfolding tragic conflict which has more affinity with the resolution of the conflict in comparison to the conflict itself. For Hegel, reconciliation calls for the adoption of a tragic outlook on conflict. This outlook calls for recognition of and reflection upon all of the conflicting aims and is yet critical of what Hegel calls the "false one-sidedness" of these aims. The powerful tragic figures that embody a substantive obligation would eventually either be destroyed because of their one-sidedness or they would need to resign themselves into accepting what they had with full force rejected. So the tragic reconciliation is an outlook, a state of mind that raises the state of conflict above guilt and suffering. I think that the way in which Hegel speaks about reconciliation in the Aesthetics shows that this

⁵² Ibid., Knox, p. 1197

reconciliation emerges affectively from the way in which the action unfolds. The conflict itself is irreconcilable. Its resolution occurs either with the destruction of those who continue to remain one-sided or it would occur when the parties in the conflict become conscious of their one-sidedness and resignedly accept the validity of the position of the other side. In other words, the conflict destroys everything except the justified obligation itself. In a tragic conflict, it is difficult to reach reconciliation among the individuals in collision, however, the value that they embody – assuming they are justified – come alive in the fabric of the community.

It is crucial to note that unlike the Natural Law essay where reconciliation occurs due to the necessity inherent in the metaphysical system, reconciliation in Aesthetics is a sense or affect that emerges from the unfolding of the violent tragic conflict. I would say that reconciliation is not necessary in metaphysical terms. When a tragic conflict unfolds, it brings to our view what Hegel calls “eternal justice”⁵³. I understand this justice as being what is true and in accordance with reason. This sense of justice refuses to see the irreconcilable conflicts as being permanent and demands their resolution. The ethical obligations that the individuals put into action have both a positive and a negative side. The positive side of these obligations is that they fulfill through action one specific constituent of the ethical order. The negative side is that they can commit the tragic individual to a position whereby he wants to struggle against and eliminate those who hold opposing obligations. The sense of justice calls for the adoption of an all encompassing outlook that gives all parties of the conflict their due. The positive side of all aims has to be affirmed while the negative side needs to be annulled because the tragic conflict cannot be a permanent condition according to the demands of reason and justice.

The Israel Palestine conflict is a tragedy that has been unfolding for the past sixty years. In Hegelian terms, it is the conflict between two obligations – Palestinian nationalism and Islamic ideology on the one hand and Israeli nationalism and Judaic (Zionist) ideology on the other. Both parties in the conflict are driven by aims that emerge not from an abstract morality but from an ethical order. These aims come from deeply felt obligations that have been evoked by specific historical circumstances. Individual leaders and many people on both sides have become the embodiment of their actions. They suffer due to their actions because these actions have created the world in which they live and thus their tragic fate. Both sides, in my view, are

⁵³ Ibid., Knox, p. 1198.

equally guilty because of their false one sidedness. The Palestinians have perhaps suffered more because of lack of military and economic power but nevertheless Israelis have also gone through major wars and live in fear of terrorist attacks. Through their actions both fulfill obligations towards their community but they continue to remain blind to the obligations felt by the other side. The tragic conflict as it unfolds affectively brings to the surface a sense and need for reconciliation. Justice demands that the unity of the ethical order be restored. The idea of disharmony lasting forever goes against the sense of reason and justice. The reconciliation is not going to emerge of necessity as a result of some metaphysical principle. It is rather a sense or outlook that emerges from contemplation upon the situation of irreconcilable opposition and it demands that both sides give up the negative side of their obligation. If not, one or most likely both parties of the conflict would get destroyed. The best possible resolution would demand the emergence on both sides of leaders who embody the obligations towards the interest of their respective community and yet have an all encompassing tragic outlook that recognizes the value of these opposing obligations for the creation of harmony.

The ethical pathos that drives the action of the protagonist at the center of a tragic conflict is supplied by the ethical order. A specific pathos is one aspect of the ethical order as it undergoes schism in our finite world of particularization. The tragic conflict is therefore between individuals who are passionate embodiments of individual, opposing aspects of the ethical order. Now, as we have seen, Hegel's definition of tragedy from Aesthetics is very expansive and ostensibly indeterminate and it caters to tragic conflicts emerging from various different aspects of the ethical order. However, there is a particular set of opposing aspects of the ethical order which Hegel considers to be the most important. This is the conflict between what Hegel calls "the law of the land" and "family love"⁵⁴. At another point in the Aesthetics he refers to it as the collision between "the state, i.e. ethical life in its *spiritual* universality, and the family, i.e. *natural* ethical life"⁵⁵. In the *Antigone* of Sophocles the two main protagonists, Antigone and Creon become embodiments of these two spheres of the ethical order. Hegel says about *Antigone* that it is "the most magnificent and satisfying work of art of this kind."⁵⁶ I think that for Hegel, this "chief conflict" more or less illustrates the "essence" of all profoundly tragic collision. For Hegel, law and love are - "the clearest powers that are presented in tragedy,

⁵⁴ Ibid., Knox, p. 1209

⁵⁵ Ibid., Knox, p. 1213

⁵⁶ Ibid., Knox, p. 1218

because the full reality of ethical existence consists in harmony between what an agent has actually to do in one and what he has to do in the other.”⁵⁷

What then is the concrete and specific significance of this subject that is “valid for every epoch” and “despite all national differences, continues to excite out lively human and artistic sympathy”⁵⁸? Speaking first in the context of our entire discussion in this chapter, we can see that from the Natural Law essay to the Aesthetics Hegel is moving towards a progressively broader notion of tragic conflict. In the Natural Law and Spirit of Christianity texts, tragedy is purely the dialectic of an ethical life that suffers ruptures within itself through the formation of fate and is reconciled with this fate through love. The realm of law, in those earlier texts is an arena defined by the rigid oppositions between universal and particular, subject and object and therefore excludes the possibility of dialectical relations and thus the tragic. In his Aesthetics, Hegel argues not only for Antigone’s ethical pathos which consists of absolute loyalty to unwritten laws deriving from ties of kinship but also for Creon’s ethical pathos which rises out a deep sense of loyalty to the written laws that govern public life and the welfare of the state. Just as there is no confusion in the character of Antigone as she as subject becomes the embodiment of the law of family loyalty, Creon also without vacillation becomes the essential embodiment of a deeply felt obligation towards the law of the land. In fulfilling, through action their respective ethical obligations both Antigone and Creon simultaneously and necessarily satisfy and transgress the ethical order. In the writings preceding the Aesthetics, the world of the law of the land was not even considered a part of the ethical life, however, now, the tragic conflict consists precisely of the dialectic between law and love which are both elements of the substantive ethical order.

Having spoken about the conflict between love and law within the context of Hegel’s philosophy of the tragic it is important now to see how it plays a role in the harmony or discord of political life. As we have seen, Hegel refers to the state (or law) as the ‘ethical life in its concrete universality’. ‘Law’ means the laws of the state or the contents of the constitution which are to be universally followed and upheld by all citizens living in the state. I think that it is important to emphasize again that in the Aesthetics, Hegel conceives the law as a power that is an integral

⁵⁷ Ibid., Knox, p. 1213

⁵⁸ Ibid.

part of the ethical life. This means that laws have a presence that is vital. The law is not an inscription that exists in separation from the individuals. It is rather an ethical pathos, a deeply felt obligation. Hegel refers to love as ‘natural ethical life’. I take natural to literally mean blood ties. Hegel calls love family love. I take Hegel as speaking here about deep rooted ties or relations that take the form of familial love or familial loyalty. In my mind, Hegel’s notion of family love applies to a great extent literally to kinship ties but then it must also go beyond just that. I understand Hegel as speaking about a familial form of love. This means that I have to love with a deep sense of loyalty all those with whom I am linked, even outside the circle of my immediate family. This loyalty is also a vital part of ethical life and it has to be nourished.

I will speak now in terms of society and culture and on the basis of personal history. I have witnessed the dialectic between law and love in two different societies, my motherland Pakistan and modern American society⁵⁹. In the United States there are many people who literally hold the constitution and the bodies that interpret it (Supreme Court) as sacred. The Army of the United States promises to fight in defense of the constitution. Americans in general and at the widest possible level live in agreement with the law of the land because this law ultimately upholds individual freedom and liberty. However, my experience has taught me that ‘natural ethical life’ in the United States is in a state of decline. The weakness of this one element of the ethical life puts the whole at risk of disease. I have met very few young people who come from families that are intact. Ties of kinship have become shallow and weak. Family, even when it is there is devoid of blood. Friendship and love are for the most part very artificial and synthetic. The coming together and falling apart of people is often seen as purely accidental. Adherence to the law of the land and only to that has also made America a very legalistic, formal society. Exchange between individuals, even of love, is more like a legalized business exchange. In short there is a disharmony between love and law in the United States and the dominance of the latter is leading towards social decay. There is, nevertheless no doubt in my mind that individual freedom is a goal that every society needs to attain and this is a goal that the United States as a

⁵⁹ I lived in Karachi, Pakistan till the age of twenty three and then came to the United States for higher studies. I feel that I have spent enough time in the U.S to have some sense of the values that prevail here and since perhaps in my inner life I remain a Pakistani I am in a position to set up a comparison between the two societies.

society has achieved. The tragic sacrifice of a deep sense of loyalty among family and friends is perhaps a fair price to be paid for the sake of individual freedom.

If I think of Pakistan in terms of the conflict between the law of love and the law of the land, I see the former as being in ascendancy over the latter. The constitution of Pakistan reflects very little in the national life of the people. It perhaps still retains some of its vitality but it is a document that has been amended by successive rulers not for the national interest but for propagating their own rule. In Pakistan, many of the people, both rich and poor are always in search of ways and means through which they can evade the law. There are vast portions of the country where the writ of law does not even run; the law of state is not even universal. Moreover, if an individual is rich and well-connected, he can get away even with heinous crimes like rape and murder. The law of the state as a crucial aspect of ethical life has been in decline since the inception of Pakistan. The opposing sphere of love however is still quite strong and that is what keeps ethical life alive in Pakistan, albeit in a state of discord and disharmony. I think that the 'natural ethical life' in Pakistan is so strong that there is often very little sense of individual freedom. The substantive obligations that bind you to your family are often times the only substantive powers which give meaning to your life. People may well not respect the law but they would take daring action in circumstances that place family honor or integrity at stake. There are numerous instances of individuals coming into conflict with the law of the land by taking actions for the good of the family. It is also not very unusual to observe that close relationships of friendship and love that fall outside the ambit of the immediate family are seen as being inscribed in blood. In short, familial loyalty runs deep. The society, however, remains in deep discord. Pakistan is a land of great injustice. The law of love cannot on its own preserve the fabric of ethical existence.

CHAPTER III
TRAGEDY OF CULTURE OR OBJECTIFICATION AND ALIENATION IN
DIALECTIC

I would like to begin this chapter by putting a softer touch on the topic at hand, which is objectification and alienation in dialectic or the tragedy of culture. I assert that my focus is upon the tragic side of culture which reveals itself in certain specific contexts or historical circumstances. My point here is that culture is not necessarily tragic and moreover, there can be many different types even within the category – “tragedy of culture”. I am not adhering to any broad based metaphysical presuppositions about the definition of culture or the teleological aims of culture. In my mind, culture is an inclusive phenomenon at many different levels. On the one hand it incorporates everyday life, mannerisms and folk traditions. On the other hand, it also includes, what in my mind are projects – economy, religion, technology, art, law, the list is immense and diverse. It is inclusive and not exclusive also in the sense that it carries the negative and the positive, the sick and the healthy within its fold. It incorporates within itself that which is drawn with hard, clear lines and that which is vague, nebulous and as yet unresolved. Culture opens up possibilities of human freedom and yet, in my mind, all forms of culture contain a strict normative element. I do not think that a tragic dialectic is a necessary or essential aspect of culture. We can and do have tragedies of culture but this does not mean that culture is in any way inherently or essentially tragic. I think also that we need to be careful about bringing any metaphysical assumptions to bear upon the exploration of the relation between persons and culture. This relation is in a constant state of evolution and to say that culture has this or that specific meaning for an individual or a society is deeply problematic. Moreover, since culture is an inclusive phenomenon, it is problematic to offer a particular logic or dialectic according to which the evolution of culture or the relation between people and culture occurs. When engaging in cultural critique, I feel that it is better to avoid adherence to ideological thinking which seeks to completely overturn the existing cultural order. In theorizing about culture, it is important to separate that which calls out for critique from that which deserves affirmation. I think that in conducting philosophical inquiry into the realm of culture (or any other realm for that matter); one has to maintain a pragmatic and ameliorative sensibility.

Having begun this discussion with an appeal or claim to open-mindedness, I hope now to be consistent with this as I delve deeper into the matter. A process in which the forces of culture-as embodied in institutions, technology, ideology – cause the irreversible loss of things that are of great value is, in my mind, the tragedy of culture. The idea of the tragedy of culture has to be kept distinct from ideas of cultural decline or from the clash of cultures although all of these do overlap in concrete human history. I start with an assumption which, from all the evidence that I have, is a sound one - every major historically grounded cultural force contains within itself a promise or “Good” which are meaningful only when understood with reference to and in relation with individuals or society. If a cultural force manifests itself in such a way that it breaks its promise (alienating persons) and causes irreversible harm then we can say that a cultural tragedy is unfolding. According to Heidegger, the movement of western philosophy after Plato is a cultural tragedy in this sense. The original promise of western philosophy was to open up the question of Being. After Plato, this original purpose became rigidified and objectified into an essence that deviated from the path that it was supposed to take. Thus philosophy, in having turned away from the question of Being, is alienated from itself and moreover, it has closed the possibility for the individual to encounter Being. Philosophy as a cultural activity and institution adheres to and has invested all of its expectations in an objectified essence which over the course of time has moved far away from the call of Being.

The notion of broken promises is the contextual net around which this chapter is being constructed. Behind every cultural institution, there is some original promise; furthermore, during my discussion of Nietzsche later on in the chapter, I will establish that the general purpose of culture as species activity is to produce individuals who can make and fulfill promises. In a tragedy of culture, institutional certitude comes into conflict with the passion of the individual. In this tragedy, the original promise is reversed and objectified. These themes will be fleshed out by appealing to and creating an ideational conversation between Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear* and Dostoevsky’s parable of the grand inquisitor.

Towards the end of the previous chapter, I broached upon the topic of law in the context of the Hegelian conflict between law and family. If we think about law as a cultural force or more precisely an autonomous cultural institution, then its inherent promise or the good that it should produce is, I think, quite evident. In the absence of the rule of law, only power prevails. Law, as

a cultural force or institution promises accountability and the negation or minimization of reliance upon sheer power as the only way of attaining justice. Now, if in a particular social or historical context and location, law serves power instead of keeping it accountable that is, it punishes the weak and protects the powerful then a promise has been broken. When law starts to produce harm, the tragedy linked with this particular cultural institution is already underway. And this tragedy becomes concrete for those who live by the law, respect the institution and when faced with injustice they appeal to the institution, they are crushed even more by power. So when law breaks its fundamental promise, the expectations invested into it collapse. The cultural value of an existing institution of law resides solely in its capacity to deliver on its promise of providing justice in every situation, all else counts only towards objective value⁶⁰. There are societies in which the institution of law is autonomous, economically self-sufficient and labyrinthine in terms of hierarchies and procedures. Despite this, the system cannot provide justice to those who abide by it. In such circumstances, the impressive structure of the institution adds only to the objective value and serves to intensify the common, law abiding persons' alienation from the legal system. To have genuine cultural value, the institution of law needs to actively and consistently fulfill its basic promise. A high objective but low cultural value means that the soul of the legal institution, so to speak, has become rigidified and objectified. In the latter case, those running the system of law are adhering only to objectifications of laws (and not their spirit) that have no currency when it comes to delivering justice in concrete situations. In this tragedy, not only are the appellants alienated from the justice system but the system itself has become alienated from the aims which it was originally expected to fulfill.

Within the space of the above mentioned discussion in chapter II, I also considered the notion of family or the world of love, as Hegel calls it. If we carry the notion of family as a strong cultural institution into Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*⁶¹, I think that the tragedy of culture emerges as perhaps the strongest theme of the play. The drama is set in a milieu in which family is the strongest cultural force or institution, at least much more so than the law. I think that the promise that family as a cultural institution makes is that it will in every way nurture all persons

⁶⁰ My use of the concepts, objective value, cultural value, autonomy and differentiation is inspired by my reading of Georg Simmel. Reference: Simmel, Georg. *The Concept and Tragedy of Culture* from *Simmel on Culture* edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (U.K: Nottingham Trent University, 1997), pp. 55-74.

⁶¹ William Shakespeare, *Romeo & Juliet*, edited by Roma Gill, (Oxford England, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

within its fold and enforce harmony and unification among them so as to ensure the prosperity of the unit as a whole. The Capulets and the Montagues are two families at the center of the tragic conflict and they do seem to fulfill the promise that I have just outlined. However, it is also the case that through the course of history, the intense familial loyalty has led to a violent competition among the two families. This ongoing feud has resulted in the objectification of the meaning of membership in either one of the two families. So, since Juliet is born a Capulet, she must hate or have animosity towards all Montagues. And since Romeo is born a Montague, he must consider absolutely all Capulets as enemies. Thus, when Romeo and Juliet fall in love with each other, their passion comes into conflict with the rigidified objectified meaning of what it means to be a Capulet or a Montague. The heads of the two households care deeply for their own; however, the care for one's own has become causally aligned with hatred towards the other. When seen through the myopic lenses of their respective families, Romeo and Juliet are necessarily enemies. Hence, when they come together as lovers, the institution as a whole turns against this love. The Montague and Capulet families adhere to a rigid, objectified formulation of what it means to be a Montague or a Capulet. This obsession is the tragic flaw at the level of institution. Romeo and Juliet manifest the tragic flaw simply in the intensity and passion of their love which goes against the expectations of their families. The family, in acting so as to fulfill the fundamental promise, breaks the promise precisely by insisting upon a rigidly outlined course of action. As the tragedy unfolds, the two families and Romeo and Juliet become alienated from each other even as they remain intractably bound to each other. The mode of destruction ends in the death of Romeo and Juliet and of their love, a thing of the highest value. The overall dialectical structure of this process should by now be quite evident. The institution of the family moved to protect its own but ended up causing their demise. In the eyes of the family, Romeo and Juliet are of necessity enemies but in their deepest inner selves, they are lovers. A radical split occurs within a single unit -the family- as Romeo and Juliet embody aims that are in opposition to what the culture demands. The two opposing families are reconciled after the death of Romeo and Juliet but that event does not redeem that which was destroyed by the institution.

In order to thicken this discussion on the tragedy of culture and to bring forth with fuller clarity the dialectic and tragic flaw that relates to it, I have decided to delve into *The Grand Inquisitor*, a

parable presented in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*⁶². I will establish during my analysis that based on my understanding of the theme under consideration, the legend of the grand inquisitor can be read as a tragedy of culture. The cultural force or institution that is under consideration here is Christianity. That there is no single tragic hero who gets destroyed in Dostoevsky's parable is a point that can be brought up to show that this is not a tragedy. My point here is that for a specific dialectical process to qualify as tragedy, it must entail the irreversible destruction of something of great value precisely by what should have preserved it. Dostoevsky's parable is set up right in the midst of a process in which the fundamental values of Christianity are being destroyed by the institution of the faith.

I think that in his work, Dostoevsky is deeply interested in certain fundamental traits that characterize the origin of the Christian faith as a cultural force. These traits, for Dostoevsky, are embodied in the figure of Jesus Christ. I think that for Dostoevsky, Jesus is a complete embodiment of two virtues – freedom from material needs and the capacity to love all around him unconditionally. These two virtues make Jesus a saint and ultimately a martyr. It is precisely the saintliness which comes into conflict with the world and leads to the destruction of the saint. In my mind, the theme of saintliness gains most prominence in Dostoevsky's novel "*the Idiot*"⁶³. That novel revolves around Prince Myshkin who, after enduring a traumatic event, has decided to give unconditional love to all whom he comes in touch with. Myshkin is a Christ like figure who is devoid of the power of miracles and who is also free from some of the sharpness and bitterness demonstrated by the Jesus of the gospels. In creating such a figure – a genuinely simple and good soul - Dostoevsky is testing the limits placed on one who practices the dual virtues of freedom and unconditional love. In my mind, Myshkin is basically a secular saint because he seldom refers to his faith and does not purport to carry out his deeds in the name of God. Myshkin is genuinely free for there is no transcendental basis or ground for his actions. In the maddening finale of that novel, Dostoevsky details the destruction of Myshkin precisely on account of his virtues. The destruction that ensues in the denouement of that novel comes upon not just Myshkin but also those whom he loves the most and here too it seems that Dostoevsky gives a causal link between the saint's consistently loving way and the tragedy it brings.

⁶² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Grand Inquisitor* from *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by David McDuff (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 322 – 345.

⁶³ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, translated by David McDuff (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2004)

As I have stated before, tragedies of culture are not simply occurring at all times and across all contexts but rather in specific circumstances. And this is also where the social and historical significance of a cultural tragedy comes to the fore. Now, Dostoevsky's parable of the grand inquisitor is set within the context of the Spanish Inquisition. Is there any doubt that the period of the Inquisition is one of the darkest chapters in the history of western civilization with specific reference to the historical development of Christianity as a cultural force? During the Inquisition, we see the manifestation of a complete reversal of freedom and love, the two virtues that – at least in Dostoevsky's thought - lie at the origin of the faith. In the Spanish Inquisition, Muslims, Jews and other Christians who fell under the broad label of "heretics" were given a choice between conversion to Roman Catholicism or death and exile.

The dialectic weaves its way through the parable in many different ways. In Dostoevsky's depiction of the atmosphere of the Inquisition, we see how the cultural project has moved in unexpected directions so that its original promise is violated from within. The main confrontation is between two figures within the same institution. On the one hand is Christ, as the embodiment of the original promise. On the other hand is the Inquisitor, who becomes the embodiment of the violation of precisely that promise. It is interesting to note that in this parable, Dostoevsky makes Christ appear not as an ordinary man like Myshkin in *the Idiot* but with the miracle healing and of raising the dead back to life. The focus, however, is not upon the myth of the miracle but upon the power and limits of concrete and possibly secular saintly values of freedom and love. In the confrontation between the two figures, we can also observe the absolute silence of Jesus in opposition to the verbosity of the Inquisitor. It seems as if the words of the inquisitor are preemptively destroying anything that Christ may say in response. However, the silence of Christ is not a disinterested one for on his part he adheres passionately to the original promise of the culture. It seems to me that by not reacting angrily to all the provocations from the Inquisitor, Jesus manifests one particular saintly virtue – to live so that there is no causal reaction from within the self to all the cruelty and suffering coming from without. This is in opposition to how the Inquisitor has lived his life. After viewing all the depravity and cruelty in the world, the Inquisitor does indeed develop a causal reaction within his self and foregoes one of the most fundamental values of the cultural force. If, as in

Nietzsche's schema, the meaning of culture is "training and selection"⁶⁴, then I think that in Dostoevsky's view, the basic question underlying saintly freedom is as follows - How do I discipline myself so that there no longer remains a causal link between the resentful feelings of fear, anger, revulsion and the circumstances which surround me? I think that this is freedom from aesthetic point of view - to discipline oneself to not react resentfully to outside circumstances. To live so that one reacts without resentment and self-pity to circumstances which would call out these emotions in most people, is to live with freedom. This idealized form of freedom reaches completion when one loves everyone unconditionally without any need for reciprocation. This love cannot be possible without freedom from the need to react resentfully to objective circumstances. So, in terms of character, the Inquisitor heads the institution of Christianity with a fanatical devotion and yet, he has completely turned against the saintliness demonstrated by the person who is the symbolic origin of the cultural force. The opposing, contradictory figures of the Christ and the Inquisitor arise from within the same cultural force and this gives tragic acuteness to Dostoevsky's parable. Throughout his provocative speech, the Inquisitor seeks an angry response from the other side but at the end, the Jesus figure "suddenly draws near to the old man without saying anything and quietly kisses him on his bloodless, ninety-year-old lips. That is his only response"⁶⁵. This response shows that the Jesus figure adheres to his original position. And in saying; "Go and do not come back...do not come back at all...ever...ever!"⁶⁶, the Inquisitor shows that he would stand by the new, objectified meaning of the mission of Christianity. As Ivan adds later on, "the kiss burns within his heart, but the old man remains with his former idea"⁶⁷. In this parable if Jesus is the embodiment of the original character traits and even more significantly, the original promise of the cultural force the Inquisitor is the embodiment of all that has resulted in the violation of the promise. One crucial point is that the Jesus figure appearing in the midst of the inquisition only breaks into reality for an instant and vanishes forever while the grand inquisitor appears as a concrete historical fact. The Jesus figure appears only as a reminder of the original promise and the inquisitor represents the concrete fact that the promise has been irreversibly lost in history.

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

⁶⁵ Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, p. 342

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

I think that the theme central to any tragedy of culture is the broken promise. Dostoevsky makes this very explicit in this parable. In my view, the theme appears in the text in several distinct ways. The first appearance of this theme is in continuity with the notion of “*Deus Absconditus*” which attains existential gravity in Dostoevsky’s work. In my view, a religious sensibility is important to think this thought and to take it seriously. The basic idea is that there is a divine spirit or God and this spirit has turned away from the world. This turning away is the violation of a promise that was made with the people in the world. For if there is a divine spirit then that spirit must consistently pervade through the world and take care of the people. I think that for Dostoevsky, the figure of Jesus is the embodiment of the divine spirit and its promise of specific benevolence. The breaking of the “vow”⁶⁸ to return is an idea that Dostoevsky’s brings forth with almost obsessive clarity. In the parable of the grand inquisitor, the return is in itself a tragedy. This is because the return does not heal the wound. Rather, this coming back serves only to intensify the wound for it brings into painful prominence that which has been lost for ever. Dostoevsky places the return in the specific context of the Spanish Inquisition. Understood dialectically, the luminosity of the spirit serves only to accentuate the darkness of the world which at that specific moment encroaches upon the institution set up in the name of that very spirit. We must remember, however, that the specific institution in question here is the Roman Catholic Church and not the Russian Orthodox Church which still holds promise for Dostoevsky. I think that the tragic feeling in Dostoevsky’s parable emerges due to the author’s personal, intellectual commitment to the fathers of the Russian Orthodox Church (Zossima in *Brothers Karamazov*) whom he sets in contrast to the figure of the Cardinal. In my view Dostoevsky holds on to this commitment even when plagued by feverish doubt and anxiety about the future course that the Russian Church would take:

“Oh, this is not, of course, that coming in which He will appear, according to his promise, at the end of days in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and which will take place suddenly...No, He has conceived the desire to visit his children at least for an instant and precisely in those places where the bonfires of the heretics had begun to cackle.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 323

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 324

Thinking further along religious lines, it seems as if the world is never ready for the fulfillment of the divine promise. When Jesus, as the first embodiment of the divine, comes into the world he is martyred. In this second appearance in Dostoevsky's parable, Jesus returns at a time when the expectation and yearning for this event are at their greatest. And yet, it seems as if there is an opposition between the divine and the world that calls desperately for it. The Jesus figure appears and he is turned away. A long period of yearning for and expecting the spirit ends with a brief return and immediate expulsion of this spirit. The hope is for the return of a divine spirit that does not belong in the world. This religious thought becomes the precursor of what in my view is ultimately a secular notion of culture. My point is that Christianity as a cultural force makes a promise with regard to ameliorating the conditions of the world. The parable shows the reversal of the original meaning and the transformation of the cultural force into an autonomous institution that is rigidly objectified and alienating.

It is important to extract the dialectic from the most concrete elements of plot and dialogue. The Jesus figure as the original face of the culture appears in the midst of an actual historical tragedy. This is a Spain where the new face of the church, the "Cardinal Grand Inquisitor" orders the burning of hundreds of heretics on a daily basis and in the midst of widespread disease, death and poverty. I need to point out here that the full force of the parable embodies the tragic in simultaneity with the ironic which Szondi refers to as a "counter concept" of tragedy⁷⁰. The tragic, however, cannot be subsumed under the ironic. Even as the Jesus figure appears on the scene and practices the miracle of healing or bringing the dead back to life, the focus remains on the theme of the promise of culture and its violation. While rendering the parable, Ivan says: "He has appeared quietly, unostentatiously, and yet – strange, this – everyone recognizes Him. That could have been one of the best bits in my poem – I mean the question of why it is that everyone recognizes him." The original promise has been broken over the course of history but the memory remains. This memory no longer refers to the original meaning of the ideal which has been lost over the course of time. In being drawn towards the Jesus figure, the people are in fact attracted by the traces of a path that was mapped out according to the ideal. Since the exact meaning of the path is lost, the path itself has become inaccessible. The return of the Jesus figure serves only as a reminder of what has been lost but this return does not lead towards its

⁷⁰ Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, translated by Paul Fleming (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 2002)

retrieval. The brief return is a flame that illuminates the course that events were expected to follow but did not.

I think that Dostoevsky's detailed depiction of the initial stages of the confrontation between the inquisitor and the Jesus figure opens up a dialectic which carries through to the end of the parable. As the people huddle around the Christ figure, the inquisitor appears. Dostoevsky lays emphasis upon subtle aspects of the inquisitor's appearance and attire. For instance, he points towards the "monkish cassock" that the inquisitor wears during the encounter as opposed to the "resplendent Cardinal's attire" that he wore while presiding over the burning of the heretics. The two different aspects of the same figure show objective differentiation within the institution. The inquisitor orders his guards to arrest the Jesus figure. The people who until then were yearning to get close to the Jesus figure, simply fall in line en masse and bow down to the inquisitor. This shows the strength of the institution. The Jesus figure represents the original promise of a culture and the inquisitor is the face of the institution erected in the name of precisely that promise. Through history the institution has gained power and autonomy as it has moved further and further away from the original meaning of the cultural force. The people are alienated from the culture but under the sway of its objective power. Not a single person in the frame resists as the Jesus figure is led away to prison.

"The Guard conduct the Captive to a narrow and murky vaulted prison in the ancient building of the Ecclesiastical Court and lock Him up in it. The day goes by, and the dark, passionate and "unbreathing" night begins...In the midst of the deep murk the prison's iron door is suddenly opened and the old Grand Inquisitor himself slowly enters the prison with a lamp in his hand. He is alone; the door instantly locks again behind him..."

I think that the central elements of my understanding of the meaning of tragedy of culture are etched out in this simple picture. The Christ figure is locked up by the Cardinal in a cell inside a building of the legal arm of the church. This represents an alienation of culture from within. The iron door of the prison separates the origin of the cultural force from the objectified form that it has now taken. That the entrapment and alienation occur within one cultural institution adds to the strength of the dialectical structure. The sheer scale of the building is a metaphor for the highly objectified form that the culture has assumed. The Cardinal enters the cell as an

interrogator, closing the door behind him. Within the suffocating confines of the cell, the original promise is set up against everything that has resulted in its violation. The narrow space further intensifies the unity within which unfolds the dialectical opposition of two radically different aspects of the same cultural force. The autonomous institution has become so powerful that it can entrap, reject and expel the very ideal on which it is based.

In the following passage I would like to reflect upon one aspect of the autonomy of cultural systems or institutions. I take it as a universal, but nevertheless quite mysterious fact that at any given point in our lives, we are under the sway of one autonomous cultural system or the other. Even nomads fall under the sway of some sort of tribal cultural system. The system makes demands upon us in terms of specific commitment and the expenditure of spiritual and physical energies. In return the system provides us with what I would call nourishment and it enables us to prosper or at a minimum sustain our lives. This is the basic rule of reciprocity that all cultural systems are based on. A system maintains strict scrutiny of all the persons who come under its power. If you display weakness in that you do not fulfill the demands that the system is making upon you then you are deprived of nourishment and eventually expelled. This mode of punishment inflicted by the system is not necessarily unfair. In my mind, a system is fair (broadly speaking) as long as there is balanced reciprocity. This means that as long as persons continue to give what the system demands from them they actualize sources of growth within the system otherwise they are punished, expelled or destroyed depending on how they have failed with reference to the basic rule of the system. The system manifests its power through the individuals working at different levels of hierarchy. All of these individuals, however, are mere faces because the system in itself is autonomous. If punishment or reward comes upon a person from another person or group of persons more powerful than him, it is simply the system expressing its power and not the individuals. It is clear to me that this aspect of the autonomy of a system contains within itself the seeds or the potential for a tragedy of culture. A situation can unfold whereby the system breaks its own fundamental rule or promise of reciprocity. This means that the system makes excessive demands upon persons and gives little or nothing in return. The tragic is intensified in this context with an increase in the demands that the system makes upon the people who come under its power and decrease in what it gives back. As the demands of the system increase so does the element of exclusion and punishment because more and more fail to give what the system needs. In Dostoevsky's parable the Cardinal appears as

the expression of the power of the Roman Catholic Church which, during the Inquisition, is a system that has broken the fundamental rule of reciprocity. It is the single most powerful institution in 16th century Spain and it encroaches upon the very soul of all those who come under its sway, taking away more than just economic goods. The system seeks to literally absorb all sense of individuality and any content of consciousness that does not fall in line with a particular, objectified meaning of Christianity. After taking away all of this, it gives nothing more than bare basic sustenance to those who do not occupy the avenues of power.

The idea of the tragedy of culture as presented in Dostoevsky's parable runs much deeper than what has been stated in the above passage. Returning again to the narrow confines of the prison cell where the Cardinal launches a speech against and into the silence of the Jesus figure, I would like to reflect upon the implications of the following lines:

“You have no right to add to anything to what was said by you in former times.”⁷¹

“You gave your promise, you sealed it with your word, you gave us the right to bind and loose, and so of course you cannot even dream of taking that right away from us now. So, why have you come to get in our way?”⁷²

“I shall find you guilty and burn you at the stake as the most wicked of heretics, and those same people who today kissed your feet will tomorrow at one wave of my hand rush to rake up the embers on your bonfire.”⁷³

In the context of the parable, the silence of the Jesus figure - as the embodiment of the original promise - is not fatalistic. The original promise is still valid even though it has been distorted and its meaning is lost to the people. However, the current form of the institution is so powerful and it has deviated from the original to such an extent that even the concrete embodiment of the original is helpless in reversing the damage that has occurred over the course of history. The original promise has been distorted and objectified to such a great degree that it would no longer be possible to rejuvenate and reconnect it with the past. According to the new meaning of the

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 326

⁷² Ibid., p. 328

⁷³ Ibid., p. 326

institution, the Jesus figure himself is in violation of laws against heresy because adherence to the original has now become a sin. The original ideal is now so completely unacceptable that Christ himself, from whose name the institution derives its power, deserves to be burned at the stake. Moreover, the people are required to participate in the burning of their most revered figure because they are clueless as to the original meaning and inescapably entrenched in a system that demands precisely this kind of obedience. The Cardinal renders the new meaning of the term “bind and loose” as uttered by the biblical Jesus. This term now refers solely to the power and autonomy of the system and not towards the promise of perpetuating freedom, compassion and integrity.

This may already have come across through what I have written thus far but I would like to reassert my original position which is that I want to investigate the relation between dialectic and tragedy as it appears in literature and in life. Now, the image of a silent embodiment of the original promise in opposition to the rigidified and objectified form of the promise has powerful reverberation towards understanding cultural tragedy in the context of the history of Pakistan. I think that in this context we need to think about Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the man who is the face of the original promise on which the country was founded in 1947. Jinnah is often depicted as a modernist figure in the same vein as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk which in my view is only partially true. Jinnah and his close companions, the founders of Pakistan so to speak, had a modernist vision not rooted simply in Pakistani nationalism but also in the religion of Islam. Jinnah wanted to do for Pakistan and Islam what Atatürk did for Turkey. Atatürk did not think that Islam as a cultural force could ever develop any modernist response to history. Jinnah, on the other hand, affirmed the cultural value of Islam and believed that the religion could be reinterpreted, modernized and given due recognition in history. It is crucial to note that in Jinnah’s vision, Pakistan was to be a “fresh” country where law, education and politics were to be recognized as genuinely modern cultural forces and the promise associated with each of these would be fulfilled through the institutions erected in their name. Jinnah himself was a jurist of some genius and an astute politician well familiar with the function of government in advanced democracies like Britain and the United States. Moreover, his view of Islam was centered on freedom and open mindedness. He placed emphasis upon the need for developing modernist responses to history while remaining within Islam and not brushing aside its core values. Those who are familiar with the history of Pakistan would recognize that the way in which the country

has unraveled over the past sixty years or so is not just ironic or comic but genuinely tragic and inexplicable. A portrait of Jinnah is a mandatory feature of buildings that house the various cultural institutions whether they are legal, political or educational. Every one of these institutions is built upon the dead and buried bones of the original promise. Nevertheless, they purport to function in the name of the original promise and the figure of Jinnah. Jinnah himself has become objectified and his ideals locked away, inaccessible and forgotten. Attempts are made every now then through books, articles or films to revisit the original meaning of the dream of Pakistan. However, as long as these attempts do not encroach upon and challenge the powers that be, they are applauded and soon covered over because most people have forgotten or repressed the very meaning of the original promise. In the previous chapter, I spoke briefly about the status of the legal system in Pakistan. My point here is that due to the utter and complete of violation of the promise of all cultural institutions (with the exception of family) in Pakistan, a void has been created which is now being filled with a new and emerging form of Islam. This is a cultural force that has completely detached itself from modernity and is purely reactionary and nihilistic. This is another reversal of the promise of Jinnah who wanted Pakistan to be a model of a modern, Islamic country. This new cultural force asserts that Pakistan was created by Jinnah in the name of Islam and nothing more. I think that the cultural tragedy of Pakistan will only intensify now that this new form of Islam will take revenge upon the existing institutions for their complete failure. This new force would also strive to destroy the cultural heritage of Pakistan and the lives of many people who do not fall in line with its movement. Jinnah as a cultural symbol stands alienated from and powerless against all of this.

I think that in Dostoevsky's parable he tests the notion of whether the Inquisitor himself can be seen as a tragic figure and evidence for this can be obtained through the following line, "Would not one such man be enough to produce a tragedy?"⁷⁴ My focus thus far has been on the actual elements of the dialectic in a tragedy of culture. However, we need also to discuss the traits that keep this tragedy in place, that is, the tragic flaw. We can obtain a clear clue to this if we examine the gist of the Cardinal's argument with reference to the three temptations of the biblical Christ. In Dostoevsky's thought, the central tenet of the life and teachings of Christ is consciousness of freedom and the unbounded love and compassion that flows from it. The Cardinal's rejection of each of the three temptations is based upon his dispute with precisely this

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 341

original notion of freedom. Now, the Cardinal presents an argument the conclusion of which is that Christ should have accepted all three temptations instead of rejecting them. The Cardinal's radical reversal of a motif as central as the temptations is not simply driven by cynicism; it is driven rather by a love for what he calls the mass of humanity. Paradoxically, implicit in the Cardinal's position is a deep sense of reverence for the doctrine of freedom. The Cardinal points towards his past life when he himself lived like a monk, saying "I too blessed the freedom with which you have blessed human beings"⁷⁵. The split that has occurred within the culture is also a schism that has divided the very soul of the Cardinal, with one part alienated from the other. The Cardinal's turn away from the doctrine of freedom is based upon the observation of an existentially obvious fact: people in general escape from freedom because they are not strong enough to bear the responsibility and loneliness that comes with an affirmation of freedom. It is this premise on which is based the Cardinal's assertion; "Had you accepted that third council of the mighty Spirit, you would have supplied everything that man seeks in the world, that is: someone to bow down before, someone to entrust one's conscience to, and a way of at last uniting everyone into an undisputed, general and consensual ant-heap."⁷⁶ It should be noted that the Cardinal, like the biblical Jesus has a deep concern and love for humanity. The Cardinal has, however developed a resentful reaction to the original ideal of freedom after an empirical observation of human nature as manifested through history. The Cardinal who in the past was devoted to freedom is now devoted to everything that cancels this freedom thus siding with Satan now instead of the Jesus and saying "We are not with you, but with *him*, there is our secret!"⁷⁷ The Cardinal is also driven by a love for humanity but the expression of this love is the exact dialectical opposite of the original. The Cardinal thinks that it is not through freedom but through oppression that historical progress can be made towards his conception of 'utopia'; "I returned and adhered to the crowd of those who have *corrected your great deed*."⁷⁸ I read Dostoevsky as saying that both the inquisitor and the Christ would agree upon one teleological goal – human happiness. However, the understanding of what this happiness entails and the process to be followed in reaching there are radically different. The trait or tragic flaw that keeps a tragedy of culture in place is precisely this adherence to a path or developmental process and a teleological end even though the original meanings of both the process and the end have

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 339

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 336

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 335

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 339

been long lost. In order to further thicken the inquiry but while still holding on to this line of thought, I would like to delve into Nietzsche's view of the purposes of culture and extract some insight into tragedy of culture as I understand it. I will be relying upon the direction that Deleuze takes in his interpretation of Nietzsche⁷⁹. The affinity between Dostoevsky's parable and Nietzsche's theory of culture should also become evident as we go along.

While remaining true to Nietzsche's genealogical philosophy – which challenges all types of traditional metaphysics and transcendental critique - Deleuze sketches out three perspectives on culture. The first perspective is prehistoric, the second post-historic and the third is historic. Even before going into any of these points of view in any detail, we can intuit, based on our discussion thus far that the possibility for explaining a tragedy of culture would truly come up when culture is considered from historic point of view or in its historical movements. Nietzsche's genealogical schema consists of character types and their relation to the will to power⁸⁰. The term "character type" may mislead us into thinking that Nietzsche's philosophy has a purely psychological significance which is not true because type refers simply to the kind of force that dominate an event, situation or a person. This is a new kind of empiricism. In Nietzsche's typology there are two character types – Active and Reactive or Master and Slave. The master affirms the will to power and in this character type the active forces prevail over the reactive forces or the reactive forces have been made active. In the slave type there is a negation of the will to power and the reactive forces triumph over active forces or the reactive forces are never transformed into active forces. Each of the two main types or categories has sub-categories which correspond to specific mechanisms, principles and products. In Nietzsche's schema culture is a sub-category of the master or active type. According to Nietzsche, the primary purpose or promise of any culture is to select and transform reactive forces into active forces. More specifically, culture is a "generic activity by which reactive forces are trained and tamed"⁸¹. The reactive type has three sub-categories, Ressentiment, Bad Conscience and the Ascetic Ideal. In Nietzsche's thought, culture provides a therapy for ressentiment and bad conscience which are spiritual sicknesses that pervade through human history. The original promise of the activity of culture is to cure and transform these illnesses. The teleological end of this activity is the production of the self-legislating, free and sovereign individual. In history,

⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, pp. 133 – 141.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 146

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

however the reactive forces triumph over active forces and it is here that an insight into the tragedy of culture can be obtained through Nietzsche's philosophy. It is commonly said that time is a great healer; however in this context of tragedy of culture, time seems to create and intensify wounds for it is over the course of time (meaning history) that the reversal of the original promise occurs.

To reiterate, in Nietzsche's philosophy, the purpose of culture is the selection and training of all that is base, weak and lowly in human nature (reactive forces). The term training is quite literally understood as enforcement of traditions, customs, habits and obedience by the employment of a mechanism of violence. Nietzsche, like Karl Marx, is deeply interested in species activity, that is, human beings' "generic"⁸² activity before any kind of social, racial or religious organization. This is also in accordance with Nietzsche's genealogical philosophy. The specific demands of the mechanism of violence are radically different in prehistory and history. In my mind Nietzsche (like Marx) is a thinker who is opposed to the established order. Hence, in Nietzsche's philosophy, that which needs to be obeyed after social organization is always "historical, arbitrary, grotesque, stupid and limited; this usually represents the worst *reactive* forces". This aspect of Nietzsche's thinking reflects a kind of necessitarianism that I am wary of because I do think that there are elements of the established order that deserve to be affirmed. However, I do agree with Nietzsche's further point on this matter. The demand for obedience or observance of the law is common to both history and pre-history. A human person is always subject to the structure of the law. From the perspective of species activity, the human person is presented with a model to follow. And the purpose of this model is simply to select and train that which is reactive. From the point of view of species activity, habits are enforced by culture so as transform all types of reactive forces into active forces. For our purposes and also for Nietzsche himself, the most important consequence of the training of culture as species activity is to produce a man who can make and deliver upon promises. So the original ideal of culture, in Nietzsche's schema, is to produce a consciousness that can keep promises. The importance of culture in terms of the relations between persons is the inculcation of the habit of making and keeping premises. This is a simple but very powerful thought for ultimately, in a tragedy of culture; one person has broken a promise with another person or group of persons. In the parable of the grand inquisitor, he has broken a promise that the culture of Christianity had

⁸² Ibid., p. 133

made with the people. The inquisitor does remember the promise but the remembrance of a promise has meaning only with reference to future fulfillment and not the past. The fulfillment of a promise occurs only in the future and not in the past.

What lies at the origin of all cultures is a generic activity that enforces consciousness so that promises can be made and kept. In general, that is, going above and beyond organizational differentiation, the normativity of culture is centered upon a mechanism which trains persons to make promises and adhere to them. Culture as generic activity always defines a path that needs to be followed and the deviation from the path constitutes distortion or violation of a promise. I think that it is important to think about this point from within Nietzsche's typology with specific reference to the place of consciousness in his schema. In this schema consciousness is a sub-category of the active type or master⁸³. There is no possibility of consciousness in the reactive type or slave. It seems to me that in Nietzsche coming to consciousness in the first instance constitutes forgetfulness. The faculty of forgetting is the "regulative principle"⁸⁴ of consciousness. As I have asserted before, the quality of the will to power in the master type is affirmative. Nietzsche is against all types of dialectic which excludes things on the basis of and for the fulfillment of overarching metaphysical presuppositions. He is also against all metaphysical presuppositions which subsume things under arbitrary, transcendental categories. Total affirmation places a burden upon consciousness. The affirmation of life which is characterized by ambiguity and to not seek for principles of ultimate intelligibility opens up the possibility of unresolved, irreconcilable and burdensome memories. I think that in Nietzsche's thought, to come to consciousness is to come to terms with the wounds of the past so that they do not fester and thereby throttle activity. This is also where the chief difference between the active and reactive type comes into play for the latter only magnifies and holds on to the festering wounds of the past, letting them throttle all activity and dictate life and thought.

Coming to consciousness with an affirmative will to power is to learn to deal spontaneously with all of the negativity and darkness with which life strikes us. As life becomes more intense and active, the negativity also increases. According to my understanding of Nietzsche, to come to consciousness is to react to the world in a certain way. In Nietzsche's philosophy, the world is

⁸³ Ibid., p. 146

⁸⁴ Ibid.

formed out of nothing other than forces and these forces are qualitatively different from each other. So in terms of the forces or events in life that demand reaction, the master type draws a distinction between what deserves a reaction and what deserves to be repressed. To have consciousness is to be able to make this selection. Consciousness reacts only to that which excites it, makes it move forward, and projects it towards the future. Even the most painful of events have something that can be reconstituted as part of future growth and development. Anything that stays behind as a trace and resists assimilation in a dynamic movement needs to be successfully repressed. Consciousness is really devoid of content because it only consists of excitations which are fleeting, transitory and disappear once their energies have been utilized so as to move consciousness itself to a higher level. All traces - which I understand as past events or components of events which may linger on in the reactive type - are functionally repressed by consciousness. Functional repression is an ongoing activity of the will and its aim is to keep under the surface all which may disturb dynamic movement. The trace, like everything else in Nietzsche's schema, is a force but one that creates resentment and bad conscience. The only force that consciousness keeps, so to speak, is excitation which denotes all that is fleeting and energetic. The faculty of forgetting is the "regulative principle of consciousness" and its ultimate aim is to produce, what Nietzsche calls the noble man⁸⁵.

As I have discussed before, the purpose of cultural activity at a generic, prehistoric level or universal level is to open up the possibility of making and fulfilling promises. Both culture and consciousness are sub-categories of the master type, they both have an affirmative will to power and one aim – to let active forces dominate over reactive forces. However, their originating principles and mechanisms are radically opposed to each other. If consciousness is based upon the regulative principle or force of forgetting then culture is based upon the teleological principle or force of memory for without memory promises are meaningless. If consciousness is characterized by fleeting, transitory excitations and it rejects all memory then how can this consciousness be made to keep and fulfill promises? That forgetting and memory are two opposing forces creates an apparent conflict within the heart of the master type. Culture overcomes this challenge through violence. Prior to culture consciousness consists only of fleeting sensibility. It is only after culture that the faculty of promise is added to consciousness through great violence and sacrifice. The main point here is that the making and fulfilling of

⁸⁵ Ibid.

promises and commitments lies at the very foundation of any cultural force or activity and Nietzsche employs his genealogical philosophy to establish this.

As I understand it, the central aim of the activity of culture is the production of persons (as embodiments of the institution) who are reliable, that is, they can willingly remember the promises that they make and strive actively for their fulfillment. Promises are meaningless in the absence of memory. Nietzsche draws a qualitative distinction between two kinds of memory. The first kind of memory is associated with resentment. It consists first of all of sense impressions (traces)⁸⁶ which remain lodged in the past and which the slave type can never overcome. It consists also of words that were given as parts of promises made in the past. These are words linked with promises that remained unfulfilled and they too remain lodged in the memory as sense impressions that the slave type cannot move beyond. The memory of resentment is linked with sensibility. These are vague impressions that are never forgotten and they only fester and grow with time. The memory enforced by culture is that of the future, not the past. Cultural memory can be developed only after all reactive forces have been overcome. This is a memory that looks into the future with a strong sense of causality. The memory of culture is linked with the will, not the sensibility⁸⁷. This is a memory of words that have been stated with a full consciousness of the necessity of that which is being promised. This is memory in which the original word is linked causally with a future event that must transpire. This memory is not that of a trace or an impression that the slave type has failed to overcome and is now passive in the face its decay. The memory of words consists of a desire to hold on to a future event that would fulfill the promise contained in the words⁸⁸. A promise can be made only with an insight into the future course of events. It has to be made on the basis of necessity and not chance. A promise can be made only by someone who is fully active. I think that Nietzsche has given us the genealogy of the very act of making promises. A promise is a sacred, willed activity that can be given only by one who looks into the future and not by one who is lodged in the past. The genealogy of the enforcement of the habit of promise making displays also the violence practiced by culture for this purpose.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 133

⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vantage Books, 1989), p. 58

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 58

In Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, we find passionate and detailed descriptions of the violent means used by culture as species activity for the enforcement of the faculty of memory and promise making. One way to understand this is to say that culture will not shy away from any kind of violence to bolster consciousness of the active type. Another way to respond to this would be to say that Nietzsche is serious about philosophy and yet he is not an argumentative philosopher but a genealogist so in accordance with his method he presents the violent interplay of forces in history. The most important point in this respect is that immense and real sacrifices have been given in history for the sake of the strengthening of the faculty of making and keeping promises. So when a cultural institution breaks promises, the persons responsible are laying waste to thousands of years of painful training.

“If we place ourselves at the end of this tremendous process, where the tree at last brings forth fruit, where society and the morality of custom at last reveal *what* they have simply been given the means to: then we discover that the ripest fruit is the *sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality and custom, autonomous and supramoral (for “autonomous” and moral are mutually exclusive), in short, the man who has his own independent, protracted will and the *right to make promises*.”⁸⁹

The production of persons who can make promises to others lies at the very heart of the activity of culture. The tragedy of culture is the loss of this faculty of making and fulfilling promise. I interpret Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a tragedy of culture. More specifically, I think that *King Lear* can be read as a tragedy about the loss of the virtue of promise making within the context of the meaning of culture. As we have seen in Nietzsche's philosophy, the virtue of making, remembering and keeping promises is enforced into consciousness by culture in its generic, prehistoric activity. In my view, the issue in *King Lear* is not about making a promise related to this or that cultural goal. The matter is simply of giving one's word, making a promise in general.

“Meantime, we shall express our darker purpose. Give me the map there. Know that we have divided in three our kingdom; and it is our fast intent to shake all cares and business from our age, conferring them on younger strengths, while we unburdened crawl toward death. Tell me,

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 59

my daughters (since now we will divest us both of rule, interest of territory, cares of state), which of you shall we say doth love us most.”⁹⁰

These are Lear’s first words in the play and I think that in these lines the central dialectic of the tragedy is already set forth. This dialectic centers first of all on the very meaning of promise. In this tragedy, the making of promise collides with its violation. There is a conflict between the objectified meaning of giving a word and its real meaning. If this is seen as conflict between power and virtue then the chief virtue at stake here is the desire and capacity to make promises with respect to future realization. The institutionalization or organization of cultural forces brings up the issue of power and authority. This is because institutions confer power upon individuals who may be driven simply by motives that have nothing to do with the teleological principles that drive culture in its generic form.

Lear makes his appearance on the scene in the midst of murmuring and speculation about the division of the “kingdom”. These murmurings center upon, what I think are surface aspects of the kingdom, the literal drawing or redrawing of the geographical boundaries and who should or should not get what. My point is that the “kingdom” that Lear speaks of is a quite general metaphor for cultural institution. Lear is the head or driving force of a cultural institution. And he has built this institution, unified it and enforced the law over a long period of time and through the use of brute force. In Nietzschean terms, the general teleological end of cultural activity is the production of a sovereign individuals; legislators who can make and fulfill promises. The principle of culture is the enforcement of a memory of words that mean something definite with reference to the future. I think that this is also deposited in Lear’s consciousness as a force from prehistory and this is how I make sense of the use of the term “darker purposes” and his demand for words. The division of the kingdom could have been a simple matter but no, Lear demands verbal promises. I see Lear as bequeathing a cultural institution upon “younger strengths” but before they inherit anything they need to show that they are reliable and can “stand security”⁹¹ for themselves.

⁹⁰ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1, line 35.

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, 1, Ibid., p. 58

As the first two daughters speak Cordelia reacts but such that no one hears anything. To Goneril's profuse expression - "Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter, dearer than eye-sight, space and liberty..." Cordelia responds - "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent." In response to Regan's words - "...that I profess myself an enemy to all other joys which the most precious square of sense possesses, and find I am alone felicitate in your dear highness' love.". To this Cordelia says - "And yet not so; since I am sure my love is more ponderous than my tongue." Lear, however, trusts these words at face value and rewards his daughters and husbands with their respective shares of the kingdom, that is, the cultural institution. The unfolding of the tragedy reveals that Lear has given power to those who are not responsible and reliable.⁹²

Simply stated this is a conflict between saying what you actually feel and saying something just because you ought to say it. I would approach the plot element described above on the basis of the distinction between objective and cultural value set out at the beginning of this chapter. As the mode of destruction unfolds in the play, we see that Lear's acceptance of the words reflects a confusion of objective and cultural meaning. The acts of giving a word or of making a promise have genuine cultural value only if they are affectively connected with the soul. Also, the words have genuine cultural value if they are coming from a free, sovereign, legislative individual. If these two conditions are not met then the act of giving a word or making a promise is simply a meaningless objectified expression of the purpose of culture, which, once again, enforces consciousness with the principle of memory and promise. The words that Lear accepts have only an objective, not cultural value. These are empty promises made under the seduction of a power that would ultimately be devoid of virtue. The words of the sisters are simply currency used in exchange for power. Among the three daughters, only Cordelia is the embodiment of love and loyalty towards Lear. She is the only one capable of making a promise that has cultural value. In her reaction to the words of her sisters, we see a conflict between promises that are dead and those that are alive and willed. Here also we already see the basis for what would develop into Cordelia's total estrangement or alienation from Lear and by implication the cultural institution itself. The root of Cordelia's alienation lies in what she is in her innermost self - a fully reliable person who can make promises because she is the embodiment of love and loyalty. Cordelia has become existentially incompatible with the institution. The dialectic

⁹² Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I, Scene I, lines 59 - 85

comes into play here as Cordelia is expelled from the cultural institution precisely due to the fact that she fulfills the teleological end of culture – the production of a person who can make promises.

Let us now move on to the actual tussle between Lear and Cordelia and reflect upon the reason for this fight between the old “dragon” and his daughter:

Lear: ...what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.

Lear: Nothing?

Cordelia: Nothing.

Lear: Nothing will come of nothing: speak again.⁹³

In my mind, Cordelia’s “Nothing” opens up a rift between the path that the culture was, so to speak, destined to take and the path that it has actually taken. I think that what we need to focus on is the sheer arbitrariness of Lear’s demand for obedience. Cordelia is the embodiment of obedience and yet Lear demands of her that she establish this through words. As we have learnt from Nietzsche, the demand for obedience is a part of the mechanism of culture and its purpose is to produce individuals who are reliable and can make promises. We also learn from Nietzsche that when culture appears in history in the form of institutions, the demand for obedience can become a demand for that which is “arbitrary, grotesque, stupid and limited”⁹⁴. The aim of this latter demand is to simply assimilate the individual within the institutional matrix. The “Nothing” brings into view the gulf between cultural institution and the very soul of the individual. In my mind, Lear occupies a dual role as a father and as a head of a cultural institution. His anger at Cordelia stems from her refusal to obey the arbitrary demand of the institution. As a father, he loves Cordelia much more than his other daughters and he also realizes that Cordelia too loves him immensely. However, Lear is the very embodiment of the cultural institution and completely assimilated into it. That is why it is impossible for him to discern the fact that Cordelia’s disobedience is towards Lear as the master of the institution and not towards Lear as father. With Cordelia’s “Nothing”, the very soul of Lear is split into two because his obligation towards the objectified institution comes into conflict with his obligation

⁹³ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 85 - 89

⁹⁴ Deleuze, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, p. 133

as father. It is the latter which prevails as Lear adheres to his demand for verbal promises that conform to the institution and not to himself as father. His role as “dragon” encroaches upon his role as father which I think is the key to understanding what he says to Kent who challenges the decision against Cordelia:

“Come not between the dragon and his wrath. I loved her most, and thought to set my rest on her kind nursery. Hence, and avoid my sight! So be my grave my peace, as here I give her father’s heart from her!”⁹⁵

The reference to “dragon” shows that Lear is the personification of the monarchy as a cultural institution. He is also the loving father of Cordelia. The drama contains enough evidence that prior to this tragic moment, the relation between the two was based on mutual reciprocation. Later on also as the devastation unfolds and Lear awakens, he says “come, let’s away to prison; we two alone will sing like birds in the cage”⁹⁶ At the beginning of the tragedy, however, when Lear still has all the power that comes with it, he disgraces his beloved daughter and banishes her into exile. The role as dragon destroys Lear’s role as father. It is thus that the institution moves against all of Lear’s emotions and feelings as a father. When Lear relinquishes power he is no longer the dragon. Lear exercised control over the institution as long as he was in power. Once that is gone, we see that Lear as a human person was always fundamentally disconnected from that institution. Now autonomous and beyond his reach, the dragon unleashes his wrath on Lear himself, destroying him and everything that he held dear. Lear as an individual becomes the victim of the cultural force to which he gave his entire life.

Lear’s devaluation of Cordelia in the first scene of the play is in itself reflective of resentment. The basic meaning of resentment is precisely this – the mental act of the devaluation of something which actually has a high value⁹⁷. Furthermore, when I examine the tragic process undergone by Cordelia, a chief aspect of her fate is that she is being penalized precisely because she embodies the great values of love and loyalty which are also what Lear demands. Scheler’s definition of the tragic finds its validation in Cordelia’s punishment – “It is tragic in the most

⁹⁵ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 120 - 125

⁹⁶ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 5, Scene 3, lines 8 - 9

⁹⁷ Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, translated by Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1994).

pronounced sense...when one and the same power allows a thing to realize a high, positive value (of itself or of another thing) and, in the process of effectuating this, causes the destruction of just this thing as a value bearer”⁹⁸. When Lear regains consciousness and as everything around him unravels tragically, he says, “The art of our necessities is strange that can make vile things precious.”⁹⁹ I think that careful attention to this line takes us into the very heart of this play in particular and the tragedy of culture in general.

Different “necessities” are at play in this tragedy. There is some specific promise that is inherent in every culture or cultural product. An examination of the path that culture has followed in pre-history would show that the opening up of the possibility of making promises to others and fulfilling them is at the very center of all cultural activity. *King Lear* as a tragedy of culture centers not upon some specific promise but upon making promises in general in accordance with the prehistoric spirit of culture. Lear as the head of a cultural institution now wants to bequeath his position to his daughters. Driven by, what in my mind is prehistoric necessity, Lear makes a demand for promises. The future leaders of culture must prove that they can give their word. Lear is obsessed with “vows”. He takes the words of Goneril and Reagan to be reflective of actual and not simply empty promises. In Lear’s mind, the fact that they have given him their word fulfills the perfectly valid purposes of culture. The thing that matters most to Lear is the expression of loyalty through words. Moreover, these words must be given in the context of the inheritance of the cultural institution (the state or kingdom). Cordelia is cultured in the sense that there is no chasm in her character between her commitments and what she is. She is already a promise fulfilled but Lear cannot see this because his concern is with verbal promises and not with who is giving them. The tragic process reveals that for Goneril and Reagan the promises are simply objective requirements and they do not have to be made with full authenticity. It seems as if these promises were given to fulfill a beauracritic necessity. Once again, making a promise in general terms means that you embody the words that you speak and that you have a desire to fulfill them in the future. In bureaucracy it is the word itself and not the person who is giving it that counts. Goneril, Reagan and their husbands embody disloyalty and are driven by the necessities of the lust for power. What is at stake here is culture but in its institutionalized form and with that issues of power encroach upon and displace the virtue of loyalty. The motive for

⁹⁸ Max Scheler, “On the Phenomenon of the Tragic” in “The Questions of Tragedy”, edited by Arthur B. Coffin. Mellen Research University Press, San Francisco 1991.

⁹⁹ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 2, line 70

power – “vile thing” displaces loyalty. The objective meaning of promise displaces its real cultural meaning. Words take precedence over the person who gives them.

In my interpretation, Lear’s tragic flaw is his abiding faith in the value of a culture even after it has deviated from the path that it should have taken. There is an obsessive intensity in Lear’s insistence upon vows. He has a blind trust in the capacity of culture to produce individuals who can give their word. I can think of no other explanations for the manner in which he transfers complete control of the institution to Reagan and Goneril simply on the basis of their word. Promises given in the context of the state have taken on a purely objective meaning and Lear abides by them as if they were real. All of his expectations emerge from his trust in these promises even though the words are disconnected from the individuals who give them. He exercises his own promise giving faculty as a cultural power one last time when he degrades and banishes Cordelia paying heed neither to his own heart nor to her pleas. Even as the tragedy unfolds and the destruction becomes evident, Lear is filled with a mad wonder whenever a promise is broken.

“When the mind is free, the body is delicate; this tempest in my mind doth from my senses take all feeling else what beats there – filial ingratitude.”¹⁰⁰

“They are not men of their words: they told me I was everything; it is a lie.”¹⁰¹

In this I see a refusal to believe that the state as a cultural institution which he nurtured is now governed by those who do not know the meaning of loyalty. After Cordelia dies he says, “I might have saved her; now she has gone for ever!”¹⁰² It is apparent that the original promise has now completely disappeared but he still wonders, “Is this the promised end?”¹⁰³

As I move towards the end of my discussion on *King Lear*, I need to assert that the most important scene in the context of the tragedy of culture is the one where Lear and Cordelia struggle with one another. Cordelia’s “Nothing” carries a hypnotic resonance and hearkens back

¹⁰⁰ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 3, Scene 4, lines 11- 13

¹⁰¹ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 4, Scene 6, lines 102-103

¹⁰² Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 5, Scene 3, lines 269 - 270

¹⁰³ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 5, Scene 3, line 265

to the silence of the Christ figure in Dostoevsky's parable. And her dismissal by Lear reminds me of the finality with which the inquisitor rejects the Christ figure, "we shall never let you near us again". This, in my mind is once again the original promise of culture colliding with the objectified form that it has taken. Now devoid of the original meaning, culture is alienated from the ideal and can only devalue and reject it. Lear needs words because for him "nothing will come out of nothing". Only the words in a promise have any currency in the objectified culture. Cordelia's has all the words to express her loyalty but she will give only "Nothing" and then silence to the demands of Lear as king. Her silence to the demands of the institution is not passive, but violent. There is exactitude, a precision to her silence resistance which is borne out by her lines, "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth: I love your majesty according to my bond; no more nor less" and "Good my lord, you have begot me, bred me, loved me: I Return those duties back as are right fit, Obey you, love you, and most honor you."¹⁰⁴ The following dialogue also deserves note:

Lear: "So young, and so untender?"

Cordelia: "So young, my lord, and true."¹⁰⁵

We also need to take into account what Nietzsche has to say about the type of character that can make promises - "Man himself must first of all have become *calculable, regular, necessary*, even in his own image of himself, if he is able to stand security for *his own future*, which is what one who promises does! This precisely is the long story of how *responsibility* originated."¹⁰⁶

The notion that culture as generic activity enforces the faculty of promise making is valid only in terms of interpersonal relations. Cordelia and Lear have a strong relation, a "bond" between father and daughter. Cordelia's actions bear out that this "bond" is simply that and is not to be confused with the relation as seen in an institutional framework – princess and monarch. A strong relation is built upon mutual reciprocation. Feelings and emotions are reciprocated through action and being. One feels indebted to the other for a demonstration of affection and wants to reciprocate. Absence of reciprocation points towards a lack of the sense of responsibility. To have a relation in this sense is to be in a perpetual state of fulfilling a promise

¹⁰⁴ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 94 - 97

¹⁰⁵ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1, lines 105 - 106

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Book 2, # 2

which is that the loyalty and devotion from the other would be repaid. The character that can fulfill this promise of reciprocation is one in whom there is no gap between the feelings evoked and demanded by the relation and the actions of state of being required for the reciprocation of these feelings. In such a person, the feeling of indebtedness for all past kindness is not simply a feeling; she is consistently being and acting in honor of the memory. Culture opens up the very possibility of strong ties between people. Forgetfulness and obsolescence go against the very logic of human relations. Deep ties are based on mutual reciprocation and remembrance over the course of time without which the word ‘tie’ has no meaning. Moreover, a strong bond between two persons requires precision in that all emotions related to the bond and the feelings of indebtedness have to be fully actualized. On the other hand, the nurturing of a bond also requires the ability to get over, to forget what is irresolvable instead of allowing it to linger and fester. This is the manner in which Cordelia has constituted herself in her relation with her father and that is why I say that she is exact. Her silence against all the objectivity that caves in on her in the first scene of the drama can also be understood in the light of what I have written above. She is silent because her very being is the fulfillment of the promise to Lear and that is all because all words given in proof would be superfluous. She is the very embodiment of love and loyalty and does not need to add a single word simply to fulfill the demands of the institution. She is already cultured according to the general spirit of this concept and rejects the objectified form of culture. All of the elements required for the making of promises are already active in her so she does not need to obey the arbitrary law of the state; that would be superfluous.

Returning now to Nietzsche, when culture is considered from the prehistoric and post-historic points of view it seems as if the potential of species activity has been mapped out on to it and that it is destined to fulfill this potential and produce the free, sovereign self-legislative individual who can make and fulfill promises. The element of history diverts culture from its path by grafting on to the very structure of species activity all that is opposed to culture – resentment, bad conscience, ascetic ideals that come along with institution or simply “herds”¹⁰⁷. Nietzsche makes several points in his elaboration of how culture meets with and is displaced by its exact opposite in history the consequence of which is the “triumph of reactive

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Book 3, # 18

forces”¹⁰⁸. One can learn immensely from all that Nietzsche has to say on this matter but there is a specific issue which grips my attention the most. It centers upon Nietzsche’s notion of self-overcoming or simply self-destruction. This idea applies not simply to individuals but also to collectivities as can be seen in the following where Nietzsche refers to the institutions of Justice, State and Church:

“It (Justice) ends, as does every good thing on earth by overcoming itself.”¹⁰⁹

“But this counsel I give to kings and churches and all that is weak from age and virtue – do let yourselves be overthrown! That you may come to life again, and to you may come – virtue!”¹¹⁰

In both *King Lear* and *the legend of the grand inquisitor*, we observe a conflict between an ossified cultural institution and the original promise that it was supposed to fulfill. In this sense, an irreconcilable dialectical conflict occurs also between the instinct of self-preservation and the need for self-destruction. In both *Lear* and the *Inquisitor*, we have two leaders of ossified institutions who have confused the original purpose and promise of culture with arbitrary laws and they expend all their energies in justifying these laws and by implication the institution which is now alienated from its origin. In the passionate silence of the Christ figure and of Cordelia we can read a demand that the institutions must now self-destruct because the purpose of cultural activity is not the propagation of institutions that have turned against individuality and freedom. The fulfillment of the original promise requires self-overcoming, however, the paradox is that institutions are driven by the instinct for self-preservation. The conflict is irreconcilable.

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, p. 145

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Book 2, # 10

¹¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Translated by Graham Parkes, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), II, 18, p. 114

CHAPTER IV

SELF DECEPTION AS TRAGEDY OR ALIENATION IN DIALECTIC

This chapter is different from the preceding two because it grapples with a form of tragic conflict that is located within the human soul but even here the implications of the tragedy can be understood fully only in terms of its concrete social and historical meaning. There are however, important notions that carry over from the first two chapters. The first of these is the irreconcilability of tragic conflict. The element of irreconcilability did not perhaps come forth very stridently in the second chapter because approximately half of that chapter is based upon texts of Hegel that are built around a metaphysical system and systems tend to incorporate reconciliation. The second chapter drew upon Simmel and the notion of irreconcilability appeared in a strident manner because Simmel is not driven by the desire to create or adhere to metaphysical systems. On the contrary, he is interested in examining the tragic for its own sake. In this chapter the site of the irreconcilable tragic conflict is the human soul as it results from self-deception and resentment which are types of spiritual blindness. We can look at the difference between Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and the *Antigone* to show how the second chapter is different from the fourth. I spoke about *Antigone* in my first chapter. In that play, the conflict is between two irreconcilable obligations or rational passions. Antigone and Creon both make their positions very clear through their actions and dialogues. There is blindness in the *Antigone* but that blindness is not towards what one is, wants or needs to do. The blindness in *Antigone* emerges in the two main protagonists' refusal to recognize each other's perfectly justified positions. *Oedipus Rex* on the other hand is a play that focuses on the blindness towards what lies within the soul. The play is a progression through the darkness within towards the revelation of painful truths. In this tragedy Oedipus does indeed act out of a sense of obligation towards family and state but he is blind towards the actual consequences of what he is doing and also towards what he is.

Another notion that is carried forward from the first two chapters is that a tragic conflict is one that threatens to split apart a unity or oneness from within. In the second chapter, tragic conflict

threatens the unity of ethical life, in the second it threatens the great process of culture which consists of the unification of subject and object. In this chapter we will be looking at tragic conflicts that threaten to rupture the very unity of the psyche. A very concrete notion that carries forward from the first two chapters – even though it was perhaps not made consistently explicit there - is that the various forms of tragic conflict are experienced as a failure of expectations. In the second chapter we discovered as to how and why it is so difficult to fulfill any expectations regarding the reconciliation of deep seated social and political conflict. In the second chapter we dealt with the broken promise of the cultural process. Now in this chapter we will engage with the failure of our expectations regarding our capacity to successfully impose rational structures upon reality and more specifically, to attain self-knowledge.

“The scene of the tragic conflict is man himself, in whom “ought” and “desire” diverge and threaten to burst the unity of the I. The banal disparity of not desiring what one should or of desiring what one should not is, of course, not tragic. On the contrary, what is tragic is the blindness in which one, deceived about the aim of his “ought,” must desire what he is not allowed to desire....the irreconcilable opposition divides what is one”¹¹¹

The above text has been drawn from Peter Szondi’s summary of Goethe’s theory of the tragic. A brief analysis of this text would help us place the notion self-deception within the context of the philosophy of the tragic. The central tension here can be expressed in several different ways, one of which is as follows. The blindness that Goethe speaks of is one that results from lack of self-knowledge. The absence of self-awareness keeps me in the dark, so to speak, with regards to the desires or drives that are pushing me to act in some direction. Moreover, in acting, I have convinced myself that I am doing the right thing in accordance with a moral or social norm. This implies a tragic failure of authenticity because I believe that I am acting under a moral ought or norm while the real motives emerge from a strong desire that is in opposition to precisely these norms. We can also understand this blindness as lack of consciousness with regards to the role that I ‘ought’ to play in a particular, problematic situation. I approach a situation with moral norms and under a role that has little relevance for the prevailing situation. I am driven to rectify the situation but because of my blindness towards the ‘ought’ that I need to

¹¹¹ Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the tragic*. Translated by Paul Fleming, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 2002. p. 26.

follow, my actions bear negative consequences. This scenario is poignantly tragic because the intentions behind the acts are good and yet they bear bad consequences because of blindness towards the appropriate roles and norms that need to be adopted so as to grapple with the situation. In essence the desire to do good stands in opposition to the blindness towards reality and the actions undertaken end in failure.

The notion of self-deception is usually not brought up in philosophical discussions of the tragic. A question that can be raised at this point would be – How exactly is self-deception a tragedy? I think that a rich and detailed response to this question can be obtained through an analysis of plot structure and some of the dialogues of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*¹¹². In my view, among the classics of western literary and philosophical thought, *Oedipus Rex* is a work that is most prominently marked with the red line of self-deception.

Let us create a landscape on which to build up an analysis of Sophocles' tragedy from the perspective of self-deception. There are three main (and inter-related) modes of self-deception that can be seen in the elements of Sophocles' plot. The first of these is reflected in something that Oedipus says towards the beginning of the play while addressing the suffering people of Thebes – “Your several sorrows each have single scope and touch but one of you. My spirit groans for city and myself and you at once.” I think that in his inner life, Oedipus' feels the deepest sense of obligation towards the city state of Thebes. He is interested in his own spiritual salvation but that salvation is always linked with the salvation of Thebes. Also, Oedipus feels a deep sense of obligation towards his family and that is why he takes steps to avoid bringing destruction upon his family. All of Oedipus' actions are motivated by a desire for salvation. In reality, however, each of these supposedly salving actions brings ruin upon Oedipus himself and those towards whom he feels the greatest sense of obligation – his family and the city of Thebes. Oedipus genuinely wants to do good but his actions bear the opposite consequences. It is only when he is completely destroyed and can no longer play a role in Thebes that there is redemption for the city and for Oedipus himself. There is some truth in what Teiresias says to Oedipus – “You are the land's pollution”¹¹³.

¹¹² Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*, in *The Complete Greek Tragedies, Volume II: Sophocles*, edited by David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 11- 78.

¹¹³ *Ibid*; Grene, v. 353, p. 25.

The second mode of self-deception that Sophocles brings forth centers on the question of human freedom and man's relationship with the divine. I think in the dramas of Sophocles, human consciousness or freedom is always constrained by context or situation. Sophocles does not bring forth a notion of absolute freedom that is not bound by a concrete context but nevertheless there is freedom to reconstruct and understand reality. In Sophocles' play most characters escape from the recognition of this freedom. There is a definite spiritual presence in the atmosphere and events of *Oedipus Rex*. However, the destruction that unfolds over the course of the play is brought about by human not divine action. I think that Sophocles' notion of spirituality is one that is grounded in a sense of reverence towards concrete events and the need for harmony and order in the world. Sophocles makes it clear that the Gods will never intervene directly in human affairs. We as humans have to take responsibility for the situation in which we are enveloped and try to understand it using our limited capacities. In this play Oedipus comes across as a figure who continues to call out for divine intervention – "I'll do everything. God will decide whether we prosper or remain in sorrow". Not only Oedipus but Laios and also the people of Thebes rely not on their own knowledge of concrete situations but on the divine knowledge that has been translated into human knowledge by way of the interpretations of the Delphic oracle.

The third mode of self-deception in *Oedipus Rex* appears in the manner in which Oedipus allows sources outside of himself to construct his self. He seeks affirmation of his self and his actions in what others have to say about him – "I Oedipus whom all men call the Great"¹¹⁴. Oedipus is forgetful of the fact that he does know more about himself than the prophet Teiresias or the people of Thebes. The crucial point is that he refuses to be awake to his own knowledge of himself and continues to trust only in the words of others. Above and beyond the knowledge of people around them, the knowledge conveyed by the oracle remains a powerfully deceptive source of "self-knowledge" for both Oedipus and his father Laios. Both of them allow their actions to be completely guided by the words of the oracle and thereby do things that they dearly wanted to avoid. Blind to his own self, Oedipus carries out all that the oracle imposed upon him and it is only when his gaze is directed inwards that he says – "O, O, O, they will all come, all come out clearly!"¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ Ibid; Grene, v. 7, p. 11.

¹¹⁵ Ibid; Grene, v. 1183, p. 63

I must say at this point that my description of the modes of tragic self-deception in *Oedipus Rex* is still only rudimentary. An analysis of self-deception extracted out of this drama must run much deeper. In addition, I also need to provide some insight into the implications of this analysis. In analyzing the tragedy in some detail now, I will structure my narrative around the three moments in the play where the voice of the oracle is heard and followed. In terms of the chronological unfolding of events, the oracle speaks first to Laios, then to Oedipus and finally to Creon. In the structure of Sophocles' play, the Oracle speaks first to Creon who has been sent by Oedipus to consult the prophetic voice. Let us examine closely the words of the oracle and the nature of Oedipus' interpretation of them. Creon conveys the message of the Oracle as follows:

“I will tell you, then, what I heard from the God. King Phoebus in plain words commanded us to drive out a pollution from our land, pollution grown ingrained within the land; drive it out said the God, not cherish it, till it's past cure.”¹¹⁶

The act of calling out for divine intervention in a situation of crisis is in itself indicative of a deep rooted self-deception. Among all the characters in *Oedipus Rex*, Jocasta seems to be the only who - if not in deed then at least in words - is skeptical of the power of oracles. She is the one who says “human beings have no part in the craft of prophecy”¹¹⁷. Her inconsistency, however, points also towards self-deception on her part; for after all if she was genuinely skeptical about the power of oracles, why then did she abandon her son to die on the slopes of Cithaeron?

I think that in *Oedipus Rex* the self-deception associated with oracles and their interpretation runs much deeper than the mere fact of calling out for and believing in divine intervention. If we now look closely at the words of the oracle as delivered by Creon and set them within the context of the crisis in Thebes, they really do hit the mark. The oracle speaks of a “pollution” that afflicts the city of Thebes. This refers to the plague or Black Death that the city is suffering from. We have concrete historical evidence that such plagues have occurred in many parts of the world wreaking havoc upon entire populations of people. Sophocles' depiction of the plague

¹¹⁶ Ibid; Grene, vv. 95 – 101, p. 14

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Grene, vv. 708 – 709, p. 41

situation has real historical precedents and it can be taken literally for what it is. The plague, however, can also be understood as a metaphor for other types of collective crises. Would I be going too far if I say that the experience of Civil War and Genocide does affect a society like a plague? There are also subtler crises, for instance the crisis of the decline of meaning and value than can affect a society like the plague, causing collective *acedia* in which the soul is torpid and dead even though the body may be alive and there may even be a semblance of social order.

My point here is that the oracle promises salvation for Thebes if the crisis at hand is resolved. There is nothing irrational in this. Oedipus as the King of Thebes and as one who cares deeply about the people needs to come up with a strategy that would alleviate the crisis over a period of time. However, in responding to the words of the oracle, Oedipus adopts a very transcendental mode of thought and speech which is worth paying attention to:

“What is the rite of purification? How shall it be done?”

Oedipus’ attitude towards the matter is already beginning to transform a quite general injunction into one that demands the sacrifice of a particular person. What concrete connection is there between the murder of Laius and the plague that afflicts Thebes? If there is, it is only a forced one as Oedipus’ words push Creon to speak as follows:

“By banishing a man, or expiation of blood by blood, since it is murder guilt which holds our city in this destroying storm.”¹¹⁸

Oedipus then asks – “Who is this man whose fate the God pronounces?”¹¹⁹ “My Lord, before you piloted the state we had a king called Laius”¹²⁰ Responds Creon. To this, Oedipus responds – “I know of him by hearsay. I have not seen him”. From this point onwards, Oedipus is driven by a raging inquisitiveness to search for the truth regarding Laius’ murder. Underlying this search are conflicting feelings – of hope for salvation of Thebes and of himself and the anxiety or dread that he himself is the murderer. The negative emotions of dread and envy come more forcefully into the picture once Teiresias comes onto the scene and starts to tear away at

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Grene, vv. 100 – 102, p. 15

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Grene, v. 104, p. 15

¹²⁰ Ibid., Grene, v. 103, p. 15

Oedipus' blindness, shaking his confidence. Before that though Oedipus was in a transcendental mood, speaking in clear, albeit priestly terms. He calls out for the sacrifice of a particular man based on an interpretation of the words of the oracle which are set in universal terms. In doing this Oedipus establishes a connection between a crisis that is universal or general in nature and a particular act of murder. We must explore the meaning of this but first let us look at some selected quotes from the speech that Oedipus delivers after having spoken to Creon, the priest and the suffering people of Thebes:

“For what you ask me – if you will hear my words, and hearing welcome them and fight the plague, you will find strength and lightening of your load. Hark to me; what I say to you, I say as one that is stranger to the deed.”¹²¹

“Now I proclaim to all men of Thebes: Who so among you knows the murderer by whose hand Laius, son of Labdacus, died – I command him to tell everything to me.”¹²²

“I forbid that man, whoever he may be, my land, my land where I hold sovereignty and throne; and I forbid any to welcome him or cry him a greeting or make him a sharer in sacrifice or offering to the Gods, or give him water for his hands to wash. I command all to drive him from their homes, since he is our pollution, as the oracle of Pytho's God proclaimed him now to me. So I stay forth as a champion of the God and of the man who died etc.”¹²³

Let us set aside for the moment the fact that unbeknownst to him, Oedipus is the actual locus of his own admonitions. We need to focus on the following matter. With a sense of great certitude, Oedipus links the general chaos and suffering of the citizens of Thebes with the murder of Laius. Oedipus is in no doubt that the diminishing life of the whole city can only be revived by the killing of the one who has murdered the previous king. In setting up this situation in this manner, Sophocles has created a model for a type of tragic self deception that runs throughout human history. In his speech Oedipus speaks of a “lightening of your load”. Can we not understand this load as being the burden of sin? I think that the notion that situations of collective crisis are born out of the inability of individual members of a community to endure the

¹²¹ Ibid., Grene, vv. 219 – 224, p. 19

¹²² Ibid., Grene, vv. 224 – 227, pp. 19 - 20

¹²³ Ibid., Grene, vv. 236 – 245, p. 20

burdens of their own sins is not restricted to this or that culture. And neither is it unique when people seek a special figure of sacrifice who will take the burden of everyone's sins and rid a society of its pollution.

Tragic self-deception runs at many different levels in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and at this point I will flesh out one specific aspect of the problem. Laius, King of Thebes, was murdered several years before the plague that constitutes the crisis pervading Thebes in *Oedipus Rex*. At one point in the first exchange between Oedipus and Creon, Oedipus asks the following question: "What trouble was so great to hinder you inquiring out the murder of your king?" To which Creon responds "The riddling Sphinx induced us to neglect mysterious crimes and rather seek solution of troubles at our feet". As we know, Oedipus murders Laius at the cross-roads in Phocis and then proceeds to Thebes where he solves the riddle of the Sphinx and brings respite to the people of Thebes from the "troubles" at their feet. At the beginning of the play, the suppliants tell Oedipus that – "You came and by your coming saved our city, freed us from the tribute which we paid of old to the Sphinx, cruel singer. This you did in virtue of no knowledge we could give you, in virtue of no teaching; it was God that aided you, men say, and you are held with God's assistance to have saved our lives"¹²⁴. Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx through his own acumen and not by any knowledge coming from a divine, transcendental source, as the people of Thebes claim.

I want to say that the trouble of the plague differs only in degree from the trouble of the Sphinx. The plague, as a source of widespread death and decay is a much bigger crisis than the crisis of the Sphinx where the citizens are held in some sort of economic bondage due to their own blindness more than anything else. The crisis of the plague is nevertheless a concrete situation that demands a concrete solution. The injunction of the oracle as stated by Creon can be seen as a rather universal and general advice to restore civic order and harmony in society. It seems to me that Oedipus - even though he cares deeply for the salvation of Thebes – has given up on finding a real solution to the crisis in Thebes. He has succumbed to the sheer devastation that he sees all around him and he now believes that there is a direct causal relation between the murder of Laius and the plague of Thebes. Oedipus is working according to the notion that a general, universal crisis can be averted by the sacrifice of a particular. It would be rational to think that

¹²⁴ Ibid., Grene, vv. 35 – 40, p. 12

the execution of the murderer would be an act of justice but to think that this execution would abate the crisis of Thebes is deeply problematic. Let us explore this further.

In forcing a connection between the murder of Laius and the plague in Thebes, Oedipus adopts a religious tone of voice. What he calls for in his raging yet clear speech can be traced in different religious traditions. Speaking of the ancient and multifaceted Buddhist religious tradition, one of its central tenets is the notion of Karma. The basic idea is that as we live in this world, we build up Karma through sin and reduce Karma through good deeds and more significantly, through suffering. Temporality in Buddhism is cyclical and there is strong faith in reincarnation. Every time a person is reincarnated in the world, he carries with him the Karma that he accumulated in his previous life. The Karma inherited ostensibly from history can only be reduced through suffering and good deeds. Moreover, there is also a notion of relational Karma whereby a bad karma builds up between two persons or even between groups of people over the course of history. Such people or groups remain antagonistic to one another through generations of reincarnation unless the karma is reduced through some means. It can so happen, according to Buddhist doctrine, that there is so much karma in a society or among a group of people – in a particular “*lebenswelt*” as Husserl would say – that the collective or individual suffering of all the people in that group is not sufficient to bring down the karma. That the collective karma has become overwhelming is borne out by situations of seemingly inextricable crisis, not unlike the plague of Thebe as depicted by Sophocles. In Buddhist religious doctrine, the crisis can only be alleviated if a special person takes up the burden of the collective karma and perishes in the process. A forced connection is thus made between alleviation of the general, universal crisis and the sacrifice of a particular person who bears the collective guilt. Is this not tragic self-deception? When a crisis situation seems inescapable, with no concrete solution in sight and there is a lack of desire to find one, people have a tendency to search for a scapegoat.

It would be an understatement to say that this theme is dominant in the very foundations of Christianity. According to Christian belief Jesus Christ was crucified and in suffering thus on the cross he took up the burden of the sins of the coming generations of humanity. The symbolic significance of crucifixion is not limited only to Christian religion and civilization. Some variations may occur across cultures but the basic idea remains the same – a causal connection is

drawn between the alleviation of current crises or avoidance of future troubles and the ritualized sacrificial murder of an individual.

I think that Islam is very interesting in that if we look at its most fundamental principles, we can see an effort to root out precisely the type of causal connection that Oedipus draws between the resolution of the crisis in Thebes and the destruction of the murderer of Laius. One of the basic ideas in Islam, at least as it comes across in the Quran is that human beings on an individual or collective level are responsible for carrying the burden of their sins and there is no special person – either prophet or scapegoat – whose sacrifice is going to alleviate the burden of sins and the crises that may falsely be associated with it. Islam certainly has strong notions of martyrdom; however, the martyrs are in no way washing away the pollution of society and culture through their sacrifice. In studying the history or progression of Islam we see that not long after the death of Muhammad, the notion of Jesus-like martyr slips into the religion through the battle of Karbala and the rise of Shia Islam. The grandson of the prophet violates the orders of the then Caliph Ameer Moavia and enters into a battle with a massive imperial army with only his own family fighting by his side. All the men in the family - and foremost among them Hussein – are killed in this battle. According to the Shia perspective, the blood of Hussein was necessary for the revival of Islam and for arresting the corruption that had set in society. From a secular perspective and also from the perspective of Sunni Islam the battle stemmed from a crisis that was social and political in nature but Shia Muslims give it a transcendental coloring whereby Hussein does indeed become a Christ-like figure of sacrifice who takes up the burden of the flaws of a society. The purpose of this digression is to show that even Islam - a religion so rigidly against the notion that a particular individual can take up the burden of sins of others – is deeply affected by this idea.

Let us glance briefly at the Great Mayan civilization during its years of decline and fall. There was widespread famine and disease due primarily, I think, to mismanagement of agricultural resources, rampant corruption among the ruling classes and a lack of civic order. As the crisis grew, an elaborate system of ritualistic sacrifice was set in place to appease the perceived anger of the Gods. Scapegoats were picked up from areas surrounding the main city and slaughtered in a ceremony at a temple as hundreds of onlookers went into a state of frenzy. The idea was that the blood of the victims of sacrificial rites would purify the land of its sickness. The sickness of

society was attributed to the anger of the Gods. And the Gods were perceived to be angry on account of the sinfulness of the people. The victims of sacrifice are symbolic offerings of faith and are also particular bearers of the sins of the collective. This, in my view, is tragic self-deception.

One of the biggest issues in contemporary American - and global politics for that matter – is what is called the war on terror. I think that the current form of terrorism is only a symptom of a wider state of unrest and discontent in many Muslim countries. To root out this particular form of terrorism, the underlying deeper issues need to be confronted. However, the focus of this war to a great extent has been to search and destroy particular figures or groups of people. Figures like Saddam or Zarqawi or Khalid Sheikh are criminals and they have to be brought to justice. However, the execution or killing of these figures should not be linked with the eradication of the root cause. I want to say that the forced connection between the war on terror and the reform of Islamic societies is a tragic self deception which has only intensified the symptoms (terrorism, extremism) of a general political and cultural disorder.

I have now expended some effort in bringing forth one particular form of tragic self-deception from out of Oedipus's overtly religious interpretation of the words of the oracle as delivered by Creon. By linking the plague of Thebes with the murder of Laius and calling for the purge of the killer, Oedipus escapes from precisely that responsibility towards the state which he feels so deeply. While holding on to this idea of evasion of responsibility in the face of a concrete crisis, let us now examine Laius' response to the crisis created in his life when he learns from the oracle that Oedipus would go on to kill him and his wife. In comparison with the situation of collective crisis in which Oedipus calls for and interprets the words of the oracle, Laius' crisis is limited to himself and his family.

The words of the oracle have certainly cast a dark cloud upon the birth of the first child, which should be an occasion of immense joy. The situation demands most of all that Laius retains a strong sense of consciousness and consistency. I think that Laius lacks both a strong consciousness of the crisis and consistency in the adoption of a course of action. Laius maintains in his mind both a belief and the negation of that belief and therefore he is in a state of self-deception. Unlike Oedipus's self-deception in the face of the oracle about the purgation, I

think that Laius's self-deception is not tragic. Oedipus believes in the voice of the oracle and his actions are consistent with this belief and that is what makes him tragic. We can certainly blame Oedipus for a lack of consciousness of himself and of his situation but we cannot take away from him his capacity to make radical decisions.

The first and main aspect of Laius's dilemma centers upon whether to believe in or to completely disregard the words of the oracle. His wife Jocasta does not believe in oracles but she is inconsistent when it comes to taking action. It seems to me that Laius himself neither believes nor disbelieves in the oracles. He is in a state of confusion and his actions bear this out. My point here is that Laius is, first of all, not conscious of the conflict that he is facing. The situation in itself represents a tragic conflict between two opposing courses of action. If he genuinely doubts the power of oracles then he should keep his son alive and in his home. On the other hand, if he has firm faith in the oracle and thus in the divine, then he is faced with a genuinely tragic dilemma. Whether he kills his son or does not kill him and lets him live in his home, Laius is doomed. Neither course of action guarantees salvation for Laius. If he kills his son, he may avoid future physical confrontation but then his spiritual life would be devastated and moreover, he would commit the ultimate crime. If he does not kill his son and lets him grow up in his home, he would then live in constant fear and anxiety. In any event, Laius is faced with a tragic conflict but he refuses to confront it and takes a decision that shows inconsistency of character. He simply decides to avoid the tragic conflict and along with his wife, gives away the son to the herdsman. The herdsman gave the baby to another man who "saved it for the most terrible troubles"¹²⁵. Laius's inconsistency leads to his eventual destruction which is not tragic, but rather pathetic. Many years after the birth of Oedipus and during a time when the citizens of Thebes are beholden to the Sphinx, Laius sets off on the road towards Delphi and meets his own son at the crossroads of Phocis. Oedipus kills his inconsistent father in a fit of rage. Laius dies without having come to consciousness and retaining his state of indecisiveness and uncertainty. Oedipus on the other hand remains decisive throughout even though he is blinded to his situation and his actions for the most part, coming to consciousness only at the end after he has brought destruction upon his family if not upon the citizens of Thebes.

¹²⁵ Ibid., Grene, vv. 1181 – 1182. p. 63

The discussion of Laius's fate has opened up for us the idea that there is a self-deception which is tragic as differentiated from one that is merely pathetic. Oedipus's self-deception is tragic mainly because he is decisive in trying to fulfill the expectations that he has of himself and for what he can do for the people of Thebes. Oedipus is filled with desire and he does take strong actions. What he lacks is genuine consciousness of the crisis of Thebes and more importantly of his own self. Nevertheless, he does make an authentic effort to come to consciousness and gets destroyed in the process. His greatness lies in the fact that he ultimately takes responsibility for everything that he has done. Oedipus's frantic search for himself also leads to the death of his mother Jocasta. I think that Jocasta is also a figure in self-deception but her fate is sad, not tragic. She also displays inconsistency of character. I think that Jocasta's perspective on the whole situation can be captured in what she says to Oedipus as she tries to prevent him from his search for the terrible self-knowledge:

“Why should man fear since chance is all in all for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing? Best to live lightly, as one can, unthinkingly. As to your mother's marriage bed, - don't fear it. Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles, many a man has lain with his own mother. But he to whom such things are nothing bears his life most easily”¹²⁶.

Socrates tells us that an unexamined life is not worth living. The first part of Jocasta's statement goes against this basic philosophical attitude towards life that Socrates brings forth. To either give up on or to never undertake the struggle for consciousness is to give up the battle against of self-deception. Jocasta chooses to look away from the situation in which she is trapped. She is skeptical about the power of oracles but does not allow this skepticism to play a role in the decisions that she makes. Also, even after she realizes that Oedipus is her son, she continues to look away from this reality. This ultimately leads to her demise, which is sad but not tragic.

We have thus far constructed our narrative around two statements of the oracle – the one that Oedipus hears through Creon and the other that Laius hears after the birth of Oedipus. Let us now examine the third occasion in the play where the oracle speaks, this time to the young Oedipus. Oedipus was living in Corinth as the son of Polybus and Merope and “was held

¹²⁶ Ibid., Grene, vv. 970 – 984, p. 52

greatest of the citizens”¹²⁷. He was blind to the fact that he is not the son of the king and queen of Corinth. Then one night, a drunken man at a banquet sowed the seeds of doubt in Oedipus’s mind, accusing him of “being a bastard”¹²⁸. Polybus and Merope try to comfort Oedipus as they continue to conceal from him the truth of his parentage. Rumors begin to circulate in Corinth and Oedipus is immensely disturbed and agitated. Without informing Polybus and Merope, Oedipus goes to Delphi to learn the truth from the oracle. However, as Oedipus talks about this with Jocasta, he tells her:

“Phoebus sent me home again unhonoured in what I came to learn, but he foretold other and desperate horrors to befall me, that I was fated to lie with my mother, and show to daylight an accursed breed which men should not endure, and I was doomed to be murderer of the father that begot me.”¹²⁹

Oedipus has firm faith in the voice of God; however, what he hears does nothing to free him from his ignorance regarding who his parents really are. If anything, the words of the oracle make it even more imperative for Oedipus to reach the truth. However, with his mind suffused by darkness, Oedipus, instead of returning back to Corinth to extract the truth from his supposed parents, decides to run far away from them. I think that his decision is governed by a firm faith in and fear of God. He interprets the words of the oracle as an impossible command to avoid doing what he is fated to do. Since the oracle does not reveal his parentage, Oedipus decides to believe that his supposed parents are his true parents. Oedipus and Laius are both faced with a similar type of conflict. Oedipus, however, unlike Laius takes a firm decision based on faith. He acts forcefully by running away from Corinth and towards Thebes. His action does not save him from his ignorance, however. It is basically this blindness towards who his parents are that Oedipus commits the future terrible crimes. Oedipus begins the search for consciousness when it is already too late. It should be kept in mind that Oedipus’s decision to flee towards Thebes is governed by a genuine albeit blind desire to avoid being the destroyer of his family. He is genuinely seeking redemption for himself and for his family.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Grene, v. 776, p. 45

¹²⁸ Ibid., Grene, v. 780, p. 45

¹²⁹ Ibid., Grene, vv. 790 – 795, p. 45

Oedipus's confrontation with Laius at the crossroads of Phocis is laden with philosophical and symbolic meaning. On the one end there is Oedipus, seeking redemption and fleeing so as to avoid committing the terrible acts that the oracle has spoken of. On the other end there is Laius who is Oedipus's real father, precisely the person that Oedipus wants to avoid harming. Oedipus is coming out of Delphi while Laius is going towards it. In the scuffle that ensues Oedipus kills Laius. What does this mean? In his own mind, Oedipus is doing everything to save himself and his family. And that is the way things appear to him on the surface. In reality, however, his actions are bearing destructive consequences and precisely those that he dearly wants to avoid. All of this stems from ignorance towards reality. Oedipus does not know who his parents are and Laius is uncertain about the fate of the son whom he had given away. When Laius tries to push Oedipus away from the road, he is enraged¹³⁰. His anger is also a function of his desperate desire to not bring harm upon his family. It is said that things are not what they seem to be and in Oedipus's case this assumes tragic significance.

I think that a key form or aspect of tragic self-deception that we can extract from Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* is precisely this – if you are not conscious of what you are and of the situation that you are in then even your greatest efforts to do good will end in failure and will bear the opposite consequences. Once again, on the surface or in the realm of appearances, Oedipus is taking actions that are directed towards salvation and redemption. If we remove the veil of appearance, however, we see that Oedipus's actions are leading him and his family towards destruction. In my view, if we think of Oedipus in terms concrete obligations (in a Hegelian sense), he has obligations towards his family and also towards the people of Thebes for he is their King. He has a genuine desire to fulfill all of these obligations but due to his ignorance about reality, he ends up failing himself, his family and also the people of Thebes.

Now this tragic juxtaposition of redemption in the realm of appearances and annihilation in reality is very powerful for understanding concrete human tragedy. For me, Oedipus's desire to do good for himself and his family is as important as his desire to do something beneficial for the people of Thebes. However, it is his role as a political leader that strikes me as being something that intensifies the tragedy. For after all, his decisions and his actions are having an impact upon people outside of the sphere of his own person and family. When political leaders in positions of

¹³⁰ Ibid., Grene, v. 805, p. 46

power make decisions in a state of self deception, their tragedy is not simply personal but collective. In history and in current events, we have examples of leaders who genuinely want to do good for their people but due to lack of consciousness regarding what they are and what crisis they are facing, they plunge themselves and their states into disaster.

My discussion thus far of the tragic self-deception in *Oedipus Rex* may leave the reader with an impression that I have too much of a faith in the capacity of human reason, consciousness and freedom. That is not so. I think that there are crises whose intractability exceeds the limits of human reason and freedom. In such cases tragedy is inevitable, irrespective of what the actor does. The complexity or the inevitability of a crisis or dilemma should not however absolve the actor from the responsibility of overcoming self-deception. Oedipus too engages in the struggle to come to consciousness and to overcome the layers of blindness. But he has already “spoken far too much” and exceeded all limits in his actions. The struggle though does bring forth all of the duality, contradiction and more importantly the mode of human failure that emerges out of tragic self-deception. Sophocles’s description of this struggle can be seen as a universal metaphor for what happens when powerful people, driven but blind, overcome this blindness when it is already too late. Oedipus’s greatness lies in the way in which he eventually assumes responsibility for everything that he has done; there are many in his position who would not have done so.

Oedipus’s battle for consciousness begins in earnest during his dialogue with Teiresias who though afflicted with physical blindness, is spiritually aware of what lies uncovered. Oedipus greets the prophet with immense respect, for he genuinely wants to know where the killers of Laius are hiding. However, this attitude changes as Teiresias points out to Oedipus that he himself is the killer who is being blamed for the plague in Thebes. One important notion that I think can be extracted from Oedipus’s exchange with Teiresias is that self-deception even in figures as powerful as Oedipus does lead to the lowly, negative emotion of resentment. It is resentment, hidden grudges and jealousy that drive Oedipus to make unsubstantiated claims against Creon, his loyal friend and against Teiresias himself. At this stage, Oedipus is strongly resisting nascent feelings of his own culpability and still believes that he is now and has in the past acted in the best interests of the state. As this belief begins to waver, feelings of grudge and envy come to the surface and these are what really motivate his attack on Teiresias and Creon -

as the latter says – “Were his eyes straight in his head? Was his mind right when he accused me in this fashion?” Oedipus is resentful against Teiresias because he can see into the heart of the matter despite his physical blindness. Similarly, he is resentful against Creon for his calm, wise demeanor in the face of crises. Both Creon and Teiresias also come across as figures that are not driven by ambition, they are at peace with what they are and what they have; Oedipus, I think, resents this too. In this play Creon’s character can be grasped through these words:

“I was not born with a frantic yearning to be a king – but to do what kings do. And so it is with everyone who has learned wisdom and self-control. As it stands now, the prizes are all mine – and without fear....How should despotic rule seem sweeter to me than painless power and an assured authority.”¹³¹

I think that in philosophical discussions of tragedy, particularly those inspired by Nietzsche, resentment is seen as the antithesis of the essence of the tragic. If I speak of resentment in the context of the tragic figure of Oedipus, a Nietzschean response to me would be that my perspective is that of the spectator and I am not seeing the drama from the view point of Dionysus. I want to say that the negative force of resentment that drives Oedipus comes through in his condemnation of Teiresias and Creon who, in this play certainly has greater character than Oedipus. It also comes through in the following dialogue with Jocasta – “Keep up, your heart Jocasta. Though I’m proved a slave, thrice slave, and though my mother is thrice slave, you’ll not be shown to be of lowly lineage.” Now this last dialogue reflects, in my view an absence of a sense of self. If one has a strong sense of one’s own being, then one does not need to hold on to power or status. One is what one is and that should be enough. For Oedipus, this is not so and Sophocles’s depiction of the power of resentment in this drama provides some sort of model for beginning to understand concrete human tragedy. There are people who, blind to what they are and to their situation, perform terrible deeds purely under the influence of resentment without any substantial basis. It seems that resentment and the emotions associated with it have a strong affinity to self-deception.

Jocasta comes across as a figure who is witness to Oedipus’s struggle in the face of his own blindness. She says something which captures something very profound about Oedipus – “For

¹³¹ Ibid., Grene, vv. 587 – 595, p. 36

Oedipus excites himself too much at every sort of trouble, not conjecturing like a man of sense, what will be from what was, but he is always at the speaker's mercy, when he speaks terrors." The sense of guilt in Oedipus is evoked to the fullest when Jocasta relates the history of the family. In speaking about the murder of Laius, she speaks with reference to the herdsman in reassuring Oedipus that the murderer was not a lone man but a band of robbers. However, during her speech she refers to King Laius's piercing of Oedipus's ankles and this is what Oedipus later calls "that old pain"¹³². So when Jocasta refers to the wounds, Oedipus knows that he is guilty. From this point onwards, he retains in his mind the idea that he is guilty but also the negation of this idea. In his heart of heart he knows that he is guilty but he seeks negation by interviewing two different people. His prevailing self-deception prevents him from coming to consciousness of his condition on his own. So first comes the messenger (shepherd) with the news that Polybus, king of Corinth is dead. Oedipus is filled with a mad joy in which he seems to be giving up his responsibility towards the state –

"Ha! Ha! O dear Jocasta, why should one look to the Pythian hearth? Why should one look to the birds screaming overhead? They prophesied that I should kill my father! But he's dead and hidden deep in earth, and I stand here who never laid a hand on spear against him..."¹³³

These lines show that Oedipus does lack that quality which makes a leader truly great – self sacrifice. Through these words, a now insane Oedipus falls to a level where he takes joy merely in the false knowledge that he is free from culpability for the plague in Thebes – the depiction of "birds screaming overhead" signify that - and therefore his power is secure. This blind joy however is short lived as the messenger reveals to Oedipus that Merope and Polybus are not his real parents. The contradiction in Oedipus's mind is still not resolved as he searches for the negation of his guilt. He continues to search and through torture, he extracts from the herdsman the final pieces of knowledge which he ought to have known earlier – that Laius and Jocasta were his parents and that he is the one who murdered Laius. After this, the contradictions in Oedipus's mind disappear and all of the conflict in his past action emerges clearly. He assumes responsibility for everything. This consciousness however has come too late and in a symbolic gesture, he tears out his own eyes. Earlier on, we had seen how Oedipus makes a connection

¹³² Ibid., Grene, v. 1034, p. 55

¹³³ Ibid., Grene, vv. 965 - 970

between the plague of Thebes and the murder of Laius. Now seeing himself as the “pollution” of Thebes, Oedipus sentences himself to permanent exile from his homeland.

In his very last dialogue with Creon, Oedipus says to him “Since you have torn me from my dreadful expectations...”¹³⁴ On the one hand, we can understand the meaning of “dreadful expectations” purely within the context of this particular dialogue. After having gained self-knowledge but having lost everything else, Oedipus meets Creon and expects the latter to further humiliate him. Creon, however, acts in a noble manner so Oedipus’s expectations are reversed, this time for the better. However, if we look at the play as a whole we can see how due to self-deception, the main figure experiences a failure of expectations. Oedipus flees towards Thebes, hoping to fulfill the deepest expectations that he has for himself. Oedipus’s inner life is rooted in family and state and these are the sources of his expectations. On the road to Thebes, he kills his father and violates one major expectation. Then, when he reaches Thebes, he becomes a great political figure by solving the riddle of the Sphinx. His status gives him the right to marry Jocasta and once again his expectations for himself in his role as the son of the family are reversed. What Oedipus wanted to be was a good son and a good ruler. He made plans in ignorance but events did not unfold according to his expectations. There is an immediacy or simultaneity to the manner in which the deepest, innermost expectations collide with the causes of their failure. In coming face to face with Laius at the crossroads, Oedipus confronts the very failure of his deepest expectations in the figure of his father. The entire action of the play turns upon the investigation into the murder of Laius. It starts with Oedipus harboring great expectations for himself and for Thebes and it ends with Oedipus finding out that he himself is the murderer. The action of the play can thus also be seen as process during which Oedipus is separated from his expectations only after all of his blind actions have already produced terrible consequences. At the end, Oedipus confronts himself as the source of the failure of all of his expectations. Thus, if there is a duality between expectations and the failure of expectations, this duality is always moving closer to unity as the investigation into the murder proceeds. Both of these opposing elements come together eventually within the soul of Oedipus.

Now that we have drawn, what can be described as some of the aspects of tragic self-deception from out of Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*, it is time to move on to a discussion of some philosophical

¹³⁴ Ibid., Grene, v. 1430, p. 72

theory. I will be looking at Sartre's analysis of self-deception from his book *Being and Nothingness*¹³⁵ in which he gives some powerful insights which can help us in understanding our subject. Before delving into Sartre, however, I think that it is important to draw a clear distinction between tragic self-deception as it appears in *Oedipus Rex* – with particular stridency towards the end - and the bad faith that Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness*. In this connection, it is crucial that we reflect specifically upon Oedipus's act of self-blinding:

“He tore the brooches – the gold chased brooches fastening her robe – away from her and lifting then up high dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out such things as: they will never see the crime I have committed or had done upon me! Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on forbidden faces, do not recognize whom you long for – with such imprecations he struck his eyes again and yet again with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs gushed and stained his beard – no sluggish oozing drops but a black rain and bloody hail poured down.”¹³⁶

Oedipus blinds himself at that specific moment when he is no longer alienated from himself and his circumstances in the sense that he has now reached a stage of complete recognition. He now knows exactly who he is and where his obligations are located. The point however is that this overcoming of alienation and attainment of self-knowledge do not in any way heal the injuries that have already been caused. The damage done by tragic self-deception is irreversible and the value destroyed cannot be recovered. Moreover, the fresh wounds that Oedipus has created by blinding himself do not cure the wounds of the past. One way to interpret Oedipus's self-blinding would be to say that this is the sacrifice that needed to be made in order to overcome alienation and to reach self-knowledge. This interpretation also implies that the tragedy is ultimately reconciled. I do not agree with this interpretation because the act of self-blinding is the terminal point of the tragic dialectic of self-deception. Beyond this point there is only darkness and before it, the irreversible loss of things that are of value. There is no consolation. Furthermore, Oedipus's self-blinding is, in my view, the culmination of a series of actions carried out with nothing but sincere intentions. Despite all the blindness that pervades his consciousness and obstructs its path, Oedipus does remain sincere throughout towards what he perceives to be his family and his state. The starting point of Sartre's analyses of bad faith and

¹³⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Translated by Hazel Barnes, Philosophical Library, New York 1956.

¹³⁶ Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, pp. 66-67

sincerity – the replacement of reality with idea – is already present in Oedipus. We also learn from Sartre that bad faith is inevitable and sincerity is bound to fail because the ontology of consciousness teaches us that consciousness is nothing but the for-itself which is expressed exclusively in action and has no thing-like (in-itself) reality. Though his theory has tremendous potential, the problem is that Sartre, in my view (and at least in this earlier work) retains too much of a faith in the capacity of a unified consciousness to discern and overcome the lies that it is telling to itself. In Sartre, consciousness is destined to be in one state of self-deception or the other but the main idea is that there is a power of intention, will and freedom (the basic characteristic of consciousness) that can overcome this alienation. We learn from the tragedy of Oedipus that there is a tragic form of self-deception which cannot be overcome on the basis of notions of authenticity. Moreover, the toll that it takes is radically irreversible compared to the toll exacted by Sartre's bad faith which afflicts us at every moment in our life. To take this point further, sincerity is more than a question of recognizing the other and oneself as 'for-itself'. It is a question of fulfilling obligations in the context of deeply formed relations. Oedipus self-deception does indeed imply a lack of recognition but what pains him much more is his failure at doing what he ought to do and sincerely desires to do. Finally, the sources of Oedipus's blindness towards what he is and what he ought to do may well be in his own consciousness but it cannot be overcome by the exercise of will and freedom. One must continue to probe with an aim to discover further elements in the dialectic of tragic self-deception. I think that an extrapolation of Sartre's ontology can enrich our understanding of tragic self-deception.

In Sartre's philosophy human consciousness or the 'for-itself' is the source of all negation or non-being in the world. The phenomenon of bad faith is a type of "self-negation" where the function of negation is directed inwards, that is, towards consciousness itself¹³⁷. The Szondi text on Goethe brings forth the idea that for self-deception to be a tragedy, we must presuppose the unity of the psychic whole or 'I'. Sartre, in his analysis of bad faith (self-deception) points out that it is precisely through the phenomenon of bad faith that we can derive the conclusion that the self is a unity. Sartre makes a subtle distinction between bad faith and lie - in bad faith, I conceal the truth from myself. This concealment does not have any sort of ontological duality inherent in it. In bad faith, I hide a truth from myself, not from an ontological other. Moreover, the process of self-deception is not disjointed in time; rather, it occurs in the unity of the present

¹³⁷ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 48

moment¹³⁸. Bad Faith is a tragic paradox that evades the grasp of the Freudian dualism of the Ego and Id. The phenomenon of bad faith both presupposes and demonstrates the unity of a psychic whole. In bad faith there is a subtle veiling of something that is very evident and this can occur only within a psychic organism that is unified. Sartre often takes a position contrary to Freud and particularly so when he is speaking of bad faith¹³⁹. For Sartre, the Freudian trinity of Ego, Id and Superego fail to explain an experience that presupposes the unity of the psychic self or I¹⁴⁰.

Sartre begins his analysis of bad faith with the following question, “what must be the being of man if he is to be capable of bad faith?”¹⁴¹ And he is in search for a response to this question. I think that the most powerful of these attempts centers on the description of patterns of bad faith¹⁴² which really is an experiential inquiry into the phenomenon. Sartre gives a typical example of bad faith through his description of a woman who goes out on a rendezvous with a man for the first time. The woman has knowledge of the sexual intentions that the man harbors regarding her but she hides this from herself. She knows also that she will need to make a decision at some point but she puts it off, so to speak, and focuses her attention only upon what is “respectful and discreet in the attitude of her companion”¹⁴³. She understands quite well that his behavior is an attempt to achieve a “first approach” but she forgets that and chooses to focus only on the nobler aspects of his behavior¹⁴⁴. She fixes the phrases with which the man addresses her into a thing-like permanence and by doing so she is also seeing the man as an in-itself. She sees his current respectful and discreet behavior as an expression of his entire personality, his essence. At the same time, she behaves throughout her appointment as if she herself was a thing in-itself and therefore refuses to make any decision in one direction or the other. For Sartre, as we know, human existence precedes essence so that there is nothing essential or thing-like about what we are. We are our consciousness, which is the for-itself that is devoid of all content and is characterized only by pure freedom. One of the reasons why the woman is in bad faith is that she looks at herself as a thing and wants the other to also recognize

¹³⁸ Wilfrid Desan, *The Tragic Finale – An Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Harper Torchbook 1960. p. 24

¹³⁹ Ibid., Desan, p. 24

¹⁴⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 52

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Sartre, p. 55

¹⁴² Ibid., Sartre, pp. 55 - 67

¹⁴³ Ibid., Sartre, p. 55

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

her as a thing. She attaches objectivity to her own qualities and those of her suitor while these qualities are part of an ever-changing temporal flux.

“We shall say that this woman is in bad faith. But we see immediately that she uses various procedures in order to maintain herself in this bad faith. She has disarmed the actions of her companion by reducing them to being what they are; that is, to existing in the mode of the in-itself. But she permits herself to enjoy his desire, to the extent that she will apprehend it as not being what it is, will recognize its transcendence. Finally while sensing profoundly the presence of her own body – to the degree of being disturbed perhaps – she realizes herself as not being her own body, and she contemplates it as though from above as a passive object to which events can happen but which can neither provoke them nor avoid them because all its possibilities are outside of it. What unity do we find in these various aspects of bad faith? It is a certain art of forming contradictory concepts which unite in themselves both an idea and the negation of that idea. The basic concept which is thus engendered, utilizes the double property of the human being, who is at once facticity and transcendence. These two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination. But bad faith does not wish either to coordinate them or to surmount them in a synthesis. Bad faith seeks to affirm their identity while preserving their differences. It must affirm facticity as being transcendence and transcendence as being facticity, in such a way that at the instant when a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other.”¹⁴⁵

The woman is in bad faith because she does not have knowledge of what she wants. She is full of desire and inspires the desire of her companion but she refuses to acknowledge her desire for what it really is. On the one hand she has formed idealizations of the emotions displayed by her partner and on the other hand, she does continue to feel and enjoy her desire only to the extent that she apprehends its transcendental form. Also in terms of her recognition of her own body, she sees her soul not as one with but as distinct from her body. For her the body is purely an object, an in-itself that cannot act in this or that way but is merely at the behest of forces external to it. She does not have a grasp on what her possibilities really are. Bad Faith is an attitude in which facticity (reality) and transcendence (idealization) cohere in such a manner that one is confused with another. During her rendezvous the woman affirms the idealization of the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., Sartre, p. 56

situation and confuses it with reality or forgets the reality altogether. Her expectations of the situation are formed only by the idealization and objectification of transitory feelings and qualities. Thus Bad Faith brings forth the tragedy of failure of expectations. We form false expectations of a situation by working with a mind that is suffused with contradictions. We fail to see the demands of the situation and to know what is required of us. Sartre refers to the transcendence-facticity complex as a metastable concept. What underlies this metastasis is a lack of solid commitment so that when in bad faith, one continually shifts to and fro between transcendence and facticity¹⁴⁶.

To show with further clarity as to how self-deception represents a tragic paradox, I would like to refer back to Szondi's identification of the tragic with the dialectic which is – "the unity of opposites, the change into one's opposite, the negative positing of oneself, self-division"¹⁴⁷. If we go by Sartre's analysis of self-deception, we can see that it is a unification of opposites - transcendence and facticity. Also in bad faith, transcendence is taken as facticity and facticity is taken as transcendence. Furthermore, the person in bad faith posits himself negatively, that is, as a thing devoid of possibilities. Finally, bad faith is manifested in the occurrence of arbitrary divisions within the self. We can see for instance the way in which the woman in Sartre's example completely divides her body from her soul. That Sartre's conception of self-deception follows Szondi's dialectical formulation of the tragic is in itself not sufficient to show the potential for tragedy that this attitude contains.

Let us take for instance Sartre's description of two opposing and contradictory judgments that can be made on the issue of love. Bad Faith, for Sartre, is subtle art of exploiting such contradictory judgments with the aim of establishing that "I am not what I am" which is an avoidance of responsibility and an escape into inauthenticity. In matters of love, Sartre seems to be saying, there is an idealism or transcendence found in Plato's Eros, Lawrence's Deep Cosmic Intuition, Mauriac's "river of fire" (longing for the infinite)¹⁴⁸. That is one judgment on the nature of love but there is another which is based on the facticity of love. Sartre refers here to "the contact of two skins, sensuality, egoism, Proust's mechanism of jealousy, Adler's battle of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Sartre, p. 57

¹⁴⁷ Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, p. 102

¹⁴⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 56

sexes”¹⁴⁹. Sartre shows how these two contradictory judgments on love are unified in a prototypical formula of bad faith captured in the title of a work by a French novelist Jacques Chardonne – “Love Is Much More than Love”¹⁵⁰. In this statement the facticity or reality of the present of love is unified with its idealized or transcendental form in such a manner that we escape instantaneously from the concrete to the transcendent. On the other hand, there are formulae of bad faith where transcendence perpetually disintegrates into facticity. In this regard Sartre gives the example of the title of a play by Sarment – “I Am Too Great for Myself” or the following sentence – “He has become what he was”¹⁵¹. The main point here is that the formulaic expressions of bad faith are devoid of substantial content. The coming together of contradictory statements in these formulae means that they are perpetually unstable in that they move from idealization to reality and vice versa.

“We can see the use which bad faith can make of these judgments which all aim at establishing that I am not what I am. If I were only what I am, I could, for example, seriously consider an adverse criticism which someone makes of me, question myself scrupulously, and perhaps be compelled to recognize the truth in it. But thanks to transcendence, I am not subject to all that I am. I do not even have to discuss the justice of the reproach...the ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I am my transcendence in the mode of being of a thing.”¹⁵²

We can break into the above passage by thinking in terms of the distinction that Sartre makes between the For-itself and the In-itself. The For-itself is human consciousness and it is nothing but pure freedom and the source of all negation in the world. The in-itself, on the contrary, is fullness and it consists of the world outside of human consciousness. The consciousness of freedom comes only through the anguish in the face of possibilities which are always my possibilities. For Sartre, Bad Faith is an escape from this anguish and thus from freedom itself. The engagement with possibilities that Sartre speaks of is conscious and reflective. If I am acting in Bad Faith, I am still reflecting but in such a way that I am pure transcendence devoid of the facts of my reality. Moreover, I am my transcendence in the mode of the in-itself which is

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Sartre, p. 56

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Sartre, p. 57

¹⁵² Ibid.

duplicious because what I am is the for-itself which is in opposition to being in-itself. In bad faith I have confused my facticity with my idealizations in such a way that I am completely blinded to the responsibility that I bear for my situation – there are clear echoes of Oedipus here. Returning to the case of the young woman we can see how she has taken the respect shown her by her companion on to the plane of the transcendent. All the facts of her situation are made to adhere to the idealizations and eventually they acquire for her the character of the in-itself whereas in fact they are the products of a free consciousness.

Sartre explains that the metastable concept of transcendence-facticity is not the only ground for self-deception. Another very basic example of duplicity as derived from concrete human reality is rooted in the distinction between being-for-itself and being-for-others. Self-deception occurs when my being-for-itself is defined by what others make of me. This is a form of duplicity in which I have forgotten that I know more about myself than others know about me. This implies that I am living a second-handed life in which I do not have an original position on any matter. All of my beliefs and positions – particularly those that pertain to my inner life – are derived from what others make of me. The expectations that I form for myself do not come from within, they are based rather on how others see me.

Sartre points out that each one of my actions can be subject to my own gaze and to the gaze of the other¹⁵³. These two looks or perspectives can be understood as two aspects of my being. These two perspectives on my being and actions will not have the exact same structure in any given case. What does happen though, as Sartre points out, is that these two perspectives upon my being are not different in the way in which we speak of a difference between “appearance and being”¹⁵⁴. In self-deception, I think that what I know about myself is the same as what the other knows about me. I thus fail to realize that there is a difference between the “truth” that I know about myself and the deformed image of my self that the other possesses of me.

¹⁵³ Ibid., Sartre, p. 57

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Sartre, p. 58

“The equal dignity of being, possessed by my being-for-others and by my being-for-myself permits a perpetually disintegrating synthesis and a perpetual game of escape from the for-itself to the for-others and from the for-others to the for-itself”¹⁵⁵.

For Sartre, consciousness is unified and in self-deception a duality develops within the structure of this unity. This duality results from the formation of a “disintegrating” identity which attempts to escape from itself. Sartre makes a clear distinction between the for-itself and for-others and explains that an unstable synthesis of the two is one of the basic instruments of bad faith. Once I identify my being-for-myself with my being-for-others, I have fallen into a second-handedness where my actions are determined not by self-knowledge but by what others think and know about me. My self-awareness and consciousness of my own actions is confused with the awareness that others have of me to an extent where the former is covered over and forgotten. I act according to standards that others have set for me and there is a lack of self-consciousness in all of these actions.

Sartre links this second basic instrument of bad faith with the first one as follows. There is an aspect of our being which is the in-itself, that is, our thing-like presence as an object among other objects in the world. It is through the aspect of our being which is the for-itself that we project ourselves beyond our thing-like presence in the world towards our own possibilities¹⁵⁶. Looking back at the example of the woman who goes out on a rendezvous, we see how she manipulates her situation as an inert object in the midst of the world so as to escape her role as a being who creates her own world and her own possibilities. Sartre uses the term “temporal ecstasy” to explain the escape from being-for-itself to being-in-itself. This is an escape that occurs in both the instruments of bad faith that we have discussed so far. Sartre’s elaborations of these two instruments of self-deception is directed at establishing that human reality is a “being which is what it is not and which is not what it is”¹⁵⁷. The two temporal ecstasies that we have studied are metastable concepts which are tied together by a single structure. There is a particular disintegrating or confusing synthesis that lies behind the ambiguity generated by these temporal ecstasies. This disintegrating or metastable synthesis affirms at once that “I am what I have been (the man who deliberately arrests himself at one period in his life and refuses to take

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

into consideration the later changes) and that I am not what I have been (the man who in the face of reproaches or rancor dissociates himself from his past by insisting on his freedom and on his perpetual re-creation)”. Self-deception thus emerges not only as blindness towards one’s self and one’s situation but also as an escape from responsibility. In the first instance, one’s past is seen as being inscribed in stone so that there is blindness towards changes that have occurred and an escape from the responsibility that one holds for the present and for the future. In the second instance, one evades responsibility for what has happened in the past by insisting on a freedom that has assumed a thing-like form, devoid of consciousness. In this case, the person in self-deception is blind towards the fact that freedom is tied with consciousness and consciousness brings responsibility.

CHAPTER V

TRAGEDY AS FAILURE OF EXPECTATIONS AND THE QUESTION OF DIGNITY

The 'tragic' element in human existence is multi-faceted. I hope to have brought this across in my first three chapters, each of which deals with a different type of tragedy in human life. I think that in order to clarify the subject matter of this particular chapter and to clearly distinguish it from the previous three, it would be expedient to begin with the following question – Am I, as a person, exclusively a product of social, historical, environmental, cultural and political forces acting on me from without and of psychological and physiological forces acting from within? Or is there something more to me, other than and above and beyond all the forces that condition me?

If I consider the first question within the context of the three chapters on tragedy that I have already written, it seems to me that the answer would be 'yes'. In my second chapter I drew mainly upon Hegel to show how political conflicts emerge from out of the adherence to deeply felt rational obligations that come to us from history. Then in my third chapter, I started by drawing upon Simmel to broach upon the tragic conflict within culture or more precisely, the conflict that occurs between the inner life of the human person and the autonomous products of culture; a in which the latter prevail. My fourth chapter was about the broad-based inner darkness of self-deception which leads to tragedy on an individual and collective level. In this chapter I drew upon Sartre and Oedipus to bring forth the central features of tragic self-deception, one of which is its seeming inevitability. In my dissertation, I have not focused at all upon human physiology, but I think it is safe to say that there are iron-clad predetermined forces that control the body too and there are undoubtedly tragic conflicts that emerge from what we are biologically.

In this, the fifth chapter of my dissertation, I will be looking at a different type of tragedy, one that will also enable me to provide an affirmative response to the second question (outlined above). To explain myself, I need to speak in terms of well-known and perhaps not very subtle facts. These are also facts that have not yet been tested on the anvil of history. As I write these lines, the news media is reporting that Gaza is now under the control of Hamas while Fatah controls the West Bank. In both Gaza and the West Bank, moves are being made by the

respective parties in power to “close the chapter” of activists and supporters of the opposing camp. So until a few years ago, those fighting for the cause of Palestine, driven by deeply felt obligations towards their land, clashed with Israel. It seems now that there are conflicting obligations within Palestine that is driving Palestinians to eliminate their own people and not Israelis. So the political tragedy of Palestine now centers upon not just a fight with Israel but also a fight amongst the Palestinians themselves. Irrespective of what we can say about the rationality of passions or obligations that make groups of people collide against each other, to me, the situation in Palestine seems highly absurd and that is where the issue of tragic self-deception comes into play. The actions of the politicians have nothing whatsoever to do with what the situation on the ground demands of them. Moreover, there is also the cultural force of Islam that is playing a role in the current conflict. It appears here, as it does in so many other parts of the world, as a negative force of resentment. The distorted face of Islam is not leading the Palestinians towards any kind of liberation on a personal or national basis.

My point here is as follows. All of this that I have pointed towards- the forces of historical obligation emanating from 1947 or 1967 or hundreds of years prior to that, self-deception among the politically powerful, the emergence of the cultural force of Islam as one that undermines the cause of liberation – does not fully capture the tragedy of Palestine. There is at least one another aspect of the tragedy which is linked with the failure of expectations of the people and the loss of a sense of personal worth. I would be making an unwarranted assumption if I were to say that every single person living in the occupied territories has a self which is totally and absolutely conditioned by forces of environment and history. There is no doubt that the people living there are conditioned by their circumstances and are under the sway of some sort of ideological obligations but nevertheless this is not sufficient to explain their personality to the fullest. What evades the grasp of any historicizing tendency or even self-deception is the human being’s sense of self-worth and the expectations that people have with regards to their relation to the world around them.

I, as a human person, am undoubtedly conditioned by different social, historical and cultural forces. These are forces that enter me from without, penetrating into and conditioning my inner life. These forces are embodied also as expectations which others closely linked with me have of me and eventually these expectations that come from without merge with and transform the

expectations that I have of myself. I think that my journey through the world consists of relations that I form with the world. These relations bring expectations that are grounded in obligations towards family, nationality, ethnicity, ideology, comradeship and other sources. Moreover, there are also expectations that I have of myself with regard to the relation that I form with the world with respect to the work that I do here and this work enables me to realize an inner potential. All of these different expectations enable me to live with a sense of belonging to the world and my sense of self-worth is associated with whether or not I have a place in this world.

I have spoken with reference to Palestine to bring forth the point that the tragedy unfolding there has a subtle aspect which is distinct – but not in total separation from – historical obligation, thrust for political liberation, self-deception and cultural crisis. This aspect or view of the situations centers upon the failure of people's expectations in terms of their sense of self-worth or their perception of the place that they have in the world. Many of the people living there may well be fighting with or supporting Hamas against Fatah and Israel or Fatah against Israel and Hamas. However, the potential for tragedy is located not just in these fights but also in the individual's sense of being rootless in the world, a loss of dignity and the failure of expectations of self-actualization. When the political and military struggle of the Palestinians started, they were rootless due to the power of their enemy. As Hamas and Fatah fight each other, the people of Palestine are even more deracinated and disillusioned because all of the violence is now directed inwards and all paths leading towards a dignified and free existence are at present closed.

Even though the lines between the personal and the collective blur when speaking of deracination and failure of expectations, however, the issue is ultimately personal. It is alive not just in zones of intense crisis like Palestine but can happen anywhere. The basic idea is that it is possible for us to be in circumstances where our sense of belonging in the world and all of our expectations regarding our roles, responsibilities and the realization of our potential are threatened with failure. The philosophical question about where our sense of dignity and our drive to making a place in the world comes from is another, separate and complicated matter which I can address only very briefly in the context of this dissertation. One answer could be that the source of the sense of dignity is mysterious and cannot be localized. Another response

would be that we do not really belong in the world in which we live and this is not something new, this is the way it has always been. Our journey through the world is then an attempt to maintain the relations that we form with it and to continue to engender new ones. This answer surely does not provide a sound basis for the perspective that there are personal expectations that persist independently of all kinds of conditioning. For the time being I would take this as an assumption and continue working, I think that the source of human dignity and the expectations linked with it can only be illuminated by seeing the human person in action.

I will now clarify my understanding of the concept, if not the source of human dignity. To me, the dignity of an individual or of a group of persons centers upon having a meaningful relation with the world. A person has dignity if he has a relation with the world that is characterized by reciprocity and leads towards not just a sense of belonging but also a sense of growth. So the failure of expectations in this context becomes a failure of the expectations emerging out of the way in which the person has developed a relation with the world. For me, being in the world is a quest for making a place for oneself in an environment that is in essence alien to the human person. The word home, for me, is not just a physical building; it is a powerful metaphor for a whole complex of features that constitute a deep relation with the world. It is important to note here that the tragedy of a loss of relation with the world is more basic and fundamental when compared with the other facets of the tragic in human existence that I have discussed in this dissertation.

To explain myself further, I would like to return to the powerful picture that the tragedy of Palestine presents which like all human tragedy, is multi-faceted. Speaking in the context of modern history, the tragedy of the Holocaust and the expulsion of Jews from many countries in Europe was critical in motivating the desire for a politically, economically and militarily powerful and independent Jewish state. The Jews who struggled for the creation of Israel had, in my view, legitimate historical obligations that they wanted to fulfill. These legitimate obligations, of which the powerful state of Israel is an embodiment, came into tragic conflict with the equally legitimate obligations that the Palestinians felt as they struggled for their rights. So since then, as Israel has grown stronger in a world order that supports them, the Palestinians (and their Arab and Muslim sympathizers) have become increasingly marginalized. After 1967, the Palestinians lost more land and power and the number of Palestinian refugees increased.

However, speaking now from the Palestinian perspective, many people - despite their physical deracination, poverty and humiliation – had a sense of belonging to the world. And this sense of belonging or relatedness or dignity centered precisely upon the tragic struggle against a much more powerful enemy.

So when Hamas and Fatah acted to eliminate one another and their actions led to a real split of the so called, occupied territories, into a West Bank and a Gaza, the failure of expectations occurred at two different level. Firstly, this was a failure of expectations in terms of victory in the tragic conflict with Israel. And victory here does not mean military conquest. Victory in this conflict would mean genuine, mutual recognition from both sides that the other has a legitimate position and that they must learn to reconcile their differences and create an atmosphere of respect for each others' position. After all, Israel is here to stay and the Palestinians can also not be thrown into the Mediterranean Sea. The internecine conflict among Palestinians has put them in a position where they have lost any semblance of genuine respect that the Israelis would have for them. At a deeper level, the bloody inner strife amongst the Palestinians has rendered null and void a very way of life. As I have mentioned before, for many Palestinians, the very meaning of the way in which they had constituted themselves in the world, centered upon the struggle for independence even though this struggle was always going to be futile. With the inner strife between Hamas and Fatah, years of struggle against Israel have been rendered meaningless. The expectations that have failed in this context were linked with the meaning of the struggle and its continuation in the future regardless of its futility. There are battles in which the losers are perceived as winners and I think that Palestinian struggle against Israel was such a battle but now, the people's expectations of being a part of this battle have been placed in a crisis. It was this battle which gave physically deracinated people a sense of belonging in the world. This sense of having a place in the world has now disappeared.

With this analysis of the tragedy of Palestine, I hope to have shown that although, on the one hand, the peoples' struggles are conditioned by specific historical circumstances, on the other hand there is an element to the tragedy which stems from something that is universal and independent of historical conditioning. To talk about tragedy as the failure of expectations with reference to the issue of the human persons' relation to the world is to appeal to a particular notion of the inner life according to which our effort to make meaningful relations with the

world is something which would always evade the grasp of historical determinism. During this discussion of Palestine, I have referred to self-deception and cultural crisis as two facets of the tragedy which, once again are distinct from the subject-matter of this chapter. I think that amongst both Arabs and the Israelis, their respective religions (Islam and Judaism) have emerged as distorted cultural forces, alienated from their essence. Speaking of tragic self-deception, there is much more of it among the Arabs, the 1967 War being a metaphor for inner blindness.

I would now turn to Arthur Miller's play, "Death as a Salesman"¹⁵⁸. This play provides a subtle model for the facet of human tragedy which is the subject matter of this chapter. The action of this play occurs mainly at the level of family; however, the way in which Miller presents it, the play becomes a metaphor for much broader concerns. In every scene of this play, we can observe the dialectic between expectations and their failure along with the transformation of hope into despair. In this sense, Miller's tragedy does follow Szondi's theory in that the tragic, irrespective of what form it takes, always unravels according to a (Hegelian) dialectical pattern. It would be expedient then to analyze this play on a scene by scene basis.

One of the primary ways in which we make a relation with the world is through the work that we do in it. The work that we do forms a link between our inner life and the world around us. To do work that is meaningful is to be involved in an activity with which the inner life flourishes. If the work that we do in the world is meaningful in that sense then we feel connected with the world because this relation consists of mutual reciprocation - I put my deepest inner self into the world through my work and what the world gives to me is a place, a "spot". I think that to have a meaningful life, we must affirm the roles give to us by nature - I for instance am biologically a son and a brother - and to create and assume new ones. If the work that we do is meaningful to us then it defines a role that we have assumed in this world. And with this role come expectations which center upon the persistence of a reciprocal relation with the world. The failure of expectations in this context would occur if this defining role is taken away from a person or if there is no reciprocation - I put my life into my work and correspondingly into the world and get nothing in return. I think that this is one of the fundamental themes in "Death of a Salesman".

¹⁵⁸ Arthur Miller, *Collected Plays*, edited by Tony Kushner (New York: Library Classics of the United States Press, 2006), pp. 159 - 258).

I look also at Nietzsche's idea of "eternal recurrence of the same" from the perspective of having and playing a role in the world. If the history of the world consists of repetitive patterns then the only thing that is unique and meaningful, as it were, is the role that an individual can assume, affirm and play to the fullest during a life span. So what gives meaning to a human experience is precisely this assumption of a role in the world which entails connection with the world. I understand Nietzsche's Dionysus and Apollo also in this context. To have the Dionysian force active in one's life is to affirm and be in some way connected with the ebb and flow of life. It is only after having experienced the Dionysian connection with the world that one creates the Apollonian image. This latter can be a work of art or of literature but I think that in Nietzsche's schema the creation is of one's own self. The main point here is that in order to chisel out a self, I must first have a deep Dionysian connection with the world and this comes out of the process of playing a role in the world. To have lost the role or for the role to lose meaning translates into a loss of the Dionysian force in one's life. And with the loss of this Dionysian force, one also endures destruction of the image that one has made of oneself. So living life with a role (Dionysian connection) is to build an image of oneself and it is with this image that expectations are linked. Once the role goes, so does the image and with that comes the failure of expectations which were built around the image that the person created of himself.

To take our discussion of the notion of role further, I would like to examine the character of Linda in *Death of a Salesman*. If the work that we do in the world is a defining relation for our inner life then what is it that Linda does? Willy is a salesman but what does Linda do? Linda is a mother and a wife. The role of mother and wife that Linda gets in virtue of her relation with Willy, Biff and Happy is the one that defines Linda's work in the world. All of Linda's expectations and obligations regarding what she is in the world stem from this one role. She affirms this role and fulfills all the responsibilities that come with it. There can be an argument about whether Linda is ultimately a tragic character or not. I think that perhaps she is not a tragic character because despite everything, her defining role in life stays with her and she plays it fully till the end of the action of the play. However, there is definite potential for tragedy in her character because she is so deeply committed to her role and obligations.

We learn about Linda's character not only through her own actions and words but also from what the persons most deeply associated with her say about her. Happy says, "What a Woman! They broke the mold when they made her. You know that, Biff?"¹⁵⁹ Biff also loves her dearly, referring to her as "pal" on more than one occasion and passionately defending her against the "little cruelties"¹⁶⁰ of Willy Loman. Loman himself loves her deeply and says "You're my foundation and my support, Linda."¹⁶¹ She is the foundation of the Loman family in many different ways. She is the only character in the family who is absolutely consistent in her efforts to keep the home together. While she remains unaware of this, her persistent love for her family tragically lies at the center of one of the pivotal sources of the anguish of the family. Biff Loman makes an inner decision to give up on life when he discovers that his father has been unfaithful to his beloved mother. The moment when he says in anger and grief, "You gave her Mama's stockings"¹⁶² is also the moment when despite all of the love that he had for him, Biff is alienated from his father. Biff and Willy are both witness to the long standing image of Linda darning her old stockings out of a sense of selflessness. And now when Biff sees Willy giving away new stockings to another woman he experiences the rupture of what for him was his deepest connection with the world – his relationship with his father Willy.

In my view, the most important thing that anyone in the play says about Linda comes from Willy Loman – "The woman has waited and the woman has suffered."¹⁶³ Willy speaks more than once about wanting to do something to improve the situation of the family because that would lead to an alleviation of Linda's suffering. Now what has Linda been waiting for and what is the meaning of her suffering? Linda has spent her whole life caring for the household. She takes care of the minutest details. The play makes references to her waxing of the kitchen floor, the selection of cheese, getting the heater repaired, having the refrigerator fixed. All of these are moments which hitherto did not find a place in the annals of tragedy but at the risk of speaking tritely, I say that to take care of these everyday objects makes a house a source of our grounding in this world. Linda stands by Willy Loman through all the trials and tribulations. Their life together is for the most part quite difficult with only interstices of joy. She does not understand

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 202

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Kushner, p. 162

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 166

¹⁶² Ibid., Kushner, p. 242

¹⁶³ Ibid., Kushner, p. 231.

as to what exactly it is that Willy does but she saves what she can out of the little that Willy brings home. She makes him feel loved and wanted even at times when he feels degraded and unwanted by the American business world. Linda protects Willy from the illusions that Ben's stories create in his mind. Linda is also the emotional bulwark for her sons and provides a critical, balancing force. For instance when Biff is still a child, she warns Willy against spoiling him too much.

In essence, Linda has poured her life into the family on a sustained basis. But what is her teleology? What does she expect to receive at the end? What outcome is she expecting? I think that her position is encapsulated in the following dialogue with Willy which occurs at the beginning of the play:

Willy: Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.

Linda: Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way.¹⁶⁴

Linda understands life as nothing but a series of losses. This position reflects her wisdom in that she has learned to constitute herself in terms of her experiences. I think that the cause of her anguish does not lie in the fact that the situation around her demands further sacrifice from her. She is completely loyal to her family and persistent in her willingness to sacrifice and to be patient. She does not expect anything for herself and neither does she expect the family to move towards a glorious future. What hurts her now is that Willy Loman is undergoing increasingly humiliating experiences in his life as a salesman. She does not share Willy's sense of teleology but she does want him to spend the rest of his life in dignity with his family. While Willy is going under, his sons are standing by, incapable - not only of doing something to help him financially - but, more importantly, of making him feel at home. The locus of Linda's expectations is the unity of the family, she struggled all of her life to keep things together but now Willy is going under and the sons have failed to recognize and fulfill their role in the family. She thus points towards their disloyalty, "He's put his whole life into you and you have turned your backs on him."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Kushner, p. 164.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Kushner, p. 197

Now what does it mean for a human person to invest his entire life into another person or a group of persons and then see the latter turn away from him. I have previously spoken of the Palestinians but I would now like to give another lesser known example from history and politics. I would like to speak briefly about the tragic history of a group of people known as “stranded Pakistanis”. When Pakistan was created in 1947 it had an east wing and a west wing separated by a massive Indian enclave. That east wing became Bangladesh in 1971. The political struggle for Pakistan was concentrated to a great extent in areas of India that are still a part of that country. After the creation of Pakistan, countless numbers of those Muslims who had struggled for its creation left their homes in India to come to their new country, a promised land as it were. In addition to patriotism towards Pakistan, communal violence within India was another factor which motivated people to immigrate. Most of the immigrants came to the area that is now Pakistan and which was then West-Pakistan. However, there was also a group of people originating from the current Indian state of Bihar who chose to settle in East Pakistan. When the civil war ensued in East Pakistan in 1971 and India took the side of the Bengalis fighting against the Pakistan Army, the Biharis put together a civilian army and fought for Pakistan. These civilian soldiers were ultimately much more valiant in their defense of their perceived homeland than even the regular Pakistan Army. Ninety thousand Pakistani soldiers surrendered to the Indians and Bangladesh was created. Immediately after the creation of Bangladesh, the Biharis underwent systematic oppression and persecution. They were not granted citizenship of Bangladesh due to their unflinching loyalty towards Pakistan. The Biharis themselves did not want to live in Bangladesh; they considered themselves to be Pakistanis and expected to be repatriated to their homeland in the near future. Even as they were stripped of all of their belongings and condemned to live in makeshift settlements, they remained loyal to Pakistan. They flew the flag of their country while living in abject poverty in a place that used to be their home but was now an alien country. This is when the real tragedy of the Biharis started to unfold. Their expectations were rooted in becoming citizens of Pakistan and they began to wait for that day to arrive. Years passed by and that day never came. The government of Pakistan refused to accept these, their own people because they did not want to disturb the complex ethnic balance in Pakistan. The Pakistan government appealed to arbitrary clauses in the constitution to cover up their disloyalty to their own people. In the year 1990 after 19 years of waiting, 100000 of these Biharis were accepted by Pakistan and settled in an area of Karachi

called Orangi Town which by the way is the largest slum in Asia. However, even those who came out of the makeshift camps into Pakistan were not given Pakistani citizenship. The worst off are clearly those 300,000 or so who are still stateless in Bangladesh and continue to live in makeshift communities. These are the people who are commonly known as ‘stranded Pakistanis’. Despite all these years, there are many among them who hold on to the dream of becoming Pakistanis some day. It seems though that, at least for now, the people whom they consider their own have forgotten about them. Even political parties which speak in the name of those who are ethnically immigrants in Pakistan no longer bring up this issue. The ‘stranded Pakistanis’ invested their life into and constructed all of their expectations around the idea of Pakistan and the people of Pakistan but they remained stateless and humiliated, continuing to hold on to fragments of a shattered dream.

The purpose of this tangential discussion is to show that even though “Death of Salesman” is set at the level of a family and an individual and in the context of America, it carries immense potential for explaining human tragedy in a universal sense. The life of Willy Loman is a subtle model for understand what the stranded Pakistanis have gone through. They fight for the creation of Pakistan, perceiving it as a land where they would live with dignity. They migrate from India to East Pakistan and become a prosperous community in their chosen country. The Bengalis rise in revolt against the government of West Pakistan. The Biharis remain fiercely patriotic to West Pakistan and what they get in return? A life lived in the midst of filth and the failure of their deepest expectations. They were rejected by precisely those whom they considered to be their own people and for whom they sacrificed their lives.

Coming back to our discussion of Death of a Salesman, I think that it is important to look further into the relation between teleology and tragedy. It seems to me that Linda does not have teleology in the sense that Willy has. Despite this, there is potential for tragedy in her character because of the committed manner in which she has constituted herself as the mother of Biff and Happy and the wife of Willy. She is the force that holds the family together. In the case of Willy, it is obvious that he wants and crucially expects things to move towards an outcome. For himself, he wants the position of “number one man”¹⁶⁶ and to eventually sum up to something. He forms expectations regarding a particular type of greatness for Biff and Happy. The two sons

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Kushner, p. 256

Biff and Happy do not have any tragic potential. They do not have teleology and neither are they fully committed, like Linda, to a framework of obligations. Now, the comparison of Linda and Willy does bring up the point that a person does not of necessity have to be directed towards an unrealizable teleological end in order to have tragic potential or to become a tragedy. What is needed though is commitment, being passionately rooted and invested in something. The expectations emerge out of such a commitment and their failure is a tragedy. I think that Linda would never self-destruct or commit suicide as long as her sons consider her to be their mother. As long as there is some semblance of her family left, she would continue to live and to struggle because her family is her work and her life. Willy, on the other hand invested himself with a strong sense of teleology in his life as a Salesman. He is being dislodged from his position and he knows also that he has done something to damage the relation between him and Biff. All Linda wants is to have a home where the sons would live with their father, support him, respect him and become serious men themselves. She does not really understand the working life but more than anyone else, she understands what Willy needs and what the family needs. She is passionately insistent as she tries to evoke a sense of responsibility in her sons:

“I don’t say he is a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He is not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He’s not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person.”¹⁶⁷

What does it mean for a man to “fall into his grave like an old dog”? I think that it is pointless to speak of this in concepts. This is ultimately an image, a powerful one with endless reverberations. Linda creates this image for her sons to make them realize that they need to step forward and save their father from going under. A significant part of Willy’s place in the world revolved around his work and now that is being taken away from him. He is slowly becoming rootless from that perspective and with that comes a loss of dignity. Willy is a man who has created an image for himself in front of his friend Charley but now by borrowing money from him, he is also losing dignity. The man is going under and Linda has created a subtle evocation of this through her words. Her appeal for intervention is directed towards her sons. They are

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Kushner, p. 195

expected to intervene, it is their responsibility. But since they have failed to play the role of sons, Linda appeals to them in the name of humanity.

Linda's appeal to her sons to save Willy - not just because he is their father and has invested his whole life in them but simply because he is now a rootless human being - is very meaningful. Let us imagine a person going under, losing dignity in a place alien to him where he does not have any friends and no one there is related to him by blood. Even that person would have some expectations of help from the others around him who are watching him. That neither Biff nor Happy really care as their father falls apart in front of their very eyes is captured in an extract from a dialogue between Letta - a type of girl whom Linda calls "lousy whore" - and Happy. These words are exchanged in the scene at the restaurant during which one of the things Willy says, "I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going around. I was fired today."¹⁶⁸ While Willy is falling to pieces as he slips into the past inside the restaurant washroom, Biff and Happy have an argument in which each of them tries to evade responsibility and they then leave the place with the two girls -

Letta: Don't you want to tell your father -

Happy: No, that's not my father. He's just a guy. Come on, we'll catch Biff, and, honey, we're going to paint this town!¹⁶⁹

One of the aspects of the tragedy of Willy Loman is that Happy and Biff (about whom Willy has been most concerned) are incapable and unwilling to invest something meaningful into the family. Moreover, Willy expects them to provide a solid support to him as he is going under but they fail to do so. The signs are there for everyone to see. Linda realizes this most of all, Willy's friend Charley too but precisely those whose intervention Willy needs and expects most fail him in this respect. In the final analysis they are incapable of paying the attention to Willy that Linda demands and Willy expects - neither as sons nor as fellow human beings.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Kushner, p. 231

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 238

There is then a distinct aspect to tragedy as failure of expectations in terms of dignity and this is defined well by Arthur Miller. Willy Loman worked to make a place for himself in the world, to create some sort of image and now that he is going under, his sons are the amongst those watching him and they are the only ones who can truly help him to regain a foothold. He expects their help and yet they fail to do anything. I think that this failure of the expectation of help from the only ones who can really do something and yet fail to do so demands special notice.

Willy Loman is an individual going under right in the midst of his beloved family and those who can truly help him fail to do so. This provides a model for understanding a form of tragedy that has unfolded in history before and continues to do so to this day. People go under as a mass, on a collective level and those from whom intervention is expected fail to do anything. It seems almost absurdly irrevocable when large numbers of persons undergo a crisis of expectations and the dialectic continues to unfold and take its toll. A tragedy of this type which has captured the imagination of the world is that of Darfur. That this atrocity has been allowed to occur just a few years after the genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia is very mysterious to me. I think that it is pedagogically significant to note that there are situations in which, irrespective of what people do to help those are going under, nothing works. From one perspective, Willy does get receive kindness from Charley and then most of Linda who has always been there for him. What he really needs and expects is that his sons should affirm and fulfill their roles, this they are incapable of and even when they do try to help but it is not enough. Linda's simply words echo loudly in the theater of Darfur for people over there have indeed been degraded and thrown into their graves like "old dogs". Based on what I know about the tragedy, the main issue is slavery. Slavery of black Africans has always been a part of Arab society. When Islam came into the picture in the seventh century, this issue became contentious because the religion forbids slavery. This injunction against slavery was interpreted by the Arab Muslims to mean that a people can be enslaved as long as they are not Muslim. So when the Arab Muslims became rulers of Sudan, for years they made efforts to ensure that the black Africans in Darfur would not become Muslims. This gave the Arab based Sudanese a chance to continue to own slaves from among the population of the country. However, Islam did come to the oppressed of Sudan, not through the Arabs but through sources within the black Africans of Sudan. So once the people in what is now Darfur converted to Islam, they could no longer be seen as potential slaves and regained

their place in the world. The people of southern Sudan, the original inhabitants of the land, developed their own political identity and stood up for themselves in the face of the African Arabs who dominate most of the country. Over the centuries, the Arabs who ruled Sudan continued to carry with them a sense of resentment at having lost their erstwhile slaves. My position is that the ongoing genocide in Sudan is a result of feelings of resentment that had been bottled up for centuries. The African Arabs in Sudan – the Janjaweed - now want to eliminate them, expel them and change the genetic configuration of the people of Darfur by systematic rape on a wide scale. The Janjaweed are driven by motives coming to them through history. These motives are grounded in the denial of and resentment against the fact that an erstwhile enslaved people have attained their own political and religious identity, their place in the world. The tragedy of Darfur is also one that presents a strong challenge to Hegel's understanding of conflict in history, politics and society. In genocide, does the side committing atrocity have any rationally grounded obligation through which they can justify their actions?

The aspect of this tragedy that we need to focus on in the context of this chapter is as follows – How does it happen that the genocide in Darfur unravels over a period of ten years right in front of the eyes of the world and yet there is no concrete help? Global organizations such as the United Nations were instituted to ensure that precisely this type of tragedy does not occur. These are people who are justified in expecting help as they are being systematically dislodged from their place in the world in every possible way and yet those who can do something are incapable of stepping forward, failing to fully realize, assume and fulfill their roles. Within the broader tragedy of Darfur, there is also this specific moment where a human being has cried out, expecting help and is met only with beauracratc debates over “facts” and an egregious evasion of responsibility.

Returning again to the plot elements of *Death of a Salesman* and the character of Willy Loman, I would like to consider the notion of the American Dream. Willy Loman is a man who undoubtedly loves American culture and believes fanatically in the American Dream. On one of the many occasions in the play where he expresses his frustrations over the way Biff has lived his life, he says, “Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such

- personal attractiveness gets lost.”¹⁷⁰ Willy also says once, “America is full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people.”¹⁷¹ Willy does have an intimate relation with the geographical and cultural landscape of America. His line of work required him to travel all over the country, opening up “unheard of territories” for his company. In the play we get images of Willy driving across long distances, always carrying the hope that wherever he went, he would be recognized and “well liked” for what he is and this would be eventually translated into success in economic terms. Despite all of the setbacks, Willy never really loses the sense that the land of America is congenial to him and his dreams and expectations. Towards the end of the play, even as he is falling apart and losing everything, Willy sets out to purchase seeds so as to plant a garden in the now barren ground in front of his home:

“I’ve got to get some seeds. I’ve got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing’s planted. I don’t have a thing in the ground.”¹⁷²

What then is the American dream? I will speak about it from the perspective of an outsider, looking into America. As long as you possess a valid (specifically - legal) perception of the manner in which you want to relate to the world in terms of the work that you do in it and provided that you are willing to put in a fight, then America is a place that would be congenial for you to realize the expectations that you have created for yourself. The term ‘American dream’ is nothing but a pluralistic metaphor for the expectations of personal success that many different people from all over the world carry with them when they come to this country. When a person dreams the American dream, that person is taking a courageous step towards affirming and fulfilling not only the expectations that center upon self actualization but also the expectations that others most dear to him have of him. There is an atmosphere of hope in America; it invites a person to have expectations of becoming rooted, making a place in the world, of amounting to something. Since Willy Loman believes so strongly in America and the American dream he simply cannot understand his son Biff, “Don’t you want to be anything?” he says to him on multiple occasions. I think that what Willy finds truly intangible about his son Biff is that he does not have any expectations of himself. Biff is hiding from his expectations

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Kushner, p. 165

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 176

¹⁷² Ibid., Kushner, p. 243

and this is also precisely the reason for saying that he does not have the potential to become a tragic character.

To me, as an outsider in America, the deepest aspect of American society is that it calls out for an investment of expectations. The atmosphere generates hope. More importantly, the American dream, as I have discussed above, is multi-various. It does not matter as to what kind of expectations you have; the crucial thing is to have expectations and to work towards their fulfillment. In my country Pakistan the scope of the dream, as it were, is very limited. In general, the atmosphere of the country does not really call out for an investment of hope. In Pakistan if you haven't got it made then the struggle to make yourself is so overwhelming that many simply give up. It would be accurate to say that in Pakistan, there is no equivalent to the American dream. There used to be a Pakistani dream when the country first came into being in 1947. People came to the country with many expectations and worked hard to build a new nation but those expectations have died a silent and unacknowledged death not once, but many times over the course of the country's history. It is interesting for me to note that *Death of a Salesman* can be read as a subtle metaphor for the history of Pakistan specifically of my city, Karachi. When Pakistan came into being, Karachi had a population of no more than 100,000 people; it is now 15 million. The city was populated and built up by those who fought for it as citizens of India. One of the primary reasons given for the creation of Pakistan was that in this country people would live with dignity, that is, they would succeed in making a place for themselves, an identity in the world. The people of my father's generation lived with this dream and worked hard. Like the dream of Willy Loman, this was a new and original dream, a deviation from historical conditioning. They expected the country to move in the direction that they had dreamed of but things turned out otherwise. The fragments of the original dream stifle shine through sometimes when one is in Karachi, but in general it is an urban jungle characterized by crime, corruption, civic mismanagement and most crucially, despair.

The relation between Willy and his son Biff is complex and full of contradictions. The two of them say contradictory things about each other. At one moment Willy says, "Biff is a lazy bum!" and the next moment, "there's one thing about Biff – he's not lazy"¹⁷³. Biff, on his side

¹⁷³ Ibid., Kushner, p. 161

calls his father “fake” or “phony”¹⁷⁴ at two critical moments in the play. The first occasion is when Biff discovers that his father has a mistress; the second occasion is when he gives Willy the instrument of suicide (rubber pipe) and basically points out to him that he has been nothing but a failure all of his life. Despite this, however, Biff also says something during the play which for me encapsulates the character of Willy Loman: “You’ve just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hardworking, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys.”¹⁷⁵

At the beginning of this chapter I made the point about how the inner life of the individual has something unique to it which evades the grasp of historical and social conditioning. We learn during the play that Willy is the son of a father who was never there for him. That father simply took off at some point in Willy’s early childhood and did not ever come back. We learn also about Willy’s brother Ben who makes an appearance only on a few of occasions in Willy’s life but leaves a mark on his active memory. Ben has accumulated immense wealth through the diamond trade in Africa. He comes across as a person who approaches his floundering brother not to help him but only to display his own wealth and to demonstrate to Willy and his family that they are nothing. Ben makes empty propositions to Willy, asking him to come to Alaska – “there’s a new continent at your doorstep” – while his real purpose is to make Willy regret the path that he has chosen for himself and to show him that he and the family that he has nurtured are failures. Willy then belongs to a family in which there is no sense of loyalty. I think that in this context it would be accurate to say that at some point in his life Willy must have made a conscious, inner decision to be a loyal father and husband. He suffers immense guilt for having cheated on his wife which in my view only goes to show how much he loves her and the family. He tells Linda on a couple of occasions, “I will make it all up to you”. I think that to refer to someone as a prince is to say that he is genuine, authentic. Despite his personal failings, Willy remains an authentic father figure and husband till the end. I read his suicide as the final expression of his deep commitment to his family. He has given his deepest inner resources to them and he is therefore fully justified in placing expectations in his sons and it is tragic when he says – “Where are you guys, where are you? The woods are burning! I can’t drive a car!”

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Kushner, p. 242, 249

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Kushner, p. 237

Willy Loman is also a prince in his chosen line of work. He does not ever become “number one man” but setting aside the success factor, he is a salesman in the same manner as Picasso is an artist. He works for his family, which is his connection to the world but his work also keeps him ontologically connected to the world. He has made a place, albeit a precarious one, for himself in the world by playing the role of the salesman. He works very hard and with a great sense of personal dignity and style. Willy’s work as a salesman is a part of his inner life; he could never see himself otherwise. Biff, for instance, insists to the end that Willy could have been better as a carpenter, “there is more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made”¹⁷⁶, he says in the funeral. Even if, as Biff implies, Willy has lived all of his life in bad faith, his seriousness and his tragedy emerges out of the fact that he did work hard and invested all of his expectations in his work and his family only to find himself rootless and unrecognized. Willy is also in bad faith due to the way in which he carries his personal sense of loyalty into the cut-throat jungle that is the world of business. And this too, in my view, was an inner, authentic, breakaway decision from a man who comes from a family where his brother Ben says to Biff after felling him through a rough and unwarranted move at the end of a friendly boxing game, “Never fight fair with a stranger boy, you’ll never get out of the jungle that way”¹⁷⁷. All that Willy wants is to be “well liked”, that is, he wants to be loyal to people and expects loyalty in return. His friend Charley points towards this as a flaw in Willy’s attitude:

WILLY: That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard.

CHARLEY: Willy, when’re you gonna realize that them things don’t mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can’t sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you’re a salesman, and you don’t know that.

WILLY: I’ve always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing -

Willy, however, consistently lives his ideal of loyalty and continues to expect reciprocation to the end. At the specific moment when he walks out of his home for the last time to commit suicide he is not in despair but full of joy because he imagines the “grandeur” of Biff with “twenty-thousand dollars in his pockets.” Willy is also expecting that his funeral would be

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., Kushner, p. 255

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., Kushner, p. 190

attended by a large number of salesmen and other people. He expects also that his son would love him and finally realize Willy's worth as a father and a salesman.

“That funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates – that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized – I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all...Why, why can't I give him something and not have him hate me?”¹⁷⁸

None of this happened. “Where were all the people he knew?” says Linda at the funeral. A total of four people came to the funeral – Biff, Happy, Linda and Willy's only true friend in the world, Charley. Moreover, even at the funeral Biff says, “He had all the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong...the man didn't know what he was.”¹⁷⁹ So even after having given his life, Willy does not find the reciprocation for the loyalty that he gave to his profession and his son. Unlike Biff, Willy was sure of his role in life, he was a salesman and a father. Willy may have become a carpenter or even a diamond miner but the point is that he constituted himself as a salesman and affirmed this to the fullest. The tragedy emerges from the failure of all of the expectations that emerged from his role as a salesman and a father.

The sense of personal loyalty that Willy carries into his field of commerce has with time become truly obsolete in it. It is a world that is suffused with the capitalistic ethos. What to speak of business, it seems to me that now the capitalistic ethos pervades through all fields of work in society. The scene at Howard's office deserves special attention in this connection. This scene, however, like the rest of Miller's play provides a subtle model for the expression of that tragic moment when a human person is being dislodged from his place in the world and his sense of dignity is tarnished.

In the immediate background to Willy's appearance at Howard's office is the hopeful event of the previous night. During this event the entire Loman family had a discussion the conclusion of which was that Biff would go to his former boss, a businessman named Oliver and ask him for a loan with which Biff and Happy would open a sporting equipment business in Florida. As Hap

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Kushner, p. 246

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 256

says more than once about Willy, “he’s never so happy as when he’s looking forward to something”. The sons have also arranged a symbolic dinner for Willy after both sons have successfully emerged from their respective challenges. So Willy stands at the door to Howard’s office with a renewal of his deepest expectations, “I’m gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I’ll get an advance, and I’ll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I’m gonna do it!” All he wants from Howard is a place at the New York office in recognition of a life spent on the road, selling for the company because Willy is exhausted with traveling.

The movement of expectations towards their failure is already underway even as Willy stands at the entrance to Howard’s office and the latter does not pay any attention to him for a few moments. And it is not that Howard was engaged with important work, he was simply playing with a wire-recording machine. When Howard acknowledges Willy’s presence and calls him in, Willy is awkward, in a sense already out of place in an office that was a hallowed place, source of hope for him. It is deeply meaningful when Willy says, “Ts, ts. Like to ask a little favor if you...” and in response Howard only fiddles with the machine and plays the voices of his son and wife. Howard is about the same age as Willy’s son Biff and after all, Willy wants Biff to live in the home that he built and raise a family of his own. So the sounds of Howard’s family would hurt Willy for he also dreams of a family for his own son. More than that, by not paying any attention to Willy and focusing only on frivolities, Howard, even without having said anything, has alienated, literally shut out his most loyal employee. In this moment of the scene, I see reverberations of Kafka’s letter to his father in which he describes the moment from his childhood when he was pushed by on the “Pavliche” by his father with the glass door definitively shut, making the child realize that he “was a mere nothing” to his father. The use of the term “spot” in the dialogue between Howard and Willy is significant here:

“Remember, Christmas time, when you had the party here? You said you’d try to think of some spot for me here in town...God knows, Howard, I never asked a favor of any man. But I was with the firm when your father used to carry you here in his arms...Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace...”

“I appreciate that, Willy, but there is just no spot here for you. If I had a spot I’d slam you right in, but I just don’t have a single solitary spot.”¹⁸⁰

In Willy’s mind this “spot” is not just a job or a position in the company. I would go on to say that this spot can only be understood in terms of metaphysics of human experience. This spot that Willy wants constitutes a significant portion of the relation that he has formed with the world in his journey through it. Willy’s job is not simply a job from which he gets money. The job is a complex of factors which makes Willy what he is, gives him his “personality”¹⁸¹. Later on in the dialogue, he tries to explain to an unresponsive and inattentive Howard as to how he chose his line of work. When he was very young he even had doubts about his future in the line of work and could have gone off to Alaska during the gold rush in search of the absentee father. But then he saw an old salesman who becomes his role model:

“His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he’d drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he’d go up to his room, y’ understand, put on his green velvet slippers – I’ll never forget – and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. ‘Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? When he died – and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston – when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at this funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. *He stands up. Howard has not looked at him.* In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it’s all cut and dried, and there’s no chance for bringing friendship to bear – or personality. You see what I mean? They don’t know me any more.”

“*Moving away, toward the right:* That’s just the thing, Willy.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., Kushner, p. 211

¹⁸¹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

In this long statement and Howard's response to it, Willy - even though speaking in ordinary, everyday terms - has mapped out the trajectory for the failure of expectations in terms of the relation that one makes with the world through the work that one does in it. So at first there is an example, a powerful image of a role model. Willy Loman's role model is the old salesman. It is not that Willy never had a choice about what to do but he chose to live the life of a salesman. He became rooted in his life as a salesman only after he met David Singleman. The way I see it, the values of loyalty and respect which Willy wants to inculcate in his family life are precisely the values that he found and admired in his field of work. When speaking of the old salesman, Willy of course has some interest in the money that the man made but what really attracts him to the person is something else entirely. Willy sees David Singleman as a consummate salesman and the chief quality of a consummate salesman is that he is loved and respected - not just on the basis of the business that he generates - for what he is, the style of his personality. So selling, for Willy is a line of work which brings a certain style of personality which he wants to adopt. As far as loyalty and respect are concerned, these are qualities which keep us grounded in the world irrespective of the line of work that we are in. Now in the case of Willy Loman his entire working life revolves around being liked which is an expression of loyalty and its reciprocation. Once Willy decides that he wants to be a consummate salesman he invests his whole life into it. In his inner life he remains a salesman even though he is falling apart and there are many occasions where he is regretful at not having gone away to Alaska with his brother Ben.

In the scene at Howard's office, we see a return of the theme of broken promises. When Willy says, "promises were made across this desk"¹⁸², there are echoes of Caesar's - "you too Brutus". Howard comes across as a typical uncultured man, a person who cannot make and keep promises. The fact that Willy gave his entire life to his work means nothing to Howard. Howard does not in any way seek to reciprocate Willy's long act of investing his entire person into a process. More than that, Howard stabs Willy in the back, dislodging him from his rightful place in the world. This can be read as a cultural tragedy of the American world of commerce for there is no recognition of promises and of the passions of the individual. More than that, however, there is the simple but powerful image of one and the same space (the office) becoming the source of all expectations and their eventual collapse. There is more than perfidy at stake in Howard's denial of the promises. The investment of the deepest inner resources is

¹⁸² Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

also an investment of trust. It is important to note that the violation of trust and the absence of loyalty emerge from a source located outside of Willy's own self. Willy's tragic flaw is that he continues to adhere to ideals of loyalty in a sphere that is not amenable to this notion. The promises that Willy speaks of were the tenuous bond that linked him to a process. Up until that point when Howard turns away in a very nonchalant, careless manner, Willy believed in the validity and power of that promise. When his demands for their fulfillment are met with a total disregard, a failure even to remember and to notice that something more important than sales' figures is breaking apart in this person's life, Willy's faith and trust are catastrophically broken. What for Howard is merely nothing, meant the world to Willy. While nothing moves in Howard as the embodiment of the world of commerce, Willy undergoes a cataclysm and he becomes a tragic hero in his refusal to move away with a whimper. Among other things, I think that Willy's suicide is a protest, a figurative self-immolation as a reminder of broken, forgotten promises. One needs to draw a distinction between the struggles of Willy Loman and those of the mythical Sisyphus. The mythical hero spends all his energies in a process from which he expects nothing; he is quite literally acting in a void and that is why he is not tragic, but absurd. In the case of Willy however, "promises" have been made, not in a void but with people. Unlike Sisyphus, the all-consuming process does not simply yield nothing, rather, it yields a violation of trust. Sisyphus has not placed hopes and expectations in the process, Willy Loman has. And this is why Willy Loman is a tragic character and Sisyphus simply absurd. My point is that the breaking of the promises has a shattering impact when these were made in an relational context, with people whom one trusted.

Willy's role as the father of the family is enmeshed with his role as a salesman through the common quality of loyalty and respect with which he invests both areas of his life. What makes Willy's story tragic is precisely this element of investment. There are many people who speak of becoming this or that or fulfilling this or that obligation. They even make some inconsistent efforts in these directions. However, tragic potential is essentially linked with consistent commitment for it is this which gives birth to expectations. Charley, for instance, comes across as a very wise character but not a tragic one (Charley seems to be more interested in shooting casino than in his son Bernard or the business) because as he himself says, "my salvation is that I

never took any interest in anything.¹⁸³” To not be invested in something with all of one’s inner life is to not have too many expectations the collapse of which can prove fatal. In the case of Willy all of his expectations – regarding his self image as a salesman and as a father – emerge out of his total commitment to this one “spot”. It is around this spot that he builds his working life and his family. So when Howard shows Willy that according to Willy’s own law – being “well liked” as a principle - he should no longer be working, Willy’s relation with the world and not just with the company is threatened. Howard points out to Willy that since he is no longer “well liked”, he should leave the company; this rejection being based on a process of irreversible decline. Howard’s act implies the removal of a redundant cog in the wheel and not that of a soul that has spent all its passion in a process that eventually yields turns against him.

The shadow of obsolescence looms large over this meeting between Willy and Howard as Willy struggles for the “spot” that he is losing. Willy reminds Howard of the fact that he “put thirty-four years into this firm”¹⁸⁴. He reminds Howard of his meager achievements, “I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928!” Most significantly, he points towards the “promises made across this desk!” Willy continues to remind Howard about the strong ties that he had with his father Frank. But Frank Wagner is now dead and Ben does not remember anything about the promises made by his father to Willy or of Willy’s achievements for the firm. In the eyes of Ben, Willy is an obsolete relic of a past that he does not share with him or appreciate. Since Willy is not making any significant sales, moreover, he tends to “crack up”¹⁸⁵ so in Billy’s eyes Willy is completely dispensable. Willy’s words - “You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away a man is not a piece of fruit!”¹⁸⁶ - hold no value for Ben. According to an inexorable logic, Willy has been uprooted from a spot that constitutes an overwhelmingly significant component of his dignity and sense of place in the world.

As the expectations that stem from his role as a salesman collapse in Ben’s office, one can look at this definitive progression towards failure and offer an explanation based on causality. The play itself provides enough clues in this regard. There are references, for instance, to the overcrowding of Willy’s neighborhood. He complains about there being too many people as his

¹⁸³ Ibid., Kushner, p. 223

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., Kushner, p. 211

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

once well lighted, well aired house is literally boxed into a small, dark spot now. More people means more competition, fresh blood, new ideas therefore it was inevitable that Willy would lose his place. We can even point towards the rise of the capitalistic ethos and say that Willy's adherence to values of loyalty has nothing whatsoever to do with what the business cherishes. One can also take Biff Loman's line of argument and say that Willy's failure comes down to the fact that he had false expectations. We could give many other explanations for what is happening to Willy but the tragedy of failure of explanations maintains its distinctness and evades the grasp of these explanations. Irrespective of what the social or historical circumstances were and whether or not Willy was in bad faith, the main point is that he committed himself fully to his role in life as a father and a salesman and all of these expectations ended in failure. The violation that occurs is not centered simply upon Willy's poverty. Willy worked to establish a relation with the world, playing a role in which his inner life was invested. It is this relation and the sense of dignity associated with it that has been disrupted.

Let us take the case of an authentic patriot who has invested himself fully into the creation and development of Pakistan, by all means a "failed state". Now, once the failures of the state became prominent, we can say to this person that this was inevitable, it had to happen this way. We can say for instance that the dream of Pakistan was flawed in the first place. There has been a long line of corrupt rulers. The country has never had a sacred constitution. The majority of the population consists of ignorant people who deserved what they got. Now none of this can explain away the failure of expectations. This is a person who has committed himself fully to a country and the failure of this country creates a rupture in his inner life that cannot be healed. He struggles against overwhelming odds to keep his expectations alive about Pakistan alive. Why? Precisely because his commitment is rooted in his inner life, it defines what he is. And he is a Pakistani through and through, there is no other source of expectation for him.

I will turn now to the two most important lines in Willy Loman's drama:

Biff: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

In these two lines, we see a conflict, not just between a son and his father but more importantly, between two different styles of making relations with the world during the journey of life. Biff has not made any effort to fully commit to work and family therefore he does not have any expectations. Willy, on the other hand, has spent his entire life in fulfilling his commitments, playing the interconnected roles of salesman and father of the family. His inner life and sense of personal integrity are defined by these roles. He would always refuse to submit in the face of a failure of all of the expectations that emerge from these roles. He ardently wants and expects Biff to make something of himself. So in the dialogues preceding these two lines, Willy is persistent that Biff should go out in the morning and see Bill Oliver. He refuses to accept the fact that Biff is going to leave the family and wander off, doing nothing substantial. Willy has spent his whole life in working to create and sustain a place in the world for himself and his family. And now even as he has lost his role as a salesman and recognizes that his role as father is also suspect in the eyes of his sons, he refuses to give up.

During the scene preceding the one where these lines are spoken, Willy has an inner dialogue with his long lost brother Ben. To be accurate, this is not a dialogue but a monologue for Willy is now only talking to himself. It is during this monologue that Willy makes the decision to kill himself and there are two main questions confronting him. The first question is if the suicide would be an act of courage and the second is about the results that it would yield. His response to the first one can be extracted from his line, “Does it take more guts to stand here the rest of my life ringing up a zero?”¹⁸⁷ Despite the oncoming fog of madness, he is clear, first of all about the collapse of his relations with the world but more importantly, he is clear also about the obligations that those relations place upon him. His response to the second question can be encapsulated in his words about Biff: “Why, why can’t I give him something and not have him hate me?” For Willy Loman, the suicide would achieve two main purposes. It would bring twenty-thousand dollars to the family and enable Biff to do something to make a place for himself in the world. The second and most important expectation in Willy’s mind is that after the suicide, there would be a funeral attended by all of those salesmen with whom he formed relations. Therefore, Biff would finally recognize the place that his father made in the world as a salesman and also love him for the sacrifice that he made for the family.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Kushner, p. 246

As we know from the play, most of the expectations that Willy formed around the act of suicide also failed. That, however, does not detract anything from the value of the act. Even in the face of an overwhelming collapse of the relations that Willy formed with the world, he refuses to give up on his failed expectations. In the line “I am not a dime a dozen...” and also the act of suicide, it is the inner life that shines through. So even as historical circumstances move in such a way that a person’s expectations fail, the inner life has the potential to stay active. As long as this inner life is vibrant, one would continue to forge relations and fulfill ensuing expectations till the end. And when the person’s place in the world has fallen away then suicide for the sake of fulfilling expectations that cannot be fulfilled through living in the world is an act of courage. This, in my view, is the chief ameliorative aspect of the tragedy of Willy Loman. All that remains at the end is an overwhelming sense of dignity; all expectations of reciprocation meet nothing but failure.

The ‘tragic’ element in human existence is multi-faceted. I hope to have brought this across in my first three chapters, each of which deals with a different type of tragedy in human life. I think that in order to clarify the subject matter of this particular chapter and to clearly distinguish it from the previous three, it would be expedient to begin with the following question – Am I, as a person, exclusively a product of social, historical, environmental, cultural and political forces acting on me from without and of psychological and physiological forces acting from within? Or is there something more to me, other than and above and beyond all the forces that condition me?

If I consider the first question within the context of the three chapters on tragedy that I have already written, it seems to me that the answer would be ‘yes’. In my second chapter I drew mainly upon Hegel to show how political conflicts emerge from out of the adherence to deeply felt rational obligations that come to us from history. Then in my second chapter, I started by drawing upon Simmel to broach upon the tragic conflict within culture or more precisely, the conflict that occurs between the inner life of the human person and the autonomous products of culture; a in which the latter prevail. My third chapter was about the broad-based inner darkness of self-deception which leads to tragedy on an individual and collective level. In this third chapter I drew upon Sartre and Oedipus to bring forth the central features of tragic self-deception, one of which is its seeming inevitability. In my dissertation, I have not focused at all

upon human physiology, but I think it is safe to say that there are iron-clad predetermined forces that control the body too and there are undoubtedly tragic conflicts that emerge from what we are biologically.

In this, the fourth and final chapter of my dissertation, I will be looking at a different type of tragedy, one that will also enable me to provide an affirmative response to the second question (outlined above). To explain myself, I need to speak in terms of well-known and perhaps not very subtle facts. These are also facts that have not yet been tested on the anvil of history. As I write these lines, the news media is reporting that Gaza is now under the control of Hamas while Fatah controls the West Bank. In both Gaza and the West Bank, moves are being made by the respective parties in power to “close the chapter” of activists and supporters of the opposing camp. So until a few years ago, those fighting for the cause of Palestine, driven by deeply felt obligations towards their land, clashed with Israel. It seems now that there are conflicting obligations within Palestine that is driving Palestinians to eliminate their own people and not Israelis. So the political tragedy of Palestine now centers upon not just a fight with Israel but also a fight amongst the Palestinians themselves. Irrespective of what we can say about the rationality of passions or obligations that make groups of people collide against each other, to me, the situation in Palestine seems highly absurd and that is where the issue of tragic self-deception comes into play. The actions of the politicians have nothing whatsoever to do with what the situation on the ground demands of them. Moreover, there is also the cultural force of Islam that is playing a role in the current conflict. It appears here, as it does in so many other parts of the world, as a negative force of resentment. The distorted face of Islam is not leading the Palestinians towards any kind of liberation on a personal or national basis.

My point here is as follows. All of this that I have pointed towards- the forces of historical obligation emanating from 1947 or 1967 or hundreds of years prior to that, self-deception among the politically powerful, the emergence of the cultural force of Islam as one that undermines the cause of liberation – does not fully capture the tragedy of Palestine. There is at least one another aspect of the tragedy which is linked with the failure of expectations of the people and the loss of a sense of personal worth. I would be making an unwarranted assumption if I were to say that every single person living in the occupied territories has a self which is totally and absolutely conditioned by forces of environment and history. There is no doubt that the people living there

are conditioned by their circumstances and are under the sway of some sort of ideological obligations but nevertheless this is not sufficient to explain their personality to the fullest. What evades the grasp of any historicizing tendency or even self-deception is the human being's sense of self-worth and the expectations that people have with regards to their relation to the world around them.

I, as a human person, am undoubtedly conditioned by different social, historical and cultural forces. These are forces that enter me from without, penetrating into and conditioning my inner life. These forces are embodied also as expectations which others closely linked with me have of me and eventually these expectations that come from without merge with and transform the expectations that I have of myself. I think that my journey through the world consists of relations that I form with the world. These relations bring expectations that are grounded in obligations towards family, nationality, ethnicity, ideology, comradeship and other sources. Moreover, there are also expectations that I have of myself with regard to the relation that I form with the world with respect to the work that I do here and this work enables me to realize an inner potential. All of these different expectations enable me to live with a sense of belonging to the world and my sense of self-worth is associated with whether or not I have a place in this world.

I have spoken with reference to Palestine to bring forth the point that the tragedy unfolding there has a subtle aspect which is distinct – but not in total separation from – historical obligation, thrust for political liberation, self-deception and cultural crisis. This aspect or view of the situations centers upon the failure of people's expectations in terms of their sense of self-worth or their perception of the place that they have in the world. Many of the people living there may well be fighting with or supporting Hamas against Fatah and Israel or Fatah against Israel and Hamas. However, the potential for tragedy is located not just in these fights but also in the individual's sense of being rootless in the world, a loss of dignity and the failure of expectations of self-actualization. When the political and military struggle of the Palestinians started, they were rootless due to the power of their enemy. As Hamas and Fatah fight each other, the people of Palestine are even more deracinated and disillusioned because all of the violence is now directed inwards and all paths leading towards a dignified and free existence are at present closed.

Even though the lines between the personal and the collective blur when speaking of deracination and failure of expectations, however, the issue is ultimately personal. It is alive not just in zones of intense crisis like Palestine but can happen anywhere. The basic idea is that it is possible for us to be in circumstances where our sense of belonging in the world and all of our expectations regarding our roles, responsibilities and the realization of our potential are threatened with failure. The philosophical question about where our sense of dignity and our drive to making a place in the world comes from is another, separate and complicated matter which I can address only very briefly in the context of this dissertation. One answer could be that the source of the sense of dignity is mysterious and cannot be localized. Another response would be that we do not really belong in the world in which we live and this is not something new, this is the way it has always been. Our journey through the world is then an attempt to maintain the relations that we form with it and to continue to engender new ones. This answer surely does not provide a sound basis for the perspective that there are personal expectations that persist independently of all kinds of conditioning. For the time being I would take this as an assumption and continue working, I think that the source of human dignity and the expectations linked with it can only be illuminated by seeing the human person in action.

I will now clarify my understanding of the concept, if not the source of human dignity. To me, the dignity of an individual or of a group of persons centers upon having a meaningful relation with the world. A person has dignity if he has a relation with the world that is characterized by reciprocity and leads towards not just a sense of belonging but also a sense of growth. So the failure of expectations in this context becomes a failure of the expectations emerging out of the way in which the person has developed a relation with the world. For me, being in the world is a quest for making a place for oneself in an environment that is in essence alien to the human person. The word home, for me, is not just a physical building; it is a powerful metaphor for a whole complex of features that constitute a deep relation with the world. It is important to note here that the tragedy of a loss of relation with the world is more basic and fundamental when compared with the other facets of the tragic in human existence that I have discussed in this dissertation.

To explain myself further, I would like to return to the powerful picture that the tragedy of Palestine presents which like all human tragedy, is multi-faceted. Speaking in the context of modern history, the tragedy of the Holocaust and the expulsion of Jews from many countries in Europe was critical in motivating the desire for a politically, economically and militarily powerful and independent Jewish state. The Jews who struggled for the creation of Israel had, in my view, legitimate historical obligations that they wanted to fulfill. These legitimate obligations, of which the powerful state of Israel is an embodiment, came into tragic conflict with the equally legitimate obligations that the Palestinians felt as they struggled for their rights. So since then, as Israel has grown stronger in a world order that supports them, the Palestinians (and their Arab and Muslim sympathizers) have become increasingly marginalized. After 1967, the Palestinians lost more land and power and the number of Palestinian refugees increased. However, speaking now from the Palestinian perspective, many people - despite their physical deracination, poverty and humiliation – had a sense of belonging to the world. And this sense of belonging or relatedness or dignity centered precisely upon the tragic struggle against a much more powerful enemy.

So when Hamas and Fatah acted to eliminate one another and their actions led to a real split of the so called, occupied territories, into a West Bank and a Gaza, the failure of expectations occurred at two different level. Firstly, this was a failure of expectations in terms of victory in the tragic conflict with Israel. And victory here does not mean military conquest. Victory in this conflict would mean genuine, mutual recognition from both sides that the other has a legitimate position and that they must learn to reconcile their differences and create an atmosphere of respect for each others' position. After all, Israel is here to stay and the Palestinians can also not be thrown into the Mediterranean Sea. The internecine conflict among Palestinians has put them in a position where they have lost any semblance of genuine respect that the Israelis would have for them. At a deeper level, the bloody inner strife amongst the Palestinians has rendered null and void a very way of life. As I have mentioned before, for many Palestinians, the very meaning of the way in which they had constituted themselves in the world, centered upon the struggle for independence even though this struggle was always going to be futile. With the inner strife between Hamas and Fatah, years of struggle against Israel have been rendered meaningless. The expectations that have failed in this context were linked with the meaning of the struggle and its continuation in the future regardless of its futility. There are battles in which

the losers are perceived as winners and I think that Palestinian struggle against Israel was such a battle but now, the people's expectations of being a part of this battle have been placed in a crisis. It was this battle which gave physically deracinated people a sense of belonging in the world. This sense of having a place in the world has now disappeared.

With this analysis of the tragedy of Palestine, I hope to have shown that although, on the one hand, the peoples' struggles are conditioned by specific historical circumstances, on the other hand there is an element to the tragedy which stems from something that is universal and independent of historical conditioning. To talk about tragedy as the failure of expectations with reference to the issue of the human persons' relation to the world is to appeal to a particular notion of the inner life according to which our effort to make meaningful relations with the world is something which would always evade the grasp of historical determinism. During this discussion of Palestine, I have referred to self-deception and cultural crisis as two facets of the tragedy which, once again are distinct from the subject-matter of this chapter. I think that amongst both Arabs and the Israelis, their respective religions (Islam and Judaism) have emerged as distorted cultural forces, alienated from their essence. Speaking of tragic self-deception, there is much more of it among the Arabs, the 1967 War being a metaphor for inner blindness.

I would now turn to Arthur Miller's play, "Death as a Salesman"¹⁸⁸. This play provides a subtle model for the facet of human tragedy which is the subject matter of this chapter. The action of this play occurs mainly at the level of family; however, the way in which Miller presents it, the play becomes a metaphor for much broader concerns. In every scene of this play, we can observe the dialectic between expectations and their failure along with the transformation of hope into despair. In this sense, Miller's tragedy does follow Szondi's theory in that the tragic, irrespective of what form it takes, always unravels according to a (Hegelian) dialectical pattern. It would be expedient then to analyze this play on a scene by scene basis.

One of the primary ways in which we make a relation with the world is through the work that we do in it. The work that we do forms a link between our inner life and the world around us. To do work that is meaningful is to be involved in an activity with which the inner life flourishes. If

¹⁸⁸ Arthur Miller, *Collected Plays*, edited by Tony Kushner (New York: Library Classics of the United States Press, 2006), pp. 159 – 258).

the work that we do in the world is meaningful in that sense then we feel connected with the world because this relation consists of mutual reciprocation - I put my deepest inner self into the world through my work and what the world gives to me is a place, a "spot". I think that to have a meaningful life, we must affirm the roles give to us by nature – I for instance am biologically a son and a brother – and to create and assume new ones. If the work that we do is meaningful to us then it defines a role that we have assumed in this world. And with this role come expectations which center upon the persistence of a reciprocal relation with the world. The failure of expectations in this context would occur if this defining role is taken away from a person or if there is no reciprocation – I put my life into my work and correspondingly into the world and get nothing in return. I think that this is one of the fundamental themes in "Death of a Salesman".

I look also at Nietzsche's idea of "eternal recurrence of the same" from the perspective of having and playing a role in the world. If the history of the world consists of repetitive patterns then the only thing that is unique and meaningful, as it were, is the role that an individual can assume, affirm and play to the fullest during a life span. So what gives meaning to a human experience is precisely this assumption of a role in the world which entails connection with the world. I understand Nietzsche's Dionysus and Apollo also in this context. To have the Dionysian force active in one's life is to affirm and be in some way connected with the ebb and flow of life. It is only after having experienced the Dionysian connection with the world that one creates the Apollonian image. This latter can be a work of art or of literature but I think that in Nietzsche's schema the creation is of one's own self. The main point here is that in order to chisel out a self, I must first have a deep Dionysian connection with the world and this comes out of the process of playing a role in the world. To have lost the role or for the role to lose meaning translates into a loss of the Dionysian force in one's life. And with the loss of this Dionysian force, one also endures destruction of the image that one has made of oneself. So living life with a role (Dionysian connection) is to build an image of oneself and it is with this image that expectations are linked. Once the role goes, so does the image and with that comes the failure of expectations which were built around the image that the person created of himself.

To take our discussion of the notion of role further, I would like to examine the character of Linda in *Death of a Salesman*. If the work that we do in the world is a defining relation for our

inner life then what is it that Linda does? Willy is a salesman but what does Linda do? Linda is a mother and a wife. The role of mother and wife that Linda gets in virtue of her relation with Willy, Biff and Happy is the one that defines Linda's work in the world. All of Linda's expectations and obligations regarding what she is in the world stem from this one role. She affirms this role and fulfills all the responsibilities that come with it. There can be an argument about whether Linda is ultimately a tragic character or not. I think that perhaps she is not a tragic character because despite everything, her defining role in life stays with her and she plays it fully till the end of the action of the play. However, there is definite potential for tragedy in her character because she is so deeply committed to her role and obligations.

We learn about Linda's character not only through her own actions and words but also from what the persons most deeply associated with her say about her. Happy says, "What a Woman! They broke the mold when they made her. You know that, Biff?"¹⁸⁹ Biff also loves her dearly, referring to her as "pal" on more than one occasion and passionately defending her against the "little cruelties"¹⁹⁰ of Willy Loman. Loman himself loves her deeply and says "You're my foundation and my support, Linda."¹⁹¹ She is the foundation of the Loman family in many different ways. She is the only character in the family who is absolutely consistent in her efforts to keep the home together. While she remains unaware of this, her persistent love for her family tragically lies at the center of one of the pivotal sources of the anguish of the family. Biff Loman makes an inner decision to give up on life when he discovers that his father has been unfaithful to his beloved mother. The moment when he says in anger and grief, "You gave her Mama's stockings"¹⁹² is also the moment when despite all of the love that he had for him, Biff is alienated from his father. Biff and Willy are both witness to the long standing image of Linda darning her old stockings out of a sense of selflessness. And now when Biff sees Willy giving away new stockings to another woman he experiences the rupture of what for him was his deepest connection with the world – his relationship with his father Willy.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 202

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Kushner, p. 162

¹⁹¹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 166

¹⁹² Ibid., Kushner, p. 242

In my view, the most important thing that anyone in the play says about Linda comes from Willy Loman – “The woman has waited and the woman has suffered.”¹⁹³ Willy speaks more than once about wanting to do something to improve the situation of the family because that would lead to an alleviation of Linda’s suffering. Now what has Linda been waiting for and what is the meaning of her suffering? Linda has spent her whole life caring for the household. She takes care of the minutest details. The play makes references to her waxing of the kitchen floor, the selection of cheese, getting the heater repaired, having the refrigerator fixed. All of these are moments which hitherto did not find a place in the annals of tragedy but at the risk of speaking tritely, I say that to take care of these everyday objects makes a house a source of our grounding in this world. Linda stands by Willy Loman through all the trials and tribulations. Their life together is for the most part quite difficult with only interstices of joy. She does not understand as to what exactly it is that Willy does but she saves what she can out of the little that Willy brings home. She makes him feel loved and wanted even at times when he feels degraded and unwanted by the American business world. Linda protects Willy from the illusions that Ben’s stories create in his mind. Linda is also the emotional bulwark for her sons and provides a critical, balancing force. For instance when Biff is still a child, she warns Willy against spoiling him too much.

In essence, Linda has poured her life into the family on a sustained basis. But what is her teleology? What does she expect to receive at the end? What outcome is she expecting? I think that her position is encapsulated in the following dialogue with Willy which occurs at the beginning of the play:

Willy: Figure it out. Work a lifetime to pay off a house. You finally own it, and there’s nobody to live in it.

Linda: Well, dear, life is a casting off. It’s always that way.¹⁹⁴

Linda understands life as nothing but a series of losses. This position reflects her wisdom in that she has learned to constitute herself in terms of her experiences. I think that the cause of her anguish does not lie in the fact that the situation around her demands further sacrifice from her.

¹⁹³ Ibid., Kushner, p. 231.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., Kushner, p. 164.

She is completely loyal to her family and persistent in her willingness to sacrifice and to be patient. She does not expect anything for herself and neither does she expect the family to move towards a glorious future. What hurts her now is that Willy Loman is undergoing increasingly humiliating experiences in his life as a salesman. She does not share Willy's sense of teleology but she does want him to spend the rest of his life in dignity with his family. While Willy is going under, his sons are standing by, incapable - not only of doing something to help him financially - but, more importantly, of making him feel at home. The locus of Linda's expectations is the unity of the family, she struggled all of her life to keep things together but now Willy is going under and the sons have failed to recognize and fulfill their role in the family. She thus points towards their disloyalty, "He's put his whole life into you and you have turned your backs on him."¹⁹⁵

Now what does it mean for a human person to invest his entire life into another person or a group of persons and then see the latter turn away from him. I have previously spoken of the Palestinians but I would now like to give another lesser known example from history and politics. I would like to speak briefly about the tragic history of a group of people known as "stranded Pakistanis". When Pakistan was created in 1947 it had an east wing and a west wing separated by a massive Indian enclave. That east wing became Bangladesh in 1971. The political struggle for Pakistan was concentrated to a great extent in areas of India that are still a part of that country. After the creation of Pakistan, countless numbers of those Muslims who had struggled for its creation left their homes in India to come to their new country, a promised land as it were. In addition to patriotism towards Pakistan, communal violence within India was another factor which motivated people to immigrate. Most of the immigrants came to the area that is now Pakistan and which was then West-Pakistan. However, there was also a group of people originating from the current Indian state of Bihar who chose to settle in East Pakistan. When the civil war ensued in East Pakistan in 1971 and India took the side of the Bengalis fighting against the Pakistan Army, the Biharis put together a civilian army and fought for Pakistan. These civilian soldiers were ultimately much more valiant in their defense of their perceived homeland than even the regular Pakistan Army. Ninety thousand Pakistani soldiers surrendered to the Indians and Bangladesh was created. Immediately after the creation of Bangladesh, the Biharis underwent systematic oppression and persecution. They were not

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., Kushner, p. 197

granted citizenship of Bangladesh due to their unflinching loyalty towards Pakistan. The Biharis themselves did not want to live in Bangladesh; they considered themselves to be Pakistanis and expected to be repatriated to their homeland in the near future. Even as they were stripped of all of their belongings and condemned to live in makeshift settlements, they remained loyal to Pakistan. They flew the flag of their country while living in abject poverty in a place that used to be their home but was now an alien country. This is when the real tragedy of the Biharis started to unfold. Their expectations were rooted in becoming citizens of Pakistan and they began to wait for that day to arrive. Years passed by and that day never came. The government of Pakistan refused to accept these, their own people because they did not want to disturb the complex ethnic balance in Pakistan. The Pakistan government appealed to arbitrary clauses in the constitution to cover up their disloyalty to their own people. In the year 1990 after 19 years of waiting, 100000 of these Biharis were accepted by Pakistan and settled in an area of Karachi called Orangi Town which by the way is the largest slum in Asia. However, even those who came out of the makeshift camps into Pakistan were not given Pakistani citizenship. The worst off are clearly those 300,000 or so who are still stateless in Bangladesh and continue to live in makeshift communities. These are the people who are commonly known as 'stranded Pakistanis'. Despite all these years, there are many among them who hold on to the dream of becoming Pakistanis some day. It seems though that, at least for now, the people whom they consider their own have forgotten about them. Even political parties which speak in the name of those who are ethnically immigrants in Pakistan no longer bring up this issue. The 'stranded Pakistanis' invested their life into and constructed all of their expectations around the idea of Pakistan and the people of Pakistan but they remained stateless and humiliated, continuing to hold on to fragments of a shattered dream.

The purpose of this tangential discussion is to show that even though "Death of Salesman" is set at the level of a family and an individual and in the context of America, it carries immense potential for explaining human tragedy in a universal sense. The life of Willy Loman is a subtle model for understand what the stranded Pakistanis have gone through. They fight for the creation of Pakistan, perceiving it as a land where they would live with dignity. They migrate from India to East Pakistan and become a prosperous community in their chosen country. The Bengalis rise in revolt against the government of West Pakistan. The Biharis remain fiercely patriotic to West Pakistan and what they get in return? A life lived in the midst of filth and the

failure of their deepest expectations. They were rejected by precisely those whom they considered to be their own people and for whom they sacrificed their lives.

Coming back to our discussion of *Death of a Salesman*, I think that it is important to look further into the relation between teleology and tragedy. It seems to me that Linda does not have teleology in the sense that Willy has. Despite this, there is potential for tragedy in her character because of the committed manner in which she has constituted herself as the mother of Biff and Happy and the wife of Willy. She is the force that holds the family together. In the case of Willy, it is obvious that he wants and crucially expects things to move towards an outcome. For himself, he wants the position of “number one man”¹⁹⁶ and to eventually sum up to something. He forms expectations regarding a particular type of greatness for Biff and Happy. The two sons Biff and Happy do not have any tragic potential. They do not have teleology and neither are they fully committed, like Linda, to a framework of obligations. Now, the comparison of Linda and Willy does bring up the point that a person does not of necessity have to be directed towards an unrealizable teleological end in order to have tragic potential or to become a tragedy. What is needed though is commitment, being passionately rooted and invested in something. The expectations emerge out of such a commitment and their failure is a tragedy. I think that Linda would never self-destruct or commit suicide as long as her sons consider her to be their mother. As long as there is some semblance of her family left, she would continue to live and to struggle because her family is her work and her life. Willy, on the other hand invested himself with a strong sense of teleology in his life as a Salesman. He is being dislodged from his position and he knows also that he has done something to damage the relation between him and Biff. All Linda wants is to have a home where the sons would live with their father, support him, respect him and become serious men themselves. She does not really understand the working life but more than anyone else, she understands what Willy needs and what the family needs. She is passionately insistent as she tries to evoke a sense of responsibility in her sons:

“I don’t say he is a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He is not the finest character that ever lived. But he’s a human being, and a terrible

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., Kushner, p. 256

thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person."¹⁹⁷

What does it mean for a man to “fall into his grave like an old dog”? I think that it is pointless to speak of this in concepts. This is ultimately an image, a powerful one with endless reverberations. Linda creates this image for her sons to make them realize that they need to step forward and save their father from going under. A significant part of Willy's place in the world revolved around his work and now that is being taken away from him. He is slowly becoming rootless from that perspective and with that comes a loss of dignity. Willy is a man who has created an image for himself in front of his friend Charley but now by borrowing money from him, he is also losing dignity. The man is going under and Linda has created a subtle evocation of this through her words. Her appeal for intervention is directed towards her sons. They are expected to intervene, it is their responsibility. But since they have failed to play the role of sons, Linda appeals to them in the name of humanity.

Linda's appeal to her sons to save Willy - not just because he is their father and has invested his whole life in them but simply because he is now a rootless human being - is very meaningful. Let us imagine a person going under, losing dignity in a place alien to him where he does not have any friends and no one there is related to him by blood. Even that person would have some expectations of help from the others around him who are watching him. That neither Biff nor Happy really care as their father falls apart in front of their very eyes is captured in an extract from a dialogue between Letta - a type of girl whom Linda calls “lousy whore” - and Happy. These words are exchanged in the scene at the restaurant during which one of the things Willy says, “I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There's a big blaze going around. I was fired today.”¹⁹⁸ While Willy is falling to pieces as he slips into the past inside the restaurant washroom, Biff and Happy have an argument in which each of them tries to evade responsibility and they then leave the place with the two girls –

Letta: Don't you want to tell your father –

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., Kushner, p. 195

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., Kushner, p. 231

Happy: No, that's not my father. He's just a guy. Come on, we'll catch Biff, and, honey, we're going to paint this town!¹⁹⁹

One of the aspects of the tragedy of Willy Loman is that Happy and Biff (about whom Willy has been most concerned) are incapable and unwilling to invest something meaningful into the family. Moreover, Willy expects them to provide a solid support to him as he is going under but they fail to do so. The signs are there for everyone to see. Linda realizes this most of all, Willy's friend Charley too but precisely those whose intervention Willy needs and expects most fail him in this respect. In the final analysis they are incapable of paying the attention to Willy that Linda demands and Willy expects - neither as sons nor as fellow human beings.

There is then a distinct aspect to tragedy as failure of expectations in terms of dignity and this is defined well by Arthur Miller. Willy Loman worked to make a place for himself in the world, to create some sort of image and now that he is going under, his sons are the amongst those watching him and they are the only ones who can truly help him to regain a foothold. He expects their help and yet they fail to do anything. I think that this failure of the expectation of help from the only ones who can really do something and yet fail to do so demands special notice.

Willy Loman is an individual going under right in the midst of his beloved family and those who can truly help him fail to do so. This provides a model for understanding a form of tragedy that has unfolded in history before and continues to do so to this day. People go under as a mass, on a collective level and those from whom intervention is expected fail to do anything. It seems almost absurdly irrevocable when large numbers of persons undergo a crisis of expectations and the dialectic continues to unfold and take its toll. A tragedy of this type which has captured the imagination of the world is that of Darfur. That this atrocity has been allowed to occur just a few years after the genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia is very mysterious to me. I think that it is pedagogically significant to note that there are situations in which, irrespective of what people do to help those are going under, nothing works. From one perspective, Willy does get receive kindness from Charley and then most of Linda who has always been there for him. What he really needs and expects is that his sons should affirm and fulfill their roles, this they are

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 238

incapable of and even when they do try to help but it is not enough. Linda's simply words echo loudly in the theater of Darfur for people over there have indeed been degraded and thrown into their graves like "old dogs". Based on what I know about the tragedy, the main issue is slavery. Slavery of black Africans has always been a part of Arab society. When Islam came into the picture in the seventh century, this issue became contentious because the religion forbids slavery. This injunction against slavery was interpreted by the Arab Muslims to mean that a people can be enslaved as long as they are not Muslim. So when the Arab Muslims became rulers of Sudan, for years they made efforts to ensure that the black Africans in Darfur would not become Muslims. This gave the Arab based Sudanese a chance to continue to own slaves from among the population of the country. However, Islam did come to the oppressed of Sudan, not through the Arabs but through sources within the black Africans of Sudan. So once the people in what is now Darfur converted to Islam, they could no longer be seen as potential slaves and regained their place in the world. The people of southern Sudan, the original inhabitants of the land, developed their own political identity and stood up for themselves in the face of the African Arabs who dominate most of the country. Over the centuries, the Arabs who ruled Sudan continued to carry with them a sense of resentment at having lost their erstwhile slaves. My position is that the ongoing genocide in Sudan is a result of feelings of resentment that had been bottled up for centuries. The African Arabs in Sudan – the Janjaweed - now want to eliminate them, expel them and change the genetic configuration of the people of Darfur by systematic rape on a wide scale. The Janjaweed are driven by motives coming to them through history. These motives are grounded in the denial of and resentment against the fact that an erstwhile enslaved people have attained their own political and religious identity, their place in the world. The tragedy of Darfur is also one that presents a strong challenge to Hegel's understanding of conflict in history, politics and society. In genocide, does the side committing atrocity have any rationally grounded obligation through which they can justify their actions?

The aspect of this tragedy that we need to focus on in the context of this chapter is as follows – How does it happen that the genocide in Darfur unravels over a period of ten years right in front of the eyes of the world and yet there is no concrete help? Global organizations such as the United Nations were instituted to ensure that precisely this type of tragedy does not occur. These are people who are justified in expecting help as they are being systematically dislodged from their place in the world in every possible way and yet those who can do something are

incapable of stepping forward, failing to fully realize, assume and fulfill their roles. Within the broader tragedy of Darfur, there is also this specific moment where a human being has cried out, expecting help and is met only with beauracritic debates over “facts” and an egregious evasion of responsibility.

Returning again to the plot elements of *Death of a Salesman* and the character of Willy Loman, I would like to consider the notion of the American Dream. Willy Loman is a man who undoubtedly loves American culture and believes fanatically in the American Dream. On one of the many occasions in the play where he expresses his frustrations over the way Biff has lived his life, he says, “Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such - personal attractiveness gets lost.”²⁰⁰ Willy also says once, “America if full of beautiful towns and fine, upstanding people.”²⁰¹ Willy does have an intimate relation with the geographical and cultural landscape of America. His line of work required him to travel all over the country, opening up “unheard of territories” for his company. In the play we get images of Willy driving across long distances, always carrying the hope that wherever he went, he would be recognized and “well liked” for what he is and this would be eventually translated into success in economic terms. Despite all of the setbacks, Willy never really loses the sense that the land of America is congenial to him and his dreams and expectations. Towards the end of the play, even as he his falling apart and losing everything, Willy sets out to purchase seeds so as to plant a garden in the now barren ground in front of his home:

“I’ve got to get some seeds. I’ve got to get some seeds, right away. Nothing’s planted. I don’t have a thing in the ground.”²⁰²

What then is the American dream? I will speak about it from the perspective of an outsider, looking into America. As long as you possess a valid (specifically - legal) perception of the manner in which you want to relate to the world in terms of the work that you do in it and provided that you are willing to put in a fight, then America is a place that would be congenial for you to realize the expectations that you have created for yourself. The term ‘American dream’ is nothing but a pluralistic metaphor for the expectations of personal success that many

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Kushner, p. 165

²⁰¹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 176

²⁰² Ibid., Kushner, p. 243

different people from all over the world carry with them when they come to this country. When a person dreams the American dream, that person is taking a courageous step towards affirming and fulfilling not only the expectations that center upon self actualization but also the expectations that others most dear to him have of him. There is an atmosphere of hope in America; it invites a person to have expectations of becoming rooted, making a place in the world, of amounting to something. Since Willy Loman believes so strongly in America and the American dream he simply cannot understand his son Biff, "Don't you want to be anything?" he says to him on multiple occasions. I think that what Willy finds truly intangible about his son Biff is that he does not have any expectations of himself. Biff is hiding from his expectations and this is also precisely the reason for saying that he does not have the potential to become a tragic character.

To me, as an outsider in America, the deepest aspect of American society is that it calls out for an investment of expectations. The atmosphere generates hope. More importantly, the American dream, as I have discussed above, is multi-various. It does not matter as to what kind of expectations you have; the crucial thing is to have expectations and to work towards their fulfillment. In my country Pakistan the scope of the dream, as it were, is very limited. In general, the atmosphere of the country does not really call out for an investment of hope. In Pakistan if you haven't got it made then the struggle to make yourself is so overwhelming that many simply give up. It would be accurate to say that in Pakistan, there is no equivalent to the American dream. There used to be a Pakistani dream when the country first came into being in 1947. People came to the country with many expectations and worked hard to build a new nation but those expectations have died a silent and unacknowledged death not once, but many times over the course of the country's history. It is interesting for me to note that *Death of a Salesman* can be read as a subtle metaphor for the history of Pakistan specifically of my city, Karachi. When Pakistan came into being, Karachi had a population of no more than 100,000 people; it is now 15 million. The city was populated and built up by those who fought for it as citizens of India. One of the primary reasons given for the creation of Pakistan was that in this country people would live with dignity, that is, they would succeed in making a place for themselves, an identity in the world. The people of my father's generation lived with this dream and worked hard. Like the dream of Willy Loman, this was a new and original dream, a deviation from historical conditioning. They expected the country to move in the direction that

they had dreamed of but things turned out otherwise. The fragments of the original dream stile shine through sometimes when one is in Karachi, but in general it is an urban jungle characterized by crime, corruption, civic mismanagement and most crucially, despair.

The relation between Willy and his son Biff is complex and full of contradictions. The two of them say contradictory things about each other. At one moment Willy says, “Biff is a lazy bum!” and the next moment, “there’s one thing about Biff – he’s not lazy”²⁰³. Biff, on his side calls his father “fake” or “phony”²⁰⁴ at two critical moments in the play. The first occasion is when Biff discovers that his father has a mistress; the second occasion is when he gives Willy the instrument of suicide (rubber pipe) and basically points out to him that he has been nothing but a failure all of his life. Despite this, however, Biff also says something during the play which for me encapsulates the character of Willy Loman: “You’ve just seen a prince walk by. A fine, troubled prince. A hardworking, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys.”²⁰⁵

At the beginning of this chapter I made the point about how the inner life of the individual has something unique to it which evades the grasp of historical and social conditioning. We learn during the play that Willy is the son of a father who was never there for him. That father simply took off at some point in Willy’s early childhood and did not ever come back. We learn also about Willy’s brother Ben who makes an appearance only on a few of occasions in Willy’s life but leaves a mark on his active memory. Ben has accumulated immense wealth through the diamond trade in Africa. He comes across as a person who approaches his floundering brother not to help him but only to display his own wealth and to demonstrate to Willy and his family that they are nothing. Ben makes empty propositions to Willy, asking him to come to Alaska – “there’s a new continent at your doorstep” – while his real purpose is to make Willy regret the path that he has chosen for himself and to show him that he and the family that he has nurtured are failures. Willy then belongs to a family in which there is no sense of loyalty. I think that in this context it would be accurate to say that at some point in his life Willy must have made a conscious, inner decision to be a loyal father and husband. He suffers immense guilt for having cheated on his wife which in my view only goes to show how much he loves her and the family.

²⁰³ Ibid., Kushner, p. 161

²⁰⁴ Ibid., Kushner, p. 242, 249

²⁰⁵ Ibid., Kushner, p. 237

He tells Linda on a couple of occasions, “I will make it all up to you”. I think that to refer to someone as a prince is to say that he is genuine, authentic. Despite his personal failings, Willy remains an authentic father figure and husband till the end. I read his suicide as the final expression of his deep commitment to his family. He has given his deepest inner resources to them and he is therefore fully justified in placing expectations in his sons and it is tragic when he says – “Where are you guys, where are you? The woods are burning! I can’t drive a car!”

Willy Loman is also a prince in his chosen line of work. He does not ever become “number one man” but setting aside the success factor, he is a salesman in the same manner as Picasso is an artist. He works for his family, which is his connection to the world but his work also keeps him ontologically connected to the world. He has made a place, albeit a precarious one, for himself in the world by playing the role of the salesman. He works very hard and with a great sense of personal dignity and style. Willy’s work as a salesman is a part of his inner life; he could never see himself otherwise. Biff, for instance, insists to the end that Willy could have been better as a carpenter, “there is more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made”²⁰⁶, he says in the funeral. Even if, as Biff implies, Willy has lived all of his life in bad faith, his seriousness and his tragedy emerges out of the fact that he did work hard and invested all of his expectations in his work and his family only to find himself rootless and unrecognized. Willy is also in bad faith due to the way in which he carries his personal sense of loyalty into the cut-throat jungle that is the world of business. And this too, in my view, was an inner, authentic, breakaway decision from a man who comes from a family where his brother Ben says to Biff after felling him through a rough and unwarranted move at the end of a friendly boxing game, “Never fight fair with a stranger boy, you’ll never get out of the jungle that way”²⁰⁷. All that Willy wants is to be “well liked”, that is, he wants to be loyal to people and expects loyalty in return. His friend Charley points towards this as a flaw in Willy’s attitude:

WILLY: That snotnose. Imagine that? I named him. I named him Howard.

CHARLEY: Willy, when’re you gonna realize that them things don’t mean anything? You named him Howard, but you can’t sell that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you’re a salesman, and you don’t know that.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Kushner, p. 255

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Kushner, p. 190

WILLY: I've always tried to think otherwise, I guess. I always felt that if a man was impressive, and well liked, that nothing -

Willy, however, consistently lives his ideal of loyalty and continues to expect reciprocation to the end. At the specific moment when he walks out of his home for the last time to commit suicide he is not in despair but full of joy because he imagines the "grandeur" of Biff with "twenty-thousand dollars in his pockets." Willy is also expecting that his funeral would be attended by a large number of salesmen and other people. He expects also that his son would love him and finally realize Willy's worth as a father and a salesman.

"That funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates – that boy will be thunderstruck, Ben, because he never realized – I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all...Why, why can't I give him something and not have him hate me?"²⁰⁸

None of this happened. "Where were all the people he knew?" says Linda at the funeral. A total of four people came to the funeral – Biff, Happy, Linda and Willy's only true friend in the world, Charley. Moreover, even at the funeral Biff says, "He had all the wrong dreams. All, all, wrong...the man didn't know what he was."²⁰⁹ So even after having given his life, Willy does not find the reciprocation for the loyalty that he gave to his profession and his son. Unlike Biff, Willy was sure of his role in life, he was a salesman and a father. Willy may have become a carpenter or even a diamond miner but the point is that he constituted himself as a salesman and affirmed this to the fullest. The tragedy emerges from the failure of all of the expectations that emerged from his role as a salesman and a father.

The sense of personal loyalty that Willy carries into his field of commerce has with time become truly obsolete in it. It is a world that is suffused with the capitalistic ethos. What to speak of business, it seems to me that now the capitalistic ethos pervades through all fields of work in society. The scene at Howard's office deserves special attention in this connection. This scene, however, like the rest of Miller's play provides a subtle model for the expression of that tragic

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Kushner, p. 246

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 256

moment when a human person is being dislodged from his place in the world and his sense of dignity is tarnished.

In the immediate background to Willy's appearance at Howard's office is the hopeful event of the previous night. During this event the entire Loman family had a discussion the conclusion of which was that Biff would go to his former boss, a businessman named Oliver and ask him for a loan with which Biff and Happy would open a sporting equipment business in Florida. As Hap says more than once about Willy, "he's never so happy as when he's looking forward to something". The sons have also arranged a symbolic dinner for Willy after both sons have successfully emerged from their respective challenges. So Willy stands at the door to Howard's office with a renewal of his deepest expectations, "I'm gonna knock Howard for a loop, kid. I'll get an advance, and I'll come home with a New York job. Goddammit, now I'm gonna do it!" All he wants from Howard is a place at the New York office in recognition of a life spent on the road, selling for the company because Willy is exhausted with traveling.

The movement of expectations towards their failure is already underway even as Willy stands at the entrance to Howard's office and the latter does not pay any attention to him for a few moments. And it is not that Howard was engaged with important work, he was simply playing with a wire-recording machine. When Howard acknowledges Willy's presence and calls him in, Willy is awkward, in a sense already out of place in an office that was a hallowed place, source of hope for him. It is deeply meaningful when Willy says, "Ts, ts. Like to ask a little favor if you..." and in response Howard only fiddles with the machine and plays the voices of his son and wife. Howard is about the same age as Willy's son Biff and after all, Willy wants Biff to live in the home that he built and raise a family of his own. So the sounds of Howard's family would hurt Willy for he also dreams of a family for his own son. More than that, by not paying any attention to Willy and focusing only on frivolities, Howard, even without having said anything, has alienated, literally shut out his most loyal employee. In this moment of the scene, I see reverberations of Kafka's letter to his father in which he describes the moment from his childhood when he was pushed by on the "Pavliche" by his father with the glass door definitively shut, making the child realize that he "was a mere nothing" to his father. The use of the term "spot" in the dialogue between Howard and Willy is significant here:

“Remember, Christmas time, when you had the party here? You said you’d try to think of some spot for me here in town...God knows, Howard, I never asked a favor of any man. But I was with the firm when your father used to carry you here in his arms...Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard, may he rest in peace...”

“I appreciate that, Willy, but there is just no spot here for you. If I had a spot I’d slam you right in, but I just don’t have a single solitary spot.”²¹⁰

In Willy’s mind this “spot” is not just a job or a position in the company. I would go on to say that this spot can only be understood in terms of metaphysics of human experience. This spot that Willy wants constitutes a significant portion of the relation that he has formed with the world in his journey through it. Willy’s job is not simply a job from which he gets money. The job is a complex of factors which makes Willy what he is, gives him his “personality”²¹¹. Later on in the dialogue, he tries to explain to an unresponsive and inattentive Howard as to how he chose his line of work. When he was very young he even had doubts about his future in the line of work and could have gone off to Alaska during the gold rush in search of the absentee father. But then he saw an old salesman who becomes his role model:

“His name was Dave Singleman. And he was eighty-four years old, and he’d drummed merchandise in thirty-one states. And old Dave, he’d go up to his room, y’ understand, put on his green velvet slippers – I’ll never forget – and pick up his phone and call the buyers, and without ever leaving his room, at the age of eighty-four, he made his living. And when I saw that, I realized that selling was the greatest career a man could want. ‘Cause what could be more satisfying than to be able to go, at the age of eighty-four, into twenty or thirty different cities, and pick up a phone, and be remembered and loved and helped by so many different people? Do you know? When he died – and by the way he died the death of a salesman, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston – when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at this funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. *He stands up. Howard has not looked at him.* In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it’s

²¹⁰ Ibid., Kushner, p. 211

²¹¹ Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear – or personality. You see what I mean? They don't know me any more.”

“Moving away, toward the right: That's just the thing, Willy.”

In this long statement and Howard's response to it, Willy - even though speaking in ordinary, everyday terms – has mapped out the trajectory for the failure of expectations in terms of the relation that one makes with the world through the work that one does in it. So at first there is an example, a powerful image of a role model. Willy Loman's role model is the old salesman. It is not that Willy never had a choice about what to do but he chose to live the life of a salesman. He became rooted in his life as a salesman only after he met David Singleman. The way I see it, the values of loyalty and respect which Willy wants to inculcate in his family life are precisely the values that he found and admired in his field of work. When speaking of the old salesman, Willy of course has some interest in the money that the man made but what really attracts him to the person is something else entirely. Willy sees David Singleman as a consummate salesman and the chief quality of a consummate salesman is that he is loved and respected – not just on the basis of the business that he generates – for what he is, the style of his personality. So selling, for Willy is a line of work which brings a certain style of personality which he wants to adopt. As far as loyalty and respect are concerned, these are qualities which keep us grounded in the world irrespective of the line of work that we are in. Now in the case of Willy Loman his entire working life revolves around being liked which is an expression of loyalty and its reciprocation. Once Willy decides that he wants to be a consummate salesman he invests his whole life into it. In his inner life he remains a salesman even though he is falling apart and there are many occasions where he is regretful at not having gone away to Alaska with his brother Ben.

In the scene at Howard's office, we see a return of the theme of broken promises. When Willy says, “promises were made across this desk”²¹², there are echoes of Caesar's - “you too Brutus”. Howard comes across as a typical uncultured man, a person who cannot make and keep promises. The fact that Willy gave his entire life to his work means nothing to Howard. Howard does not in any way seek to reciprocate Willy's long act of investing his entire person into a process. More than that, Howard stabs Willy in the back, dislodging him from his rightful

²¹² Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

place in the world. This can be read as a cultural tragedy of the American world of commerce for there is no recognition of promises and of the passions of the individual. More than that, however, there is the simple but powerful image of one and the same space (the office) becoming the source of all expectations and their eventual collapse. There is more than perfidy at stake in Howard's denial of the promises. The investment of the deepest inner resources is also an investment of trust. It is important to note that the violation of trust and the absence of loyalty emerge from a source located outside of Willy's own self. Willy's tragic flaw is that he continues to adhere to ideals of loyalty in a sphere that is not amenable to this notion. The promises that Willy speaks of were the tenuous bond that linked him to a process. Up until that point when Howard turns away in a very nonchalant, careless manner, Willy believed in the validity and power of that promise. When his demands for their fulfillment are met with a total disregard, a failure even to remember and to notice that something more important than sales' figures is breaking apart in this person's life, Willy's faith and trust are catastrophically broken. What for Howard is merely nothing, meant the world to Willy. While nothing moves in Howard as the embodiment of the world of commerce, Willy undergoes a cataclysm and he becomes a tragic hero in his refusal to move away with a whimper. Among other things, I think that Willy's suicide is a protest, a figurative self-immolation as a reminder of broken, forgotten promises. One needs to draw a distinction between the struggles of Willy Loman and those of the mythical Sisyphus. The mythical hero spends all his energies in a process from which he expects nothing; he is quite literally acting in a void and that is why he is not tragic, but absurd. In the case of Willy however, "promises" have been made, not in a void but with people. Unlike Sisyphus, the all-consuming process does not simply yield nothing, rather, it yields a violation of trust. Sisyphus has not placed hopes and expectations in the process, Willy Loman has. And this is why Willy Loman is a tragic character and Sisyphus simply absurd. My point is that the breaking of the promises has a shattering impact when these were made in an relational context, with people whom one trusted.

Willy's role as the father of the family is enmeshed with his role as a salesman through the common quality of loyalty and respect with which he invests both areas of his life. What makes Willy's story tragic is precisely this element of investment. There are many people who speak of becoming this or that or fulfilling this or that obligation. They even make some inconsistent efforts in these directions. However, tragic potential is essentially linked with consistent

commitment for it is this which gives birth to expectations. Charley, for instance, comes across as a very wise character but not a tragic one (Charley seems to be more interested in shooting casino than in his son Bernard or the business) because as he himself says, “my salvation is that I never took any interest in anything.”²¹³ To not be invested in something with all of one’s inner life is to not have too many expectations the collapse of which can prove fatal. In the case of Willy all of his expectations – regarding his self image as a salesman and as a father – emerge out of his total commitment to this one “spot”. It is around this spot that he builds his working life and his family. So when Howard shows Willy that according to Willy’s own law – being “well liked” as a principle - he should no longer be working, Willy’s relation with the world and not just with the company is threatened. Howard points out to Willy that since he is no longer “well liked”, he should leave the company; this rejection being based on a process of irreversible decline. Howard’s act implies the removal of a redundant cog in the wheel and not that of a soul that has spent all its passion in a process that eventually yields turns against him.

The shadow of obsolescence looms large over this meeting between Willy and Howard as Willy struggles for the “spot” that he is losing. Willy reminds Howard of the fact that he “put thirty-four years into this firm”²¹⁴. He reminds Howard of his meager achievements, “I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in the year of 1928!” Most significantly, he points towards the “promises made across this desk!” Willy continues to remind Howard about the strong ties that he had with his father Frank. But Frank Wagner is now dead and Ben does not remember anything about the promises made by his father to Willy or of Willy’s achievements for the firm. In the eyes of Ben, Willy is an obsolete relic of a past that he does not share with him or appreciate. Since Willy is not making any significant sales, moreover, he tends to “crack up”²¹⁵ so in Billy’s eyes Willy is completely dispensable. Willy’s words - “You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away a man is not a piece of fruit!”²¹⁶ - hold no value for Ben. According to an inexorable logic, Willy has been uprooted from a spot that constitutes an overwhelmingly significant component of his dignity and sense of place in the world.

²¹³ Ibid., Kushner, p. 223

²¹⁴ Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

²¹⁵ Ibid., Kushner, p. 211

²¹⁶ Ibid., Kushner, p. 213

As the expectations that stem from his role as a salesman collapse in Ben's office, one can look at this definitive progression towards failure and offer an explanation based on causality. The play itself provides enough clues in this regard. There are references, for instance, to the overcrowding of Willy's neighborhood. He complains about there being too many people as his once well lighted, well aired house is literally boxed into a small, dark spot now. More people means more competition, fresh blood, new ideas therefore it was inevitable that Willy would lose his place. We can even point towards the rise of the capitalistic ethos and say that Willy's adherence to values of loyalty has nothing whatsoever to do with what the business cherishes. One can also take Biff Loman's line of argument and say that Willy's failure comes down to the fact that he had false expectations. We could give many other explanations for what is happening to Willy but the tragedy of failure of explanations maintains its distinctness and evades the grasp of these explanations. Irrespective of what the social or historical circumstances were and whether or not Willy was in bad faith, the main point is that he committed himself fully to his role in life as a father and a salesman and all of these expectations ended in failure. The violation that occurs is not centered simply upon Willy's poverty. Willy worked to establish a relation with the world, playing a role in which his inner life was invested. It is this relation and the sense of dignity associated with it that has been disrupted.

Let us take the case of an authentic patriot who has invested himself fully into the creation and development of Pakistan, by all means a "failed state". Now, once the failures of the state became prominent, we can say to this person that this was inevitable, it had to happen this way. We can say for instance that the dream of Pakistan was flawed in the first place. There has been a long line of corrupt rulers. The country has never had a sacred constitution. The majority of the population consists of ignorant people who deserved what they got. Now none of this can explain away the failure of expectations. This is a person who has committed himself fully to a country and the failure of this country creates a rupture in his inner life that cannot be healed. He struggles against overwhelming odds to keep his expectations alive about Pakistan alive. Why? Precisely because his commitment is rooted in his inner life, it defines what he is. And he is a Pakistani through and through, there is no other source of expectation for him.

I will turn now to the two most important lines in Willy Loman's drama:

Biff: Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!

Willy: I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman!

In these two lines, we see a conflict, not just between a son and his father but more importantly, between two different styles of making relations with the world during the journey of life. Biff has not made any effort to fully commit to work and family therefore he does not have any expectations. Willy, on the other hand, has spent his entire life in fulfilling his commitments, playing the interconnected roles of salesman and father of the family. His inner life and sense of personal integrity are defined by these roles. He would always refuse to submit in the face of a failure of all of the expectations that emerge from these roles. He ardently wants and expects Biff to make something of himself. So in the dialogues preceding these two lines, Willy is persistent that Biff should go out in the morning and see Bill Oliver. He refuses to accept the fact that Biff is going to leave the family and wander off, doing nothing substantial. Willy has spent his whole life in working to create and sustain a place in the world for himself and his family. And now even as he has lost his role as a salesman and recognizes that his role as father is also suspect in the eyes of his sons, he refuses to give up.

During the scene preceding the one where these lines are spoken, Willy has an inner dialogue with his long lost brother Ben. To be accurate, this is not a dialogue but a monologue for Willy is now only talking to himself. It is during this monologue that Willy makes the decision to kill himself and there are two main questions confronting him. The first question is if the suicide would be an act of courage and the second is about the results that it would yield. His response to the first one can be extracted from his line, "Does it take more guts to stand here the rest of my life ringing up a zero?"²¹⁷ Despite the oncoming fog of madness, he is clear, first of all about the collapse of his relations with the world but more importantly, he is clear also about the obligations that those relations place upon him. His response to the second question can be encapsulated in his words about Biff: "Why, why can't I give him something and not have him hate me?" For Willy Loman, the suicide would achieve two main purposes. It would bring twenty-thousand dollars to the family and enable Biff to do something to make a place for himself in the world. The second and most important expectation in Willy's mind is that after the suicide, there would be a funeral attended by all of those salesmen with whom he formed

²¹⁷ Ibid., Kushner, p. 246

relations. Therefore, Biff would finally recognize the place that his father made in the world as a salesman and also love him for the sacrifice that he made for the family.

As we know from the play, most of the expectations that Willy formed around the act of suicide also failed. That, however, does not detract anything from the value of the act. Even in the face of an overwhelming collapse of the relations that Willy formed with the world, he refuses to give up on his failed expectations. In the line “I am not a dime a dozen...” and also the act of suicide, it is the inner life that shines through. So even as historical circumstances move in such a way that a person’s expectations fail, the inner life has the potential to stay active. As long as this inner life is vibrant, one would continue to forge relations and fulfill ensuing expectations till the end. And when the person’s place in the world has fallen away then suicide for the sake of fulfilling expectations that cannot be fulfilled through living in the world is an act of courage. This, in my view, is the chief ameliorative aspect of the tragedy of Willy Loman. All that remains at the end is an overwhelming sense of dignity, all expectations of reciprocation meet nothing but failure.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

There are three main ties that bind all four chapters of my dissertation. I hope to have established the significance of the dialectic as a starting point for philosophical inquiry into different forms of tragedy. My position is that prior to the dialectic, all we have is the powerful impression that tragedy makes upon us and the emotive power that it generates in us. It is important to note that I have embraced only the bare bones of the Hegelian dialectic during my journeys into four different forms of tragedy. This is a dialectic that does not involve necessary sublation, an overarching teleology or the justification of what tragedy destroys through recourse to metaphysical systems, absolutes and conceptual schema. It is only after we search for and discover the dialectic simply as a structural principle at work in concrete elements of tragedy that we can begin to take into account that which divides a unit from within, conflicts between forces coming from the past and those which prevail in the present, the chasm between appearance and reality, reversals of original meaning and the way in which the source that gives birth to hope becomes also the source of despair, decay and death. The other two ties that bind the themes together are intertwined. It can be shown that at the base of all tragedies is a crisis of expectations or identity and the tragic flaw that manifests itself in this crisis. These, in my view are the two traits of character that keep a tragedy in place. It is crucial to note though that emphasis upon crisis of identity and tragic flaw should not lead us to think that this study has only a psychological consequence. The matter runs much deeper for when Lear in the midst of tragic unraveling asks the question – “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” it is more that the reflection of a neurosis; something more fundamental has been threatened with displacement.

The fifth chapter of my dissertation is about Willy Loman and this is where the theme of failure of expectations comes into prominence not only as a distinct tragic process but also a general notion on the basis of which the other three forms of tragedy are tied together. Chapters II, III and IV are about what is called “high tragedy”. These three are well recognized themes in philosophical discussions on tragedy but the fourth theme is relatively less explored. In my mind, the chapter on Willy Loman brings to view an element within tragic events which can possibly help us tie them together not simply through the dialectic as a structuring principle but also with reference to content. The analysis of the character of Willy Loman opens up the

possibility of conversation among all the themes that have been developed in this project. There is a striking contrast between the figures that take center stage in the first three chapters and Willy Loman in chapter V. Broadly speaking, in the first three chapters, those that undergo the tragic process are for the most part universal embodiments of the spirit of a people or a culture. Simply stated, these are people who are politically and culturally eminent; they draw immense power from their positions. Willy Loman, on the other hand, is not a universal embodiment of any spirit or culture. He does not occupy any position of power but is simply a particular, an individual, an ordinary person whose life is falling apart. I think that the distinction between a Lear, an Antigone, an Oedipus and Willy Loman is not arbitrary but real. This, in my mind is akin to the philosophical distinction between Universal and Particular and the extraction of the latter from the former. Irrespective of the moral character or even the intellectual level of those who wield great power, it seems to me that they do possess a charisma which others do not have. Even when power is attained not through effort but through inheritance, there is something more than mere good luck which is at play. Hitler may well have been an abomination in the minds of many Germans when he came to power but the fact remains that he did become the driving force of the German nation and millions did willingly follow him to commit catastrophic crimes. The question of how leaders become leaders is one that calls out for serious philosophical investigation. My main point is that there is a real distinction between Willy Loman and the figures of high tragedy. I understand Willy as simply a particular in contrast to Lear, Oedipus and Antigone who are particulars from whom a universal can be extracted. Lear and Oedipus can be seen as embodiments of the state while Antigone is seen by Hegel as the embodiment of the world of love which is a distinct set of obligations within ethical life.

Having clarified this significant distinction between the figure of Willy Loman and the figures that dominate the discussion in the first three chapters, I would like to point towards a quality which is common to all tragic figures – the tension between expectations and their failure. My point here is that in the absence of expectation, there is no tragedy. Expectations arise when one has invested oneself with all of the energies available in the inner life into a sphere outside of oneself. The investment of the self into a sphere of activity and other people does not necessarily have to be moral for there to be tragedy. For instance, Macbeth as a well recognized tragic figure has struggled against all inner moral compunctions to invest himself fully into the project of attaining power over Scotland. Macbeth has built his identity on the basis of a lust for

power; in his mind he wants to see himself as nothing other than the King of Scotland. We see Macbeth as having deeply rooted himself in a process that would see him become King. All of Macbeth's expectations emerge from this process of treachery and murder which drives his lust for power. The tragedy of Macbeth can therefore be read as the failure of expectations even though these are false expectations, so to speak, from a moral standpoint. The source of the failure of these expectations is precisely the process, "the throne of blood" around which Macbeth builds up his identity. The theme of broken promises is linked also with the crisis of identity or expectation. That which is the source of the birth of the promise becomes also the source of its violation. In the case of Macbeth, the promises at the origin of the tragic process come from the three witches whom I see as forces of deception that seduce and urge out Macbeth's lust for power.

I think that when the focus is on a tragic process undergone by powerful persons who are connected with a broader whole, the theme of failure of expectations is somewhat suppressed. In the tragic unraveling of Willy Loman, however, the dialectic which he undergoes is centered almost exclusively upon the crisis of expectations, the creation and destruction of identity and broken promises. It is precisely the bareness of Willy Loman's character which brings to clarity the crisis of expectations and broken promise as a major theme in tragedy. Willy's character may be bare and simple but he does have the seriousness necessary for one to become a tragic figure. A tragic figure demonstrates a deep sense of self, of personal dignity, a presence that refuses to be crushed by circumstances and this is visible in Willy Loman. Willy has invested all of his deepest inner resources into his work as a salesman and into his family; this total commitment breeds expectations. Willy Loman's identity revolves around the deep relations that he has nurtured with his blood and toil. He justly expects reciprocation from these two sources. The demands of the American business world dictate that all promises made to him at his place of work are to be broken. His relation with his work which is the chief constitutive factor in Willy's identity is thus snatched from him generating a crisis of identity. Willy has also seen a promise in Biff in that he believes that his son would make something of his life. If Biff were to become successful, he would fulfill this promise. Biff Loman however comes across as a character with no potential for tragedy precisely because he is a drifter and does not form any deep relations with a field of work and neither does he genuinely reciprocate any of the love that his father invests in him. Willy's tragic flaw consists in his refusal to give up on his expectations

even as the sources of these expectations have turned against him. Willy adheres to his role as father and salesman. He wants to fulfill his commitments to his relations even as things have moved towards inevitable catastrophe. He is not willing to give up on his sense of personal worth:

“There were promises made across this desk!.....You can’t eat the orange and throw the peel away, a man is not a piece of fruit.”

“I am not a dime a dozen! I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman.”

The ordinariness of Willy Loman not only brings into powerful perspective the theme of crisis of expectations but also and perhaps more significantly, it establishes the notion that a common person can also undergo the tragic process or event. I am not asserting that the tragedy of great persons is equivalent to the tragedy of Willy Loman. All I want to say is that for the study of tragedy to have broader socio historical importance, it is crucial to consider the expectations of ordinary people. The displacement of identity or dignity nourished over the course of a lifetime or centuries can cause other forms of tragedy. All categories of tragedy overlap and one can cause the other; however, I think that the failure of persons’ expectations has the strongest causal relation with tragedies of culture and civil conflicts. For instance, when a society moves in such a manner that for the common person there is nothing but a constant crisis of expectations then, there is a chance that the gap left by a Willy Loman would be filled by persons who adhere to virulent forms of radical and violent nihilism. These persons would cause further tragedies of culture and also civil conflict.

Let us now delve briefly into the first three chapters to see how the theme of crisis of expectations plays itself out. An important reference in the second chapter is to Sophocles’s *Antigone*. Antigone’s identity is constituted around the ties that she has to her family. All of her expectations emerge out of her ties to her family and she must fulfill the obligation to give her brother a dignified burial. The hindrances erected in her path by Creon threaten to displace her identity and this is where her tragedy lies. Creon, on the other hand has fully assumed the role of law giver and this is what constitutes his identity. All he wants to do is to ensure that the law is applied consistently. The law demands that Antigone be stopped from carrying out her duties towards the family. Her insistence upon doing so threatens to displace Creon’s identity. We have a tragic situation where the fulfillment of Antigone’s deepest expectations would lead to the

failure of Creon's expectations and vice versa. Similarly, if Antigone were to be allowed to fulfill the promise that she has made with her family, Creon would break the promise that he has made with the law and vice versa. This issue gains further depth in Chapter III where I draw upon Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Oedipus has also invested himself with his deepest inner resources into his role as ruler of Thebes and the son of his parents. The paradox is that he is completely, irreconcilable blind to his actual identity and to the demands of his role. Oedipus's tragedy is the failure of all of the expectations that emerge from the roles which constitute his identity. Oedipus desperately seeks to fulfill all expectations but they come crashing down because the circumstances do not permit him to see that the content in his mind is not reality but abstraction. One of the central insights of the chapter on culture is that a person can be considered cultured only if he can give and keep promises. With reference to this theme, I look into Shakespeare's *King Lear*. King Lear has formed his identity around the state as a cultural institution based on the principle of loyalty. He places complete trust in the promises given him by his successors and expects loyalty from them. The disloyalty of his successors causes the failure of Lear's deepest expectations. Moreover, the violation of his trust jolts his very sense of identity for this was built around his conception of an institution that could reciprocate loyalty and trust.

It should be noted that the dialectic as a structuring principle and the failure of expectations as a general element of content provide a crucial starting point for making forays into various categories of tragedy. However, the consequences of thoughts developed around a form of tragedy emerge only when it is pressed further with reference to that which is being threatened by the mode of destruction. I do not abide by any form of pantragism. A form of tragedy is a specific and objective dialectical process that unfolds within social and historical contexts. The tragic dialectic always threatens something of great value with irreversible loss. Some values are universal but then there are also values which have meaning only within a social and historical context. Moreover, the tragic dialectic can move in both a subtle and an unsubtle manner. For example, the reversal of the meaning of democracy in America is a tragedy which is unfolding at a very subtle pace. In Pakistan, however, the distortion of the promise of Islam as a cultural force is an abrupt tragedy the patterns of which have already scarred the body of the nation.

The significance of these distinctions comes to the fore in the second chapter of my dissertation. Here I develop an interpretation of Hegel's employment of tragedy as a model for explaining diremption or irreconcilable conflict. I understand Hegel's concept of "ethical life" as referring to the complex of values or more specifically obligations that prevail in a single community or among different communities. The ethical whole is necessarily split apart as it manifests itself in the life of different groups of people. Dictated purely by the contingency of circumstance, people embodying opposing obligations can come into irreconcilable conflict with each other and one group calls out for the elimination of the other because an equivalent force of justification on both sides negates the possibility of peaceful coexistence. The key point that needs to be made here is that people have different historical obligations in different contexts. These obligations are also felt with different intensity in different contexts. I think that for a modern American it would be difficult to understand why one person may be willing to eliminate another for the sake of honor or ethnicity or on the basis of obligations emerging from religious faith. America is the world's most diverse society but there is an overarching American dream – an obligation to be successful – and a reliable system of Justice which covers over any ancient obligations that may cause people to call out for elimination of others in circumstances where opposing, irreconcilable obligations actively manifest themselves in the lives of people.

In the second chapter we explored the themes involved in the tragedy of culture which consists of a conflict between institutional certitude and individual freedom. In a tragedy of culture, the basic promises that underlie various cultural products are objectified, distorted and reversed when culture manifests itself in the shape of institutions. In the third chapter we pressed upon tragic self-deception which is blindness that cannot be overcome by an exercise of freedom and will. It is conflict within the soul that radically alienates a person from himself. This blindness threatens to impede the very struggle for consciousness. In tragic-self deception, the gulf between reality and abstraction in the mind of the protagonist translates into a corresponding chasm between the good intentions that underlie actions and the destruction that these actions cause. The notion of tragic self-deception becomes particularly potent when placed in the context of those who wield power and those who unthinkingly follow the dictates of this power.

This study of the relation between the dialectic and forms of tragedy brings up one insight which, in my view, provides a basis for future inquiry and also constitutes the possibility that the ideas discussed in this dissertation can be a prelude to amelioration. The recognition of the dialectical structure of a tragic event or phenomenon or process reveals the manner in which it unfolds over time. To examine tragedy through the heuristic prism of dialectic is to discern the forces that constitute tragedy. Another major tie which binds all parts of this dissertation is the theme of crisis of expectations and broken promises. We have also gained some insight into the tragic flaw, that is, the traits of character that keep tragedy in place. It should be obvious that a tragic event does not unfold in a void; it is located rather in the midst of concrete historical circumstances. There is always a history that precedes a tragic event. This means that all of the forces that would form a tragic dialectic, the promises that would be violated and the tragic flaw that would be manifested in human action are already present in the historical circumstances that prevail in the vicinity of a tragic event. My position is that once a tragic event is underway, it is unstoppable and intractable. The tragic dialectic ends only after it has taken its toll in the destruction of something that is of great value and is irreplaceable. However, there are also tragedies which are now only potential and waiting in the wings of history. I assert once again that tragedy destroys that which is valuable and irreplaceable; moreover, this destruction cannot be justified on the basis of any ideology or metaphysics. An insight into the tragic can – and I think should – breed pessimistic thinking; one needs however to draw distinctions among pessimisms. There is a pessimistic thought which is characterized by fatalism, resignation, cynicism and pure self-reference (self-absorption). But then there is also a type of pessimistic thought which jolts consciousness into action with full recognition of the fact that all of these actions may well be futile, having only some short-term consequence in a narrow sphere but in the long-term the tragedy that has to take place will take place. It is with this latter kind of pessimism that I am now calling out for serious micro-historical inquiries not only into events, personalities and martyrs (as a character type) that have already been tested on the anvil of history but also into current crises and ‘ordinary’ tragic heroes like Willy Loman who are quickly forgotten after their demise. The concepts developed in this dissertation emerge primarily out of an analysis of the powerful impression that the tragic fundamental phenomenon leaves upon literature and theory. Life and history, however, are much more complex and ambiguous and it is this ambiguity which would present the proposed genealogical research with its greatest challenge. One hopes, however that the dialectic as structural framework and

sensitivity towards persons' deepest expectations in any given context would help in attaining insight into the ineffable impressions left by past tragedies and the signs and symptoms of tragedies that may occur in the future. A basic presupposition underlying this suggestion for future research is that the tragic is not absurd for it does become intelligible when probed by thought. In these, the darkest of times, the rich philosophical and literary tradition of tragedy can yield thoughts that have genuine socio-historical relevance. One can perhaps take courage from Hölderlin, "But where danger is, grows the saving power also".

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VITA

Name: Muhammad Haris

Address: Department of Philosophy; c/o John J. McDermott; Texas A&M
University, 4237 TAMU, College Station, Texas, TX 77843-4237

Email Address: nisaremuhammad@gmail.com

Education: B.E., Civil Engineering NED University of Engineering and Technology 1999
M.E., Civil Engineering Texas A&M University 2002
Ph.D., Philosophy Texas A&M University 2008