

The Family Tie as Mystery

The aim of this chapter is to provide our investigation with enough focus to enable the ethical analysis of what family is about while also respecting its nature as mystery. In the foregoing, we have discovered that it is not easy to name what family might mean. A great deal of family research assumes that the meaning of family is already known: it is regarded as self-evident and is not usually a subject of investigation. In everyday life, family members do not usually refer to it explicitly either. Rather, meaning comes to light in different experiences and ways of acting without being named. Following our first explorations of the novel *Housekeeping*, we noticed that it is particularly when it is under pressure and not self-evident that what it means to be family members becomes visible – when, for example, family members are missing due to death or other causes or when the duties implied in being part of a family are not taken up as a matter of course. Moreover, in these difficult situations, family is experienced differently by the various members. No general definition can be given of what it means or what kind of behaviour it implies. Nevertheless, it is a way of being related that is often important for how people understand themselves. It is a connectedness that usually implies some kind of responsibility. The family tie is something to which people are answerable and can be called to account, even though members may differ on what it implies concretely. In this chapter, we will reflect critically on this first, tentative formulation of the tie. It suggests that family is a distinct sphere with a logic of its own, also as regards morality. This suggestion might seem obvious, but at present it is contentious. The most important criticism is that it suggests a uniformity that does not correspond to the enormous variety of family life. Thus, it can surreptitiously introduce a normative standard of family life without leaving room for discussion. By analysing this criticism, not only will we be challenged to account for our approach; we will also gain further insight into what is at stake in current controversies on family.

Let us first explain our initial reasons for choosing the term 'family tie' as a starting point to further explore what family might mean and the question of whether this is a distinct field of meanings. 'Family tie' is a fixed expression in ordinary language. The reference to the relationship as a 'tie' seems specific to family and not to other relationships. One does not usually speak of friendship ties, neighbourhood ties or citizenship ties. Again, this does not mean that the family tie is referred to very often by, for example, pointing it out to others who do not experience it or invoking it as a justification of certain acts or statements. Precisely because it is usually not made explicit, this notion seems an apt one for retaining its character as mystery. On the other hand, the term 'family tie' also indicates that being a family means something. This meaning can be expressed in acting or be presupposed in holding someone responsible for something, such as becoming a guardian, as happens in *Housekeeping*. A third aspect is that speaking in terms of a tie is quite compatible with the open view of family introduced in Chapter 1. Family is present where a family tie is experienced, be it in a positive or negative sense. Moreover, focussing on the family tie does not lead to the 'problem approaches' we discussed in Chapter 1. Nor does it display a sense of worry. Finally, in ordinary language, the notion of a family tie has an obvious association with something that is not chosen, but given.

In Chapter 1, we explained why we will start each of the chapters with an analysis of a literary or artistic expression of family. When looking for a literary text that can evoke an experience of a family tie in such a way that the reader can re-enact it, Sophocles' *Antigone* seems an obvious candidate. The classic interpretation of Antigone as acting on a family tie is aptly represented by an entry in the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism*:

ANTIGONE. The strong-willed daughter of Oedipus of Thebes. In defiance of the edict of Creon she performed funeral rites for her slain brother Polynices, who was regarded as an enemy of the state. Entombed alive as a punishment for her disobedience she hung herself. She was a courageous and eloquent champion for the rights of the family against the dictates of the state.¹

According to such a summary, the play may appear to be a proper expression of the specific character of the family experienced as a matter of family ties. The play then shows first of all the strength of the family tie. The bond is so strong that the question of whether it should be respected or honoured

¹ Janet K. Boles and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 52.

hardly arises for Antigone. Its strength is obvious and overrules any other consideration, even that of staying alive. The tie extends as far as the dead and can be expressed in symbolic acts like burying a family member. This family logic is different from that of the state or civil society. The incompatibility of these spheres is shown in the clash of two moralities.

The number of recent studies inspired by *Antigone* is immense. Not all of them, however, focus on the theme of family.² Reading *Antigone* with a view to family is thus a specific kind of reading – although a very dominant one, judging by the formulation just cited. The most important origin and source of inspiration for this reading is found in the interpretation the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) gave of *Antigone* in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel refers to *Antigone* in sections on the meaning of family and the specific morality related to this sphere of life. The characterisation of Antigone as a ‘champion for the rights of the family’ is a widely held summary of Hegel’s view. Consequently, a large number of recent studies of *Antigone* are thus in dialogue with this interpretation. As we will see, the character of this dialogue is very critical, even deconstructive. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that both Hegel and recent interpretations regard *Antigone* as a literary source that has a specific value in reflecting on what family might mean. To that extent, they fit in with our approach of consulting literary and artistic sources to broaden the scope of our reflection.

In the analysis that follows, we will look at Sophocles’ *Antigone* itself, for reasons indicated in Chapter 1. In the process of interpreting *Antigone*, however, it will become apparent that our initial idea of the core meanings of this literary text will need to be adjusted. The play does not lend itself to be used to evoke the experience of a family tie in the way we expected. The feminist dictionary summary of Antigone as a champion who reveals the strength of the family tie will turn out to be all too direct and simple. The issue of the family tie is indeed raised by the play, but not in the sense of having clear meanings. The play may be said to evoke the topic of the family tie, but not in the sense of an indisputable fact that implies certain rights and duties. The family tie is presented as much more ambiguous and complex than presupposed at the start. The fruits of this discovery will be given in the analysis of the play in this chapter, which we undertake in

² Bonnie Honig observes a ‘turn to Antigone in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first’, which she explains as a countering of ‘certain forms of sovereignty and rationality’ (Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1). The interests of recent interpretations are as different as the big questions of ‘agency, power, sovereignty and sexuality’.

a rather direct way. We approach the play with the questions that arise from the focus of this study, and we expect that it will have something valuable to say. This is not to be seen in the sense that it presents some model of what family should or should not be, but we hope it will yield other insights into what family might mean. For interpreters who start from a historical understanding of the text, this may be an all-too-straightforward approach. They will emphasise the incomparability of family then and now. We think comparison is possible because our aim is modest. We do not claim to give some new or final interpretation of Sophocles' work. We will read the text carefully as a literary unit and thus aim to avoid letting the text say what we want. As long as we account for our questions and interpretations in critical dialogue with others, it is possible to let our thinking and experiencing be challenged and enriched by this literary means of evoking possible meanings of family – both expected and unexpected, appealing and irritating. Analysing this literary text will let us experience meanings in ways that other, more conceptual texts cannot. Of course, the meanings we find will depend on the questions we ask. We will discuss the legitimacy of these questions in dialogue with other interpretations of *Antigone* in the sections after the first analysis of the story itself.

Family Ties in Sophocles' *Antigone*

Being Sisters

'Ismene, sister of my blood and heart' (1)³ – it is with this emphatic, double appeal to their relation that *Antigone* opens the play.⁴ Two women are on the stage in front of a palace, immediately revealed to be sisters. This

³ References in the main text between brackets are to the numbering of the lines of the Greek text and its translation in the *Loeb Classical Library Series* (Vol. 21) by Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Sometimes there are references to the edition by Mark Griffith (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)); this will be indicated.

⁴ This form of address (ὦ κοινὸν ἀντ'ἀδελφόν) is unusual in ancient Greek and hard to capture in a different language. Another translation tries: 'My own sister Ismene, linked to myself, are you aware that . . .'. On the difficulty of this passage, compare Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986; republ. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63; Bonnie Honig, 'Ismene's Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles' *Antigone*', *Arethusa* 44/1 (2011): n. 41, referring to Paul Allen Miller, *Postmodern Spiritual Practices* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Anna Papile, *Sisters and Greek Tragedy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2016), n. 3, refers to Simon Goldhill, 'Antigone and the Politics of Sisterhood', in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141–62, at 145–6 (see also chapter 9 in Goldhill's monograph on Sophocles, *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 231–48). See also

sisterhood is apparently something to be explicitly appealed to and thus not entirely self-evident. The appeal to their relation as sisters or family is continued in the rest of Antigone's opening phrases, but accompanied throughout by a sense of tension. First, she emphasises their joint sorrowful state, which they share as descendants of Oedipus. Immediately afterwards, however, she calls this shared fate into question: in an address replete with rhetorical questions, she almost accuses Ismene of not being aware of the latest disaster to affect their family. One hears the guilt insinuated in the far from neutral or open question: 'Do you not realize that our enemies' evils are approaching those we love (φίλους)?' (9–10, Griffith 122–3). Ismene does not respond to the references to sisterhood and family history, or to the accusing tone. She replies in a rather detached and calm way: 'To me no word has come . . . I know nothing further, nothing that improves my fortune or brings me nearer to disaster' (11, 16–17). Obviously, Antigone responds indignantly that this is precisely what she thought and why she has summoned Ismene out of the gates of the courtyard – to inform her about a new, imminent danger: 'Why, has not Creon honoured one of our brothers and dishonoured the other in the matter of their burial?' (21).⁵ The one, Eteocles, has received proper burial 'in accordance with justice and with custom' (24) while the corpse of the other, Polynices, was to be left 'unwept for, unburied, a rich treasure house for birds as they look out for food' (26–30). Whoever violates this edict will be stoned to death (36).

It is not just to inform her sister that Antigone wishes to speak to her. Rather, she explains the situation as one in which she may show whether 'her nature is noble' or that she is 'the cowardly descendant of valiant ancestors' (37–8). Ismene, however, perseveres in her ignorance and powerlessness: 'What could I contribute by trying to untie or to tie the knot?' (39–40). Thus, Antigone is forced to make explicit what is completely obvious in her eyes but what she now has to present as a request: 'Will you bury the dead man, together with this hand of mine?' (43). By now, Ismene's answer is all but a surprise: 'Are you thinking of burying him, when it has been forbidden by the city?' This is the moment for Antigone to confirm explicitly the distinction between them that was hinted at from the very first line as contradicting the emphasis on their unity as sisters: 'I will bury my brother, and yours, if you will not; I will not be caught

Nussbaum (*The Fragility*, 63–4) and the translation by Griffith (*Antigone*, 40–1) on the centrality of the issue in *Antigone* of whether family members are one's friends (φίλοι) or enemies.

⁵ The small words introducing another rhetorical question by Antigone – 'has not . . .?' (οὐ γὰρ . . .) – again accuse Ismene of not being aware of the most recent family disaster. Antigone refers to Creon's law as things 'the people say', which also suggests that Ismene could have known about it (23, 27, 31).

betraying him' (45–6). Ismene is set apart as a traitor because of her refusal to do what a sister should do for a brother.

Then it is Ismene's turn to appeal to sisterhood in order to keep Antigone from doing this 'reckless' (47) deed: 'Woe! Think sister' (49). Like Antigone a moment ago, although in vain, Ismene now starts referring to their family's history, the terrible fate of their father and mother after the revelation of the scandalous character of their incestuous marriage and the fate of their brothers as well, 'on one day killing each other' (55). Now, only the two of them are left – women, moreover, 'who are ruled by those whose power is greater'. They cannot do anything but obey these powers who forbid to bury. It is foolish to go against what exceeds one's powers, she argues (67). At the same time, however, Ismene begs the dead for understanding, which implies that she does feel the claim of Antigone's plea. Antigone, in reply, takes Ismene's appeal to sisterhood and family fate as nothing more than an expression of her subjectively choosing to be a certain 'kind of person' (71) and thus of her distancing herself from the rest of the family. Antigone claims her own decision to bury her brother and the death penalty that will result from it to be 'honourable' (72), 'a crime that is holy' (74), while accusing Ismene of taking 'pleasure' in the 'dishonouring of what the gods honour' (76–7). Ismene does not take pains to defend herself against these accusations but pities Antigone's sorrowful fate that is the result of 'being in love with the impossible' (90). Antigone then counters by expressing her hatred of Ismene for saying this and claiming again the honourableness of her own imminent death. The final words are, surprisingly, granted to Ismene, who suddenly puts herself in the role of the one whose consent is requested in deciding on a difficult dilemma. She utters a judgement: 'Well, if you wish to, go! But know this much, that in your going you are foolish, but truly dear to those who are your own (φίλοις⁶)' (98–9). Ismene now claims to speak on behalf of the 'dearest', the family, and still includes Antigone and herself among them. Thus, the opening dialogue ends up in a rupture between the sisters while they both claim their kinship as well.

Burial of a Traitor as a Family Issue

The family tie is clearly brought to the fore from the start in this opening scene. The central dilemma of the play – the question of whether a traitor, Polynices, deserves to be buried even when the lawful government forbids

⁶ Griffith also gives another possible translation: 'because you are truly devoted to kin you are behaving impossibly' (*Antigone*, 138).

it – is presented from the outset as the issue of burying a brother, a family member and not just any traitor. Antigone presents the responsibility for paying one's final honours as something belonging to them as sisters or family members as they are the only direct relatives left in the Oedipus family. It is remarkable that Antigone brings this duty forward as self-evident and does not try to underpin it by giving explicit reasons for it or to refer to a law-like formulation. Ismene, for her part, does not try to solve the problem by putting the responsibility on others, perhaps those outside the family circle – an option Creon suggests later in the play.⁷ She disagrees with Antigone's decision to bury Polynices, but not with the sisterly obligation to do so as such, and even begs the dead for understanding regarding her negligence.

Despite the fact that this sisterly or familial duty appears self-evident, Antigone also assumes from the start that Ismene will not take up this task and is thus somehow insensitive to the obviousness of this duty. From the beginning, Antigone casts doubt on her sister's solidarity and almost seems to have assumed that this sisterhood will amount to nothing in the end. She does not make much of an effort to convince her sister of her duties towards the dead. Ismene hardly gets the chance to act otherwise. As a result, one wonders why Antigone discusses her plans with Ismene at all. Her own decision is, moreover, already firmly established. Antigone does not seem to need her sister's opinion, advice or consent at all, or to want to consult properly with her so she can finally make up her mind with respect to the burying.

One could easily imagine a different staging of the opening scene, such as a monologue by Antigone revealing the pros and cons of the burial and showing how she finally arrives at her firm decision all alone. Such a monologue does occur further on in the play, where Antigone – in Creon's presence but without entering into a dialogue with him – faces her imminent death and once more reveals her motives. Or one could think of opening with a discussion among the inhabitants of Thebes in which Creon's freshly issued laws are discussed. In the rest of the play, there are several references to the negative reception of these laws among Thebes' citizens and their support of Antigone's decision. Or one might imagine an opening dialogue between Antigone and her fiancé, Haemon, Creon's son. Haemon's position seems full of literary potential since he stands in

⁷ In the next scene, when the crime of burying Polynices has been discovered, Creon explains it as being performed by the guards after having been bribed by 'men in the city who find it hard to bear me' (289–94). This option of others undertaking the task of burying Polynices is not advanced by the sisters, however.

between the laws of the king, his father and the decision of his betrothed. Sophocles does not choose any of these openings, however.

The issue of whether a traitor deserves burial is emphatically staged as a family one. Or, rather, it is a family conflict: the debate about burying is a conflict between sisters who presuppose their sisterhood in the ways they address each other. They give it different content and hardly try to convince each other of their opposed views. They are each other's 'dearest', but also fiercely denounce each other's views and leave it at that. The first scene ends up in complete opposition. Presupposed in this opposition, however, is their bond as sisters and the sisters' duty to bury their brother.

The Disputable Prioritising of the Country above 'Dear Ones'

How is this family conflict elaborated in the rest of the play? The spotlight does not remain on the sisters or on either one of them, but shifts in the next scene to Creon and the chorus of the leading elderly citizens of Thebes. The family setting is changed for the political one. Does this mean an end to the framing of the story in the sisterly obligation to bury? The floor is given first to Creon to introduce himself as the new ruler of Thebes since the death of the two brothers. The introduction ends up in an elaborate reiteration of what he has just proclaimed to the citizens. The laws that order the honouring of Eteocles and prohibit the burying of Polynices are proof of his spirit as a ruler who wants to protect the citizens against ruin and to restore safety. As this recapitulation of the freshly issued laws follows the previous scene in which Antigone attacks the laws, it creates the impression of being a defence against her objections. This impression is reinforced when Creon subsequently contrasts his conduct with that of a bad ruler whom he describes as 'him who rates a dear one (φίλον) higher than his native land' (182–3). This 'dear one' (φίλος) seems a clear reference to Polynices, the son of his sister Iocaste, and to the possibility that Creon would have paid honour to him who is at the same time the one who attacked his 'native land' of Thebes. A few lines later, he says, 'nor would I make a friend (φίλον) of the enemy of my country' (187) as it is only when the country 'prosper[s] [that we] can make friends (φίλους)' (190).

Clear as these statements may be in their prioritising of loyalties to the country above loyalties to 'dear ones', they also reveal another option – that is, favouring your 'dear ones'. In the rest of his speech, moreover, Creon openly seems to reckon with the possibility of a violation of the law against burying Polynices. Apart from having the corpse guarded, he orders the

elderly ‘not to give way to those who disobey in this’ (219).⁸ As a result, the prohibition to bury appears to be disputable from the beginning of the play, most openly in the first scene of course, but also implicitly in this second one in which Creon speaks. This disputability results from the fact that it goes against other obligations, such as those following from a loyalty that weighs more heavily than that of the city, the loyalty to those dear to us (φίλοι). No explicit references are made to sisterhood, which is not surprising, for that would already be giving way to Antigone’s claims. Yet the implicit references to the debatable character of the interdict and thus to the presence of some stronger law cannot be missed.

Appealing to Divine Government

In the next scene, then, we seem to see more chances of resuming the thread of the family. Here, a terrified guard informs Creon that Polynices’ body has been buried despite the interdict. Without the guards noticing it, somebody has been ‘sprinkling its flesh with thirsty dust and performing the necessary rites’ (245–7). The burial is presented as a complete mystery by the guard since he emphasises that there are no marks of any activity around the body (249–52). In response to this announcement, nobody suggests that the first to be suspected are Polynices’ two sisters. Nobody makes a reference to any obligation to bury a family member.

The first explanation of the enigmatic burial that is put forward is that by the spokesman of the chorus of elderly citizens. He suggests: ‘King, my anxious thought has long been advising me that this action may have been prompted by the gods’ (278–9). A reference to the gods was also already made briefly by Antigone in the first scene, when she reacted to Ismene’s refusal to bury her brother by saying: ‘As for you, if it is your pleasure, dishonour what the gods honour!’ (76–7). Creon, however, immediately rejects the suggestion by the elderly: ‘Cease, before your words fill me with rage, so that you may not be found to be not only an old man but a fool! What you say is intolerable, that the gods are concerned for this corpse! . . . Do you see the gods honouring evil men? It is not so!’ (280–9). The extremely vehement character of this response easily creates the impression that there may be some persuasiveness in this explanation with reference to the gods. Creon, however, quickly gives his own view of the miracle: the guards have been bribed by citizens who disagree with

⁸ The elderly, however, seem completely surprised at the very idea of such disobedience and reply: ‘there is no one foolish enough to desire death’ (220).

Creon's laws (289–94). They will be sentenced to death if they do not find the 'author of this burial' (306).

Despite this harsh response, the suggestion of divine government returns time and again in the rest of the play, not just in relation to miraculous events, but also in relation to the obligation as such to bury one's kin.⁹ When Antigone is caught performing the rites for the dead at her brother's body, she refers to this divine law to explain and justify the burial. She opposes this law to Creon's laws and argues that the latter are 'not strong enough to have power to overrule, mortal as they were, the unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods' (453–5). Several sentences follow in which she further explains the power of these divine laws in comparison to Creon's proclamation (456–61). This is the first time her words sound like an argument to justify her violation of Creon's law.

Her antagonist does not in any way respond to this argument, but follows the suggestion of the elderly that she reminds us of her father as 'she does not know how to bend before her troubles' (472). Creon announces that this stubbornness will lead to her downfall. Antigone embraces this fate, and it is only here that the family tie comes to the fore again. Antigone states she could not 'have gained greater glory than by placing my own (αὐτάδεελφον) brother in his grave'.¹⁰ Moreover, she claims this family duty as something 'all these men would approve, if it were not that fear shuts their mouths' (502–5). In comparison to the earlier mentioning of the divine law, this no longer sounds like an argument, a justification, but rather as claiming that her behaviour towards her brother is self-evident to anyone. Of course, Creon rejects this self-evidential character (508) and again points to the traitor status of her brother Polynices (514). Antigone insists that he remains her brother, a 'friend by birth' (523). These final references to the family bond, however, do again not sound like an argument, nor do they explicate any rule – divine or not – that obliges family members to bury their dead. They sound like a claim or statement to remind Creon of the wrongness of his distinguishing between people along the lines of enemies and friends. Creon then concludes that Antigone should die. Apparently, he is not impressed by the claim of divinity that Antigone attaches to her acting, nor by her invocation of the family bond.

⁹ For example, when the guard explains that a dust storm forced them to close their eyes when they wanted to see the attempt to burial: 'we endured the god-sent affliction' (421).

¹⁰ The term αὐτάδεελφον used in the opening lines in relation to Ismene is repeated here, compare note 4.

Punished as Sisters

Strikingly, Creon does immediately and self-evidently acknowledge the family tie in his plans to punish the transgression. He includes Antigone's sister Ismene in the death sentence: '[S]he and her sister shall not escape a dreadful death! Yes, I hold her equally guilty of having planned this burial' (488–9). In the very same sentence, he states for the first time his own kinship with the two sisters: '[S]he is my sister's child or closer in affinity than our whole family linked by Zeus of the hearth' (486–7). This kinship is, however, apparently no reason not to sentence both of them to death. Another family tie on the same level is left unmentioned: Creon is himself related to the traitor Polynices – he is his uncle. There is not a single reference to this family bond in the play, although it is on the same level as that of the nieces, which Creon does mention. This absence also puts the family obligation to bury in a different light. Nowhere is this obligation mentioned as applying to Uncle Creon as well. Had it been a family duty, this would have seemed obvious. When people – his son Haimon and the blind prophet Tiresias – later start to contradict Creon in the play, they do not adduce an argument that reminds Creon of his kinship with the traitor either. This suggests that the position of the sisters is a special one as regards this issue of the burial, perhaps because they are closer kin.

When Ismene subsequently enters, Creon gives her the chance to plead not guilty to the burial (534–5). Her reaction is a complete surprise: she admits she has done it (536–7). Instead of Creon following up on this confession with further interrogation, Antigone takes over the conversation by vehemently denying that Ismene had a part in the burial. She invokes 'justice' (538) as going against this and 'Hades and those below' (541) as knowing the facts of the matter – that is, Ismene has 'never put a hand to it' (546–7). Their sisterhood is mentioned only as the background of this rejection: 'I do not tolerate a loved one (*φίλην*) who shows her love (*φιλοῦσαν*) only in words' (543). In her response to Antigone, Ismene does not claim to have carried out the burial. However, she does not deny that she has *not* taken part in the burial either. She explains her pleading guilty as intending to become a 'fellow voyager' (541) in Antigone's suffering and by dying to grant 'the dead man the proper rites' (545). When Antigone states that her own death is enough (547), Ismene asks what kind of life there is for her without Antigone (548). She concludes by saying that their 'offence is equal' (558), to which Antigone counters that Ismene is alive while she herself 'has long been dead, so as to help the dead' (559). These are her last words to Ismene.

This last conversation of the sisters displays a striking change in Ismene's behaviour in comparison to the first scene. She now explicitly endorses her own sisterly duties both to bury her brother and to show solidarity with her condemned sister. Antigone does not respond to this change, but leaves the opposition of the first scene intact. However, this was to be expected. In the first scene, Antigone did already announce to Ismene that 'even if you were willing to act after all I would not be content for you to act with me!' (69–70). Now that this possibility has indeed become real, this reveals again how much Antigone approaches her sister as if she foresees all her characteristic ways of responding. She does not hesitate for a moment when she is finally confronted with Ismene's sudden solidarity, but rejects it immediately. It is important to observe that she does not underpin this rejection by any general statements referring to the family member's obligation to bury, or to the divine laws that command burial. She rejects Ismene's solidarity because it is not in keeping with her earlier decision not to accompany Antigone in the burial of their brother. She does not regard sisterhood as somehow implying a solidarity which might in the end overrule Ismene's earlier refusal and compensate for it. Although she rejects Ismene in this way, she also protects her, of course. In a similar way, there is a moment of protection in Ismene's willingness to share Antigone's terrible fate. While their sisterhood seems to be dominated by opposition, quarrels and rejection, there is clearly also a protective side to this quarrelling. The distance between them does not result in their no longer being concerned about each other, but the opposition dominates the relationship.

Family Ties Denied, Implied in Acts, and Finally Made Explicit

What does the part of the play that follows the burial add regarding the nature of the family tie? The part preceding the burial revealed the family tie to be ambiguous and discordant. It is the basis for the quarrel, the self-evident, unspoken reason for expecting things of each other, especially among the sisters. They expect something from each other precisely because they are sisters: an attitude of solidarity and corresponding concrete acts. These expectations are at the same time tempered by the lack of understanding they show to each other because of their fixed views of the other as either 'cowardly' or 'in love with the impossible'. This lack of understanding leads to an explicit distancing from the other. Still, this is only possible because of the underlying tie.

Subsequently, Creon's perspective dominates, which results in far less emphasis on family. Family is only mentioned as of no importance where enemies of the city like Polynices and, later, Antigone and Ismene are concerned. Moreover, family does not come into view in the first instance when Polynices is found to have been buried. Creon does not associate the crime with Polynices' sisters. Neither does anyone else. When Antigone is caught in the burial act, however, Creon suddenly does take a family perspective and holds the two sisters equally responsible. Ismene agrees to this generalising of the family, but Antigone will have none of it: she rejects her sister's solidarity. Neither of the sisters gives explicit reasons for this solidarity or the refusal of it. They do not refer to, for example, some general law that obliges family members to bury their kin. The only reasons given are the precedence either of the divine law to bury one's dead or of Creon's city laws.

As a result, the meaning of the family tie in all this is far from clear. The play does not simply conjure up the picture of a strong family tie that self-evidently implies specific behaviour. Rather it seems to invite the observer to ponder what this family tie might mean. This invitation does not stem from explicit references to the family tie in words. The tie is rather acted out. This is done most pronouncedly in the burial and in Creon's act of self-evidently including Ismene in Antigone's punishment. Moreover, Ismene's behaviour almost parallels Antigone's readiness to sacrifice herself for kinship when she shows solidarity with her sister as soon as Creon announces she will be punished as well.¹¹

The only passage that is incongruous in this respect because it does formulate an explicit obligation to bury one's brother is in Antigone's final speech just before she dies. Here, she suddenly addresses her dead father, mother, and brother directly, anticipating her imminent descent to the underworld and their reuniting. She reminds her mother that she was the one who washed her after she died and paid her the final honours. Now she has to die because she buried her brother! She argues that 'in the eyes of the wise I did well to honour you' (904). The reason she gives for this wisdom has never been mentioned before in the play and suddenly puts the past events in a completely different light.

For never, had children of whom I was the mother or had my husband
perished and been mouldering there, would I have taken on myself this task,

¹¹ In line with this moment, the suggestion of some interpreters that Ismene is the one who performed the first burial is intriguing. Is Ismene the one who in fact shows more sense of what family means by this first burial and by being prepared to share Antigone's fate? See, for example, Honig, 'Ismene's Forced Choice', 39–44.

in defiance of the citizens. In virtue of what law do I say this? If my husband had died, I could have had another, and a child by another man, if I had lost the first, but with my mother and my father in Hades below, I could never have another brother. Such was the law for whose sake I did you special honour, but to Creon I seemed to do wrong and to show shocking recklessness, O my own brother. (905–15)

Now there suddenly turns out to be a law for whose sake she had honoured Polynices. It sounds like a law for siblings only. There is no reference to the divine character of the law, as was claimed earlier. On the contrary, a few lines later, Antigone asks: 'What justice of the gods have I transgressed? Why must I still look to the gods, unhappy one? Whom can I call on to protect me? For by acting piously I have been convicted of impiety' (921–4). The reference to the gods no longer sounds firm and definite but rather hesitant, almost questioning. Firmness is now expressed in the law that obliges siblings to bury their dead because they are irreplaceable for each other.

Unsurprisingly, the Sophoclean authorship of this final passage is disputed, although present scholarship holds that 'there is no convincing evidence that the passage is an interpolation'.¹² A good reason to regard it as authentic is that what this law prescribes corresponds precisely to what Antigone aimed to do from the beginning, and has in fact done: die for burying her brother and refraining from marrying Haimon.¹³ On the other hand, there is clearly something odd in the passage. This has to do with the fact that this 'law' has not been mentioned before, although the situations – both in the dialogue with Ismene and in the dialogue with Creon – very much called for it. As a result, the appeal to it in this final section, just before Antigone dies, creates the impression of a rationalisation after the event. As such, it comes across as artificial. It does not sound convincing. It raises the question of whether this is what can happen when one makes explicit the family tie and the obligations implied in it.

Creon's Ruin

After Antigone's speech, no explicit verbal references to any specific family relations are found in the play. Antigone disappears from the scene. The blind prophet Tiresias enters, led by a boy. Tiresias reports that the 'prophetic rites' (1013) which he has performed to gain insight into what

¹² André Lardinois, 'Antigone', in *A Companion to Sophocles*, ed. by Kirk Ormand (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 55–68, at 63.

¹³ Griffith, *Antigone*, 277–9.

should be done have yielded nothing: 'the gods are no longer accepting the prayers that accompany sacrifice or the flame that consumes the thigh bones' (1019–22). Neither do the birds give any signs, for they are 'filled with carrion . . . from the unhappy son of Oedipus who fell' (1016–18). Tiresias urges Creon not to be obstinate but to retrace his steps and stop tormenting the dead man as if he could kill him over again. Creon immediately repudiates this counsel and strikes back by accusing Tiresias of being led by avarice. He debunks Tiresias' interpretation of the divine signs by the brief statement that 'no mortals have power to pollute the gods' (1042–4). Tiresias then feels forced to predict what will come of this – death in Creon's own family. Creon will be left with nothing but outrage and destruction. Tiresias and the boy leave after this ominous announcement, indignant at Creon's insolence.

Then the chorus of elders, representing the citizens of Thebes, immediately confirms the reliability of Tiresias' prophecy, and all of a sudden Creon loses his confidence and expresses his dilemma at having to choose between two evils, those of yielding and resisting. He asks the elders what he should do. They straightforwardly advise him to follow Tiresias' counsel and release Antigone from her tomb and make one for Polynices. Creon immediately gives in, stating that fighting against higher powers is in vain and that it is best to obey the 'established laws' (1105–7). He runs off to personally release Antigone from her imprisonment. In the meantime, a messenger appears and announces Creon's ruin: his son Haemon has been found dead and there seems no other explanation for it than that he has taken his own life. At that very moment, Eurydice arrives and confirms that she has heard of the terrible disaster that has affected her house and asks the messenger to repeat his announcement. He then tells how Creon first paid final honours to Polynices and then went on to Antigone's tomb. When he was close, Creon heard the voice of Haemon and hurried to the scene. There he found Antigone hanging and his son lying with his arms around her and lamenting her death. When Haemon heard his father, he tried to kill him, but Creon escaped. Then Haemon's fury turned against himself; he killed himself. Hearing this, Eurydice leaves without a word. Creon enters, carrying his dead son. His tone is one of confession: his 'mistaken mind' and 'folly' is the cause of this disaster (1261–9). He has only just admitted his mistakes when another messenger enters and announces that his wife has taken her life as well. Creon cries out bewailing his fate, asking why nobody kills him – he, the involuntary murderer of his wife and son who is 'no more than nothing' (1325). The final word comes from the chorus who acclaim 'good sense', wisdom, as the counterpart of impiety to the gods and the 'great words of boasters' (1350).

For the focus of our reading, it is important to see that Tiresias does not in any way refer to the sins of Creon as related to family obligations. His faults, both in burying Antigone alive and leaving Polynices' corpse unburied, are defined only in terms of blasphemy (1066–71). These are also the terms of the chorus who refers to the 'swift avengers from the gods' who will strike Creon if he does not hurry to correct his wrongdoings (1103–4). The notion of family only emerges in connection with the killings. Antigone chooses death after being entombed, and this leads to the death of her betrothed, which in turn leads to the death of Eurydice, his mother. The relationship between husband and wife, Haemon and Antigone, thus parallels that of mother and son, Eurydice and Haemon. Their deaths lead Creon to wish he was dead as well. Without these beloved family members, life for all three of them no longer has any value. Again, this existential importance of the family connections is not made explicit in words but in the acts of suicide or the wish for death.

Antigone and the Family Tie As Mystery

Our analysis of *Antigone* with a specific interest in whether it may reveal meanings of the family tie has shown that the protagonist is not straightforwardly a 'champion of the rights of the family against the dictates of the state'. Antigone does not take pains to defend certain rights, neither in her controversy with her sister nor in her contact with Creon. From the start, she presents herself as the only one sensitive to the implications of this tie. Neither does she try to make the other family members susceptible to it by formulating any explicit family rights or laws. The family tie thus does not seem to function for Antigone as something whose meaning can be formulated in such an explicit way. The same holds for the other members, Ismene and Creon. The meaning of the family tie is thus expressed not as such in words or reflections, but implied in the ways the people act. It becomes visible in how Antigone acts towards her deceased brother and claims the burial as a sisterly duty of divine origin. It is implied in Creon's denial in the justification of his laws and in his punishment of both sisters. It is expressed implicitly in Ismene's sudden solidarity with her sister and in the deaths provoked by Antigone's death. The central issue of the play, the permissibility of the burial, is staged as a family issue from the very start, the opening scene with the two sisters. This staging does not mean the play provides a clear view on the precise nature of the family tie. This tie is a connectedness that is on the one hand self-evident. It is the self-evident basis for calling somebody to account in Antigone's accusations of Ismene and Creon, but

also in how Creon holds both sisters responsible. It is self-evident in that the death of the one family member makes life no longer worth living for the other. But it is not a self-evidence that can be expressed in general rules. The different family members act upon it differently. The family tie turns out to be something about which the different members take a different stand. It is a given tie, but this does not mean one cannot distance oneself from it, as Antigone, Ismene and Creon all do in their own ways.

The play thus certainly evokes the notion of a family tie, but not in an unambiguous way in terms of its meaning. Rather, the conflicts between the family members the spectators are confronted with raise probing questions: What does the family tie mean? What may one expect from family members? Does the tie imply solidarity and unanimity among its members? What kind of behaviour does it imply? Should the tie be regarded as of the kind for which one should sacrifice one's life? That the play evokes the family tie in this questioning way can be related very well to our approach to family as mystery. It evokes it as something that matters, but without presenting it as a phenomenon with a meaning and well-defined status. Nor is it evident what concrete behaviour it demands. The family tie appears as something given, assumed, and not as a fact named as such. This unnamed character does not do away with the appeal that is implied in the tie, even if one chooses to ignore it. Even Creon acknowledges that Ismene and Antigone are his nieces and Polynices a 'dear one'. But this is an appeal he does not respond to – in his view, for the sake of his Thebes. Only after the death of Haemon does he change his mind, but not in the sense of any explicit acknowledgment of the family tie with the two women. In Ismene we observed a change as well: she feels the appeal from the start, but does not respond to it at first. Only after the punishment of Antigone does she turn out to be amenable to it.

It is remarkable that the only qualification Antigone gives of the unnameable law is its divine character and the claim to honour her deceased parents by obeying it. The latter aspect recalls Marcel's view of family as something in which people experience themselves as part of something greater than themselves, in relation to progenitors and future descendants. Antigone shows this larger unity also implies responsibilities related to honouring one's family members. The divine character of the law, moreover, recalls the religious tones of Marcel's approach to family as mystery. In Antigone's formulation, this holy or sacred character of the law has an intrinsic relation to its unnameability, expressed in its unwritten character and unknown origin (456–7). We will return to this sacred character of the law in the final section.

Another aspect of the character of mystery that returns is one's personal involvement. This can be seen in that the family tie is presented precisely as a question to the spectator. It cannot be answered in general but only by determining one's own stance. The play invites the spectator to identify with each of the characters despite the fact that *Antigone* is the most heroic one. The radical choices she makes and her unwillingness to accept Ismene's solidarity also give her a stubbornness that is alienating. As none of the characters is simply put in the right regarding their family views, the issue is all the more evoked as one that general statements can't be made of.

Our analysis of *Antigone* with a focus on the family tie has thus proved fruitful for a first evocation of the tie. Moreover, it has revealed elements that resonate with the nature of family as mystery and thus gives us a further elaboration of our mystery approach. However, this interpretation of the play as revealing something about the specific character of family is all but self-evident. Although the description from the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* suggests otherwise, it is in particular among scholars with a feminist interest that reading *Antigone* with a focus on family is strongly rejected. Such an interpretation would take a classic dualistic interpretation for granted: as a woman, *Antigone* stands for the family whereas Creon, the man, represents the state. Not only the gender division, but the splitting of human life into a twofold basic structure of family versus state as such is problematic for many contemporary readers. The debate on the accuracy of this more or less classical interpretation, strongly influenced by what is supposed to be Hegel's view, has not been settled so far. Publications on the topic abound.¹⁴ As a result, the play seems an excellent case for accessing current discussions on the value and meaning of the family tie and of the possibility as such of delineating a tie and a corresponding sphere of human life. The discovery of the aliveness of the debate on these issues is in line with the controversial character of the topic of family in our time, outlined in Chapter 1. Despite all the criticism of the obviousness of the combination of *Antigone* and the theme of family, it remains a topic for reflection. Apparently, Hegel's way of relating the two cannot simply be ignored, in spite of its suggested outdatedness. We will start exploring why this is so and what Hegel's value may be for our own investigations of family by means of a recent reading of *Antigone* by Judith

¹⁴ For a discussion of the different recent philosophical interpretations, in which Hegel's view remains the most important point of reference, see the contributions to the volume edited by S. E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė, *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Butler, who is a Hegel scholar as well. In doing so, we will leave the level of the first evocation of family we aimed for by means of the preceding direct analysis of the play itself. Further on in this chapter, we will return to elements from the first evocation.

Judith Butler's Trouble Reading *Antigone* in View of Family

In her Welles Library Lectures on *Antigone*, Judith Butler opens with an experience similar to our own. In reading the play, the text revealed something different from what she had anticipated.¹⁵ She describes how she started analysing *Antigone* in the hope of finding in her 'a counter-figure' to recent feminist trends of seeking state support for their aims. Upon reading other interpretations of the play, however, she was struck by the fact that the most influential exegetes, in particular Hegel, interpreted *Antigone's* role very differently. Instead of seeing *Antigone* as a political figure, they deemed her a representative of 'kinship as the sphere that conditions the possibility of politics without ever entering into it' (2). Creon, then, is the representative of state authority. The characterisation from the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* can be easily recognised here. This 'separation of kinship from the social' (3) in traditional interpretations of *Antigone* amazes Butler and guides her rereading of the play. Such a separation relates kinship to the sphere of the pre-political. It becomes a domain where nature reigns, as is obvious in the view of family as defined by blood relation or 'biology'. 'The social', on the other hand, is taken as a denominator for the public sphere of culture, politics, laws and norms. According to Butler, this dualistic interpretation does not do justice to Sophocles' *Antigone*. Moreover, such interpretations in the end contribute to maintaining prevailing social conventions of the human based on an exclusion of the non-human. In particular, they are guilty of supporting traditional forms of kinship and referring alternative forms – like the incestuous relations of *Antigone* herself – to the level of being 'entombed' as the 'essential and negative feature of the norm' which is itself in fact 'rearticulated' (76).

Butler's criticism goes to the heart of our reading of *Antigone* and of our project as such – that is, approaching family as a separate phenomenon rooted in an intuitively experienced, unspoken, yet strong family tie. Butler is deeply suspicious of treating family as a distinct sphere which is

¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Welles Library Lectures 1998 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

somehow self-evidently given in an intuitive experience of feeling a bond with someone. She warns that this approach is always conservative or conformist in the end, which leads to the underestimation or even exclusion of the non-normal. This is reason enough for us to analyse and evaluate her views, but what makes them even more relevant is that Butler is all but unaware of the importance of human relations and the fundamentally interdependent nature of life. In that sense – as she indicates herself – Butler may even be called a Hegelian thinker.¹⁶ She is interested in that which enables the ethical and the political, or better, in the complete interwovenness or entanglement of all forms of life that conditions concrete decision-making, responsibility and acting.¹⁷ The point she emphasises in relation to *Antigone*, however, is that this interest in interdependence should not be elaborated as something outside the political but as itself shaped by politics as well as giving shape to it. To put it in terms of the Hegelian opposition: interest in the inter-human relations of recognition should not lead one in the direction of separating the private from the public – that is, seeing the private as constitutive of the public.¹⁸ That is a misrepresentation because it fails to recognise that the private is already public in the sense that it already contains a contingent, culturally predetermined view of what is human. Although constitutive of the ethical, it is not outside the political and must therefore be recognised as part of the ethical consciousness itself.

Butler's analysis of Antigone thus reveals two points of emphasis that are also visible in her later works – for example, in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015). The first concerns the importance of recognising

¹⁶ 'I experience my own work as returning time and again to Hegel, to problems of recognition and desire' (Thomas Dumm and Judith Butler, 'Giving Away, Giving Over: A Conversation with Judith Butler', *Massachusetts Review* 49/1–2 (2008): 95–105, at 97). In this context, Butler also refers to her later book *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Compare references to Hegel in *Giving an Account*, 24–5, and in her later book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 44. We will also refer to her view of the self as 'ecstatic' as Hegelian; see note 31.

¹⁷ In a brief remark, Catherine Keller distinguishes between Butler's writings before and after 2000. The latter 'break into an overt discourse of ontological relationalism', while the former focussed on 'the regulatory force of sociality more than its ontological complexity' (*Cloud of the Impossible* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 220). A few pages later, Keller nuances this view: 'there is of course no supersession of an earlier by a later Butler, no pivotal conversion' (223). Yet she argues that the events of 9/11 made Butler reflect on mourning (*Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004)), which 'hosts the emergence of an explicit and widened relationalism'. As regards morality, this draws us, according to Keller, into an 'ever wider, perhaps infinite field of accountability' (227).

¹⁸ This is Butler's main problem with the way Hannah Arendt distinguishes between the public and the private, although she starts from an incentive Butler fully acknowledges – doing justice to interdependence as conditioning action. Compare *Notes Toward*, 44–6, 78; *Antigone's Claim*, 81–2.

the ‘dependency on others and on living processes’ (44) as a precondition for acting – summarised in the question of ‘what sustaining web of relations makes our lives possible?’ (24). The second makes sure this attention does not lead to a depoliticisation of dependency as a given sphere outside the normative. The first aspect provides a common ground with our interest in how the givenness of family relations can be accounted for in ethics. It emphasises that acting does not start from nowhere and that life is possible only in relations of interdependence. Ethics should take this relatedness into account. The topic of dependence will receive separate attention in Chapter 4, but in Butler, it is combined with the second, critical emphasis on the acknowledgement of its contingent political shaping. She warns against suggesting that this precondition of interdependence is an unchangeable or even natural factor, without a human, historical character. Because of these dangers, she avoids speaking of family as a distinct sphere of its own. As we will see, this leads to tensions in her thinking, or even an impasse. That is precisely the kind of impasse that may be fruitful for our project, however, because it may point to a different level and mode of reflection, one Butler perhaps does not think possible. This is the kind of reflection opened up by the question of why family cannot be regarded as a specific form of dependence on others that nevertheless reveals ethically relevant general aspects of this fundamental level of relatedness.

Judith Butler: Reading Antigone beyond the Distinction of Family versus State

The first key to a better understanding of Butler’s motives for not going into family as a separate sphere of life lies in her terminology when analysing *Antigone*. Butler uses the term ‘kinship’ instead of family. She hardly explains the difference, apart from a brief remark that ‘by kinship I do not mean the “family” in any specific form’ (*Antigone’s Claim*, 5). Apparently, she associates ‘family’ with ‘specific forms’ and wants to stay far from such forms. This reading is confirmed by what follows: the book turns out to be an argument in favour of what she finally calls a ‘radical kinship’ perspective. This aims to ‘extend legitimacy to a variety of kinship forms’ and ‘refuse[s] the reduction of kinship to family’ (74). Kinship is eventually called a ‘socially alterable set of arrangements that . . . organize the reproduction of material life, . . . ritualization of birth and death, . . . bonds of intimate alliance, and . . . sexuality’ (72). It changes constantly. This radical perspective is an alternative to the lack of openness to ‘change’

and 'radical alterations' (19) in conceptions of kinship and family in particular that are presupposed in many *Antigone* interpretations.¹⁹

We already observed that Butler finds this lack of openness precisely in the Hegelian splitting of human life into two spheres of kinship and state. As a result, this closed interpretation does not do justice to the unconventional figure of *Antigone* either. How precisely do these problems arise in Hegel's *Antigone* reflections? According to Butler, the separation of kinship from the social and the categorisation of *Antigone* and Creon under these headings takes place in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here Hegel claims that *Antigone* is 'the eternal irony of the community' and 'represents the law of the household gods' while 'Creon represents the law of the state' (4). There is a clear hierarchy between the spheres: 'kinship must give way to state authority as the final arbiter of justice' (5); *Antigone*'s transgressing of state norms is 'necessarily failed and fatal' (6). This already shows, according to Butler, that the splitting into two spheres of life does not mean a peaceful situation of co-existence, but conflict. The spheres are not in harmony, but they also depend on each other: there is an 'essential relation between the two spheres'. As a result of this conflict in relation, 'every interpretative effort to cast a character as representative of kinship or the state tends to falter and lose coherence and stability' (5). Hegelian interpreters of *Antigone*, however, do not recognise this problem. They oppose *Antigone* to Creon as belonging to one sphere only. Butler's book is mainly a long, drawn-out criticism of this reductionist view of the main characters Creon and, in particular, *Antigone* and an attempt to arrive at a much more complex reading. This also implies a much more complex understanding of kinship than is possible in its static opposition to the sphere of the state.

Primary in the alternative reading Butler proposes is the fact that *Antigone* is herself a daughter of an incestuous relationship and thus far from a representative of 'kinship' in any general sense. The incestuous character of the relations is also present in *Antigone*'s bond with Polynices in which the erotic tone cannot be missed, as Butler states (e.g., 53–5). Moreover, in the ways she acts, *Antigone* does not limit herself to the

¹⁹ Eleanor Kaufman also draws attention to Butler's favouring of the concept of 'kinship' and relates it to 'its resonances from Lévi-Strauss and structuralist anthropology' ('Why the Family Is Beautiful (Lacan against Badiou)', *Diacritics* 32/3–4 (2002): 135–51, at 137). The discussion with Lévi-Strauss and structuralism as part of the same school of thought as Lacan, which, moreover, deeply affected feminism, is indeed central to Butler's argument. See in particular *Antigone's Claim*, 14–18, which we will discuss later in this chapter. Butler does not refer to the fact that Hegel does use the terminology of the 'family' in the context of his *Antigone* remarks. In her analysis of his views, she also uses the term 'kinship'.

sphere of kinship but enters the public realm. In doing so, she also transgresses the boundaries of gender, illustrated by others' characterisations of her in the play as 'manly'. Finally, the language she uses clearly borrows from the political. Butler does not elaborate in a similar way on Creon's transgressing of any narrow identification with the state, but briefly indicates the hereditary character of his kingship and the final disintegration of his sovereign position. These parallels show that Creon and Antigone are 'metaphorically implicated in one another' (6). Thus, in the play, kinship and state presuppose each other and "'acts" that are performed in the name of the one principle take place in the idiom of the other' (11). Any static distinction between the two spheres is thus brought 'into crisis' (12).

While accusing Hegelian thinking sometimes of a too simple and absolute opposition between the two, Butler states elsewhere that Hegel does in fact acknowledge this reciprocal presupposition (12).²⁰ However, for Butler, Hegel substantiates this dialectics in a far too hierarchical way. Hegel refers to the concrete dependence of the state upon the family as a supplier of male soldiers. The dependence is invasive: the public sphere 'interfere[s] with the happiness of the family ... creating for itself "an internal enemy – womankind in general. Womankind – the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community"'.²¹ Here it becomes clear, says Butler, that Hegel in the end sees Antigone only as a figure to be surpassed: she turns into 'womankind', the 'mother' who produces sons who can become citizens by leaving behind the primacy of the sphere of kinship (12, 36–7). Antigone, as a woman, cannot become a citizen herself. For Butler, the 'strange consequences' of this Hegelian view of Antigone are that it is precisely her representation of kinship that makes her a criminal in the public domain and, secondly, that Hegel's *Phenomenology* in fact 'effaces' her name (29, 31, 35, 36).²² In the end, Antigone is ruined by the instability inherent in any one-sided position, just like Creon is. In line with this

²⁰ In a short section (*Antigone's Claim*, 38–40) on how Hegel views *Antigone* in another work, his *Philosophy of Right*, Butler also observes this ambiguity of acknowledging the reciprocal presupposition of state and kinship on the one hand and denying kinship a legitimate, visible place of its own on the other. The problematic result of the latter denial is that Hegel 'not only accepts her [Antigone's] fatal disappearance from the public stage but helps to usher her off that stage and into her living tomb' (*Antigone's Claim*, 39).

²¹ Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 35 (references to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, §475).

²² Butler does not explain this remark further at first (*Antigone's Claim*, 29), but she uses 'effacement' later (31) to refer to the fact that Antigone is mentioned explicitly only once in the text of the *Phenomenology* (see note 38), a reference that is subsequently 'effaced' by misinterpreting her political deed in general terms as the acting of 'womankind' (*Antigone's Claim*, 36). This interpretation focusses on the second part (part BB.VI.b) of the section on the 'Ethical World' of the

one-sided view, her relationship with her dead brother is characterised by Hegel as 'without desire'. This is precisely the point at which it is opposed to relationships in the public sphere. This absence of desire is the result of the blood relationship (13). Butler concludes that, for Hegel, it is thus the 'blood' relation that protects the relation against incest, stabilises kinship and establishes a specific non-desiring kind of recognition in the kin relations that is different from that of citizens in the public sphere.²³ Thus, Butler claims, Hegel's *Phenomenology* becomes the textual instrument of the prohibition against incest' (13). In such an approach, there is of course no real place for the daughter of an incestuous couple; she becomes a figure to be surpassed, whose name is effaced.

Butler refers to incest as something that is unfortunately left unsaid in Hegel and in many other readings of *Antigone* (17). The topic is central, however, in her dealing with Jacques Lacan's view of *Antigone*, which she reads as in line with the structuralist theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss on kinship and the prohibition of incest. Although she admits that Lacan 'take[s] radical distance from Hegel, objecting to the opposition between human and divine law' (40), his interpretation eventually suffers from a dualism similar to Hegel's. In Lacan – and in Lévi-Strauss as well (12) – kinship is not separated from the state, as the state does not figure in his interpretation. Kinship also remains outside the social here, now in the form of the sphere of the 'symbolic'. Lacan separates the symbolic from the social by viewing it as a 'structure of communicability and intelligibility' on which the social depends. It is the level of 'those threshold rules that make culture possible and intelligible' (16–17). This basic structure, however, is 'not precisely malleable' (12) and that is, just like in Hegel, where Butler's objections start. Kinship as demarcated by the 'threshold rule' of the incest taboo again pertains precisely to this level of pre-social, invariable structures. This invariable character may seem nuanced by the ambiguity that is not absent in Lacan's interpretation. Kinship both enables the social and is a mutually exclusive pair with it, which reminds one of the imprecise reciprocal presupposition of kinship and state in Hegel. Butler's suspicion is raised again, however, by the quasi-universal character of the symbolic in Lacan. The structure is not just contingent, like culturally variable rules and norms, but precedes them, enables them. As a result, a certain

Phenomenology. We will return to this section and also discuss the absence of her name later in this chapter.

²³ Butler notes that this idea of 'recognition without desire' goes against Hegel's view in an earlier part of the *Phenomenology* (B.IV, §167), where he argues that recognition is motivated by desire. This is the desire to find oneself reflected in the Other, in whom one is also lost (*Antigone's Claim*, 13–14).

'reification' takes place (21). The symbolic is contingent but, paradoxically, in a necessary way. As the symbolic takes shape precisely in kinship relations, these relations lack an openness to change.

Butler finds Lacanian psychoanalytical views in Lévi-Straussian structuralism and a tendency towards 'theoretical conservatism' (75) in feminist theory based on them.²⁴ They interpret the incest taboo as a rule that, despite its apparent indeterminateness, does determine the forms kinship should take. There is even the desire to view the taboo as 'the indisputable law'. Butler regards this as a 'theological impulse within the theory of psychoanalysis' (21). Hence her rhetorical question concerning the status of this rule: 'Is that not to resolve by theological means the concrete dilemmas of human sexual arrangements that have no ultimate normative form?' (21, cf. 44–5, 75). This question clearly summarises Butler's problems with the separation of kinship and the state or the social as different spheres, the first somehow preceding and enabling the second. Such a scheme easily supports a law-like interpretation of contingent family norms.

The Impasse as a Result of the Contemporary Danger of Reifying Family

This problem of the 'reification' of contingent family norms is not theoretical or abstract in Butler's reflections. Rather, this is the point at which the topicality of her argument comes to light. The 'reification' is alive and well in the dominant heterosexual perspective. Butler states: 'The horror of incest . . . is not that far afield from the same horror . . . felt toward lesbian and gay sex, and . . . the moral condemnation of voluntary single parenting, or gay . . . or with more than two adults involved' (71).²⁵ Butler analyses her time as characterised by a tension. New transformations of kinship exist next to what seems to be their precise opposite: nostalgic family idealisation and 'Vatican protests against homosexuality', in brief

²⁴ Compare Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13/1 (2002): 14–44, for example, 38–40.

²⁵ A more elaborate list of what may be called 'new' or 'nontraditional' family forms and situations is given earlier on in her text as characteristic of her time in which

children, because of divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile, and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds, move from one family to another, move from family to no family, move from no family to a family, or in which they live, psychologically, at the crossroads of the family, or in multiply layered family situations, in which they may well have more than one woman who operates as the mother, more than one man who operates as the father, or no mother or no father, with half-brothers who are also friends – this is a time in which kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive. It is also a time in which straight and gay families are sometimes blended, or in which gay families emerge in nuclear and non-nuclear forms. (*Antigone's Claim*, 22–3)

a tendency to identify being human with 'participation in the family' (22).²⁶ This tension between radical alterations in family forms and conservative family views turns out to be the current background to Butler's argument. Against this background, she argues in favour of a view of kinship that is open to change and is not constituted by what she calls the exclusion of the non-human (81–2). This is also the background of her rereading of *Antigone*.²⁷ Within this framework of family values debates, Antigone becomes for Butler a representative not of family, but of the people who fall outside the scope of the generally approved family forms. She becomes the woman who speaks from the position of the 'less than human' (82). By speaking up in the public domain, Antigone destabilises the given orders of kinship, gender and the human. This cannot be acknowledged in the interpretations in line with Hegel and Lacan, who focus on Antigone's downfall as a result of her being captive to the familial order. Thus, Butler reads *Antigone* as a radical impulse for critically assessing the given rules that determine the legitimacy of forms of love (23).

Butler herself points out that her critique from a 'radical perspective' does not mean 'the end of kinship itself' (72).²⁸ However, she does not elaborate on what an alternative theory of kinship could look like. One finds only a few concrete examples of kinship beyond the 'Anglo-American standard of family normalcy': 'black urban kinship arrangements' that are based not on the male but on the female family roles and on friends but cannot simply be understood as 'fatherless' (73), 'consensual affiliation' as substituting for the blood tie and HIV/AIDS buddies of the Gay Men's Health Clinic in New York (74). The sparseness of these examples affirms that, for Butler, *Antigone* is not the occasion for a separate constructive reflection on kinship or family. This seems to be due to the questions of the day she regards as urgent. For her, a deconstructive approach is most important given the contemporary dominance of heterosexual norms – for example, in the prevalent objections against 'civil unions' as alternative marriage-like contracts and the legalisation of gay marriage.

²⁶ Compare Butler's discussion of French protests, in particular that of Sylviane Agasinski, against gay parenting and the legitimisation of gay marriage in 1999 and 2000 ('Is Kinship Heterosexual?', 29–31). She interprets these protests as in line with the kinship theories of Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. Note the resemblances with the views of Giddens and Bauman discussed in Chapter 1.

²⁷ Note that this is a much more specific discussion than the one she herself mentions as the reason for her rereading of *Antigone* – that is, the general issue of the feminist escape to state protection (*Antigone's Claim*, 2).

²⁸ Butler refers for this statement to 'schools of cultural anthropology' that also criticise the Lévi-Straussian structuralist model of kinship but still see a constructive use for the notion of kinship (see also note 29).

As already briefly indicated, however, this refraining from paying any constructive attention to kinship is not in keeping with Butler's interest in interdependence as conditioning the ethical. This impasse in Butler's thinking gives rise to the question of whether it is not important to analyse kinship as an example of this dependence, one that, moreover, is an important basis for human moral acting. In such an analysis, the contingent, alterable character of kinship could be taken into account. A brief description Butler gives in a later article confirms this relationship between the two themes of fundamental dependence and kinship: 'kinship practices will be those that emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying, and death (to name a few)'.²⁹ Moreover, Butler relates this fundamental dependence explicitly to her views on the conditions of human acting. Throughout her work, she points out two aspects by which human acting is conditioned. First, human beings are always implicated in a 'set of norms' (*Giving an Account*, 8)³⁰ that precede them and to which they have to relate their acting. These norms should not be misunderstood in a structuralist sense as a 'totality' or as invariable (24) – a remark that recalls her criticism of the structuralist view of the 'law of kinship' in *Antigone's Claim*. Relating to the norms is always a struggle because they have a general, impersonal quality that disorients the view of ethics as a personal affair between one person and the other (25). Second, our acting always takes place in relations which Butler characterises explicitly as 'relations of dependency' (20). She emphasises that the character of these 'formative relations' is opaque – that is, 'these forms of relationality are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization'. This 'follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency'. However,

²⁹ Butler, 'Is Kinship Heterosexual?', 15. In this later text, Butler refers approvingly to post-structural kinship views in anthropology that counter the traditional relation between kinship and nature or biology. Here, kinship is conceived, for example, as 'a kind of doing' (34), and as 'assembled from a multiplicity of possible bits and pieces' (36). Butler relates the first view to David Schneider and the second to Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon. We will return to these authors in our discussion of the anthropology debate on the status of kinship in Chapter 3. However, Butler's regard for these views does not lead to a constructive elaboration of them. Rather, she concludes: 'Kinship loses its specificity as an object once it becomes characterized loosely as modes of enduring relationship . . . Kinship ties . . . may well be no more or less than the intensification of community ties, may or may not be based on enduring or exclusive sexual relations, and may well consist of ex-lovers, non-lovers, friends, community members' (37). Thus, she does not seem to desecrate here any possible elucidative power for reflection on kinship as a 'specific object' either – that is, as a sphere of its own.

³⁰ The references are to *Giving an Account*, but the theme is also central to the earlier *Prearious Life* and returns in the recent *Notes Toward* as well as in her articles and interviews.

it is 'precisely by virtue of the subject's opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds' (20). Another way in which Butler expresses this emphasis is by analysing human action as taking place in a living world where 'life' should be understood as interdependent in principle (*Notes Toward*, 43). She specifies this interdependence of all life in being related to the other human being as constitutive of one's 'self'. She calls this an 'ecstatic' view of the self which she traces back to Hegel's *Phenomenology*.³¹ This is a view of the self as constituted by 'recognition', by being acknowledged by another person and acknowledging the other. This view is based on the idea of self-consciousness as always existing for another, in the other in whom one both loses and finds oneself in a reciprocal process (*Phenomenology*, §182). This approach emphasises that the self cannot be understood otherwise than as relational with all its 'decentering effects'.³²

Family as a Sphere of Its Own?

Butler herself apparently does not see any possibility for a constructive elaboration of kinship beyond the impasse mentioned. Her focus is on the current dangers of approaching family as a separate sphere that somehow precedes the public one. We have already indicated that this criticism goes to the heart of our project. Our questions actually concern the topic of whether the relationality of family is a specific one and how its meaning for morality may be conceptualised. It is this question that we attempt to answer by the notion of an intuitively experienced, unnameable, yet strong family tie. As a result, we feel called to account by her criticism. In particular, we highlighted that in *Antigone* the family tie is present without being made explicit. This emphasis may in fact lead to a lack of transparency as regards one's assumptions regarding what family might mean. Dominant family patterns may in the end be discovered to have been presupposed in it from the beginning, consciously or unconsciously, thus shaping the views of family in a hidden way. Those forms of family life that somehow do not count as a 'real family' due to prejudice, mistrust or simply ignorance can thus be excluded. This would add to the marginalisation of non-mainstream family forms. Moreover, when family is seen as

³¹ For example, Butler, *Giving an Account*, 27 (referring to *Phenomenology* B.IV.A, §178–84); Judith Butler, 'Longing for Recognition', in *Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought: Beyond Antigone?*, ed. by Kimberly Hutchings and Tuija Pulkkinen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 109–29, at 125.

³² Butler, 'Longing for Recognition', 127.

a preliminary sphere that determines our acting without our being aware of it, this may easily become a licence to regard one's acting as something one is not fully accountable for. These critical questions will therefore accompany our further research and preclude any easy getting beyond the impasse and heading for the mystery.

On the other hand, this danger was not something of which we were unaware. We have emphasised from the outset that our time is one of increasing diversity in family forms and acknowledged the need to account for this in speaking about family. From the start, our approach was directed at evoking family as a phenomenon without restricting it to specific forms. Our approach to family as mystery is motivated also by this concern. Butler confirms the importance of the open character of any notion of family. However, in our view, this does not mean that any investigation of family as a distinct sphere is in principle disqualified. We may still meaningfully ask for the specific character of family relations without excluding, for example, non-blood relations. Our project is an attempt to show that this may be done in a way that is meaningful, in particular for ethics.

Furthermore, Butler's positive attention to what conditions morality may be taken into account constructively in our reflection on the ethical status of family. This implies a correction of views of morality in which individuals freely and autonomously make choices starting from scratch. It thus ties in with the field in which we have from the outset localised the most important challenges for being and thinking family in our time, namely the field of the given that contrasts with the dominant conceptions of agency and relationships. Moreover, we saw that Butler points out the opaque character of these 'formative relations' precisely because they are relations of dependence. The concern for the opaqueness is similar to our intentions in approaching family as mystery. For Butler, the fundamental relations that condition human acting cannot be objectified in a precise, clear way. What is more, these relations are rooted in the subject's 'opacity to itself'. These points of attention may be related to our discoveries concerning the character of the family tie as mystery in *Antigone*. Here we saw that the family tie is presupposed and apparently somehow experienced intuitively as a ground for acting and calling each other to account. However, it is not formulated in an explicit way, in, for example, the form of some concrete law of the family duty of burial. Moreover, the tie is interpreted differently by the different characters. Attempts to remind family members of the implications of the family tie seem to have little result, although the change in Ismene's behaviour may be seen as a response to Antigone's appeal to her as sister in the first scene.

Finally, Butler's reflection can also be used in a positive way insofar as she does raise the topic of the meaning of kinship and chooses Hegel's thinking on Antigone and family as a framework. She does not simply regard it as outdated or superseded. As we noted, this interest in Hegel is visible more broadly, especially among feminist thinkers. It is remarkable insofar as this reception is at the same time very critical. Within this field, Butler stands out as a result of her focus on kinship, which confirms once more that she does think it an important theme on which to reflect. Other authors rather specify their critical reading of Hegel to the dualism between male and female.

Hegel and the Other Side of Freedom

In line with Butler, many contemporary feminist interpretations point out that Hegel misses the exceptional and rebellious character of Antigone that breaks social conventions precisely with respect to feminine roles.³³ By turning Antigone – as the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* surprisingly does – into a 'champion of the rights of the family', she is in fact marginalised. She is confined to the private, so-called natural sphere of family and to that of acting on the basis of feelings and intuitions. This is a sphere one needs to go beyond if one is to become a citizen, a freely reflecting individual, which is a development reserved for men. This way of opposing women and men is often condemned in feminist critique for its 'essentialising', a term which is often left unexplained, or extended with the qualification 'biological'. In comparison to these critics of essentialism regarding being a man or a woman, Butler focusses more on the essentialising of kinship versus state. Butler and the feminist interpretations do agree, however, in extending Antigone's liberation from this essentialism to the liberation of similarly marginalised people of our time: women, LGBTQ, incestuous lovers, people living in 'new' kinship configurations and so forth. For some, this liberation project may also draw inspiration from Hegel. These authors are less rejective in formulating typically feminine characteristics and even assign a central place within them to notions like nature, immediateness or feeling.³⁴

³³ This point of attention is quite visible in a list of ten points of feminist contention against Hegel which Jocelyn Hoy gives in her analysis of Hegel's use of Antigone in *Phenomenology of Spirit* and contemporary feminist receptions of it (Jocelyn B. Hoy, 'Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique: The Spirit of Ancient Greece', in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. by Kenneth R. Westphal (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell 2009), 172–89, at 177–8).

³⁴ Antoinette Stafford refers to Luce Irigaray and Shari Neller Starrett as examples of such approaches ('The Feminist Critique of Hegel on Women and the Family', *Animus* 2 (1997): 1–29, at 8–11, 13–15).

Aside from the question of whether Hegel is more or less favoured in these interpretations, what is most remarkable is the fact that Hegel's views on the female and family in relation to Antigone are such dominant points of reference for current reflection on gender. This dominance is often explained in terms of the internal dynamics of Hegel scholarship. Feminist interpretations brought fresh insights into existing Hegel scholarship. As an exponent of an outdated gender ideology, Hegel seems at first to have little to offer to the feminist project as such in his analysis of gender, which is moreover confined to a few passages. However, closer investigations that go against the grain lay bare 'plurivocity' and 'unsettling passages' within Hegel's thinking which enable a more positive use for feminist purposes – for example, by emphasising the dialectical character of his thinking.³⁵ Still, such approaches cannot do away completely with the problematic sides of Hegel's basic binary scheme of men versus women. Given this problematic character, the amount of interest is remarkable.

There is little meta-reflection on the reasons for the enormous amount of attempts to save Antigone from Hegelian essentialism and marginalisation, be it in connection with or against Hegel. The explanation may in part simply be the attractiveness of reading a famous, beautiful, ancient literary text in dialogue with a classical philosopher.³⁶ Yet there may be more substantial reasons that relate to the aims of our project. Apparently, the idea of a separation of the two spheres of family and state as feminine and male continues to fascinate interpreters. This may be, as in the case of Butler, because the old Hegelian pitfall is regarded as fully operative in the mechanisms of exclusion in present times. Hegel cannot, then, simply be left behind as outdated. The struggle for the liberation of the marginalised is tough – the battle has not been won. Nonetheless, the fact that Butler herself is also sympathetic to many aspects of Hegel's philosophy already shows that this fascination with Hegel is not just a negative or critical one. It concerns, for example, what she calls the Hegelian idea of an ecstatic self – that is, one principally 'given over' to the Other, which generates an inescapable relationality and vulnerability. This fascination has no

³⁵ Hutchings and Pulkkinen (*Hegel's Philosophy and Feminist Thought*, 4–5) distinguish in their introduction to contemporary feminist readings of Hegel between closed, open and deconstructive modes of Hegelian scholarship. For a feminist reading in the closed mode that aims to find in Hegel definitive answers to fundamental philosophical questions concerning sex, gender and sexuality, Hegel is ultimately irrelevant. Open and deconstructive feminist readings offer the possibility of 'using Hegel against himself' and picking out valuable aspects while rejecting other.

³⁶ In a similar vein, George Steiner calls Hegel's uses of Sophocles 'the life of a major text within a major text' which thus displays 'the whole central issue of hermeneutics, of the nature and conventions of understanding' (George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 29).

legitimate place, however, in her project of saving Antigone from being parasitically perverse, sponging on 'the norm' and thus 'giving way to its rearticulation' (*Antigone's Claim*, 76).

One of the scarce attempts to address meta-questions on the remarkable Hegel reception is found in Antoinette Stafford's analysis of feminist critiques of Hegel's view of women and family.³⁷ She concludes that, in these studies, the real question is not discussed but only polemically presupposed. This is the fundamental ethical question of how the 'recognition of all individuals as equal, free subjects' can be attained, given the existing differences between people (24). Should these differences be regarded as something to be disposed of, or to be preserved and respected in order to attain freedom and equality? The feminist interpretations of course share the principle of freedom for all and see their work as contributing to its realisation. They disagree, however, on the aspect of difference: should one argue for a specific feminine subjectivity or not? This polarised debate is not just characteristic of the feminist field, but also of contemporary discussions in general that evaluate the principle of freedom (24). It is clear that a 'simplistic deification of radical individual freedom' is to be prevented by taking differences between people seriously. In doing so, however, is it possible to support the crucial importance of the ideal of freedom and equality for modern culture (25)? According to Stafford, the paradoxical consequence of this ideal of freedom and equality is that 'both life within the family and relations and institutions in the public sphere are deeply compromised' (26). Stafford therefore aims for a 'recontextualising' of the principle of freedom and argues that Hegel is highly relevant to this project. If, however, the reception becomes bogged down in either applauding or condemning Hegel's gender views, this relevance remains invisible. Stafford points out that precisely the difficult issue of the interrelation and balance between individual freedom on the one hand and social institutions, given roles and a common good on the other is at the core of Hegel's philosophy. In contemporary interpretations, this core is not accounted for in its full potential because the struggle against essentialism and the suppression of women following from it is seen as much more urgent. As a result, the possible positive value of Hegel's views for the critical debate on an all too radical conception of freedom remains hidden.

³⁷ See note 34. Stafford gives an overview of different types of feminist assessment of Hegel, both critical and constructive ones, and also tries to make sense, albeit tentatively, of the oppositions between them within the context of her time.

Stafford's analysis of the feminist interest in Hegel as displaying the deadlocked debate concerning the limits of the ideal of freedom and equality parallels our earlier analysis of an impasse in Butler's thinking. The criticism ventured by Butler and others regarding the danger inherent in any project of understanding the specific character of family is clear. It is the danger of elevating the status quo, the 'normal', to the level of the given. As we also asked in relation to Butler, does this risk disqualify *a priori* any attempt to understand family as a sphere of its own? Or may family also be an important phenomenon to shed light on what may be called the other side of freedom? This 'other side' then concerns what is given, what is not subject to choice, the structures of being human, what Butler calls dependence, relationships, orders in society, accepted patterns of behaviour and so forth. This returning question is the impulse to consider the possibilities of a different kind of understanding family, in the mode of mystery. Now that we have seen that Hegel is such an important dialogue partner in dealing with issues like these, it is obvious that Hegel's texts themselves should be looked at more closely. Why does Hegel point precisely to family as a sphere of its own to be regarded as the starting point or precondition of morality? Do we find constructive aspects in his thinking that may endure the critique of being 'essentialist'? Are there impulses for an approach to family as mystery? Taking Hegel's texts into account may also give us better insight into the reasons for the contemporary ambiguous attraction Hegel exercises, especially regarding *Antigone* and family, and into the validity of Stafford's explanation of it as an underexposed discussion of the limits of freedom. These are important insights for understanding the current controversial status of the topic of the family as well.

The Ethical Complexity of Hegel's View of Family

Coming unsuspectingly to Hegel and his interpretations of *Antigone* from the abundance of contemporary studies leaves one surprised if not puzzled. Hegel's explicit references to the play are few and far between. They appear as part of an argument that is exemplary of the complex and hermetic character of Hegel's reflection. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the text that is central in many contemporary interpretations – Hegel mentions *Antigone* only once in relation to family. This is in the section that also deals with the difference between man and woman and state and family.³⁸

³⁸ This is in the sixth section on Spirit ((BB).VI.A.b, 'Ethical Action. Human and Divine Knowledge. Guilt and Destiny' 348 /§470). The only other explicit reference in the *Phenomenology* to the play is

Contemporary interpretations usually regard this single reference as self-evidently displaying the context of the entire section. This section should then be read as dealing with the situation of the ancient Greek *polis* and the looming conflict acted out in *Antigone*. This is not, however, stated explicitly by Hegel.³⁹ The section offers little in the way of a detailed exegesis of the play or an analysis of the notion of the Greek city state. Most interpreters distinguish Hegel's earlier view of family and womanhood in his *Phenomenology* from his view in his later *Philosophy of Right*, where he also refers to *Antigone*.⁴⁰ Interpreters regard this section as dealing not with the Greek but with Hegel's own historical setting – that is, modernity. The brief reference to *Antigone* here again does not take the shape of an elaborate discussion of the drama.

This discovery of the brief, non-emphatic, implicit and complicated character of these references increases our earlier surprise at the scale of the attention paid to Hegel's views of Antigone. Why do such brief and opaque remarks lead to such an extensive reception, feminist interpretations in particular, even when they usually disagree with Hegel's dualistic view? We will study Hegel's ethical interest in family as distinct from state with this remarkable character of the current debate in mind. This will also provide us with the focus we need to limit our Hegel analysis, which could easily

at the end of the foregoing section on reason (C/(AA).V.C.c 'Reason as Testing Laws' 322/§437). References to *Phenomenology of Spirit* will first mention the page numbers of the German edition in the Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft edition (Vol. 603), *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *Werke* Vol. 3, based on the *Werke* 1832–1845, 5th new ed., ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996). The English translation will subsequently be indicated by paragraph number (*Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Arnold Vincent Miller, with analysis of the text and foreword by John Niemeyer Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977)).

³⁹ Moreover, it is hard to understand what the textual basis for this interpretation of the section is as referring in its entirety to the situation of the Greek city state. This interpretation is apparently self-evident to contemporary interpreters; they do not take pains to give references for it. For example, Steiner, *Antigones*, 29: 'With Jamesian obliqueness, Hegel will name Antigone twice only. But beginning with section V (c,a) her presence is vivid.' Other examples can be found in Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Daniel Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Wilfried Goossens, 'Ethical Life and Family in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*', in *Hegel on the Ethical Life, Religion, and Philosophy: 1793–1807*, ed. by André Wylleman (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 163–94; Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, 'Hegel's *Antigone*', in *Feminist Interpretations of G.W.F. Hegel*, ed. by Patricia Jagentowicz Mills (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 59–88; Molly Farneth, 'Gender and the Ethical Given: Human and Divine Law in Hegel's Reading of the *Antigone*', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41/4 (2013): 643–67.

⁴⁰ We will explore this reference in the *Philosophy of Right* in the next section of this chapter. Other references to *Antigone* in his work are not discussed very much in contemporary debates on Hegel's views. *Hegel-Lexikon* by Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommanns, 1957, 89) lists other quotations in *System der Philosophie II (Naturphilosophie der Berliner Enzyklopädie)*, *Ästhetik* Vol. I & II, *Religionsphilosophie*, and *Geschichte der Philosophie* Vol. II. Hegel's high appreciation of *Antigone* is especially vivid in the latter two works.

take up the rest of this volume because of the difficulty of his philosophy and the extensiveness of its reception. Another limitation will be to give an account that stays close to the text in order to make transparent where our observations come from, and evoke the specific character of Hegel's language and way of thinking.⁴¹ Thus we aim to make another in-depth borehole productive – not, this time, of an ancient literary play or a recent interpretation, but of a nineteenth-century systematic reflection. The issue at stake is still whether it makes sense to distinguish family as a separate sphere based on an ineffable tie – an issue sharpened by Butler's critique.

The Ethical Communities of State and Family

Hegel turns to family as part of his scrutiny of consciousness in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This work offers a 'science of the experience of consciousness' – that is, knowledge about knowing. It deals with the dialectical process of the development of what Hegel calls 'Spirit', of which it is important to understand all the moments or go through them. The section on family is part of the fourth moment. Whereas the three foregoing ones – Consciousness, Self-consciousness and Reason – exist in Consciousness only, the fourth is Spirit as 'existing world' – that is, as actualised. As such, it completes the foregoing moments. After the moments of 'being-in-itself' and 'for-itself' in Consciousness and Self-consciousness, Reason unites these first two moments. In this third moment of Reason, Spirit is 'aware of a being-in-itself object' as well as of 'having its being-for-itself in that object'.⁴² This unity is subsequently discussed as 'immediately actual' in the fourth moment of Spirit. With this level of 'the actual', we enter the domain of ethics, according to Hegel. He calls the real or worldly existence of Spirit the 'ethical world' (*sittliche Welt*). It concerns the world from an ethical perspective because Spirit is here conscious of itself in its relations to others, as part of a community.

Butler's problems with Hegel's view of *Antigone* and family focus on his distinction of two communities, family and the state, and the hierarchy between them. In the section of the *Phenomenology* that includes the passage on family, the dividing movement seems indeed prominent. Right from the start of the section, Hegel emphasises that the actual Spirit 'forces its moments apart' (*schlägt seine Momente auseinander*) (327/§444): it splits

⁴¹ It is this transparency that we found missing in many contemporary readings of Hegel's *Antigone* interpretations.

⁴² Goossens, 'Ethical Life and Family', 164–7.

into two. In action it splits into substance and consciousness of the substance, and these two split in turn into an individual and a universal level. In line with the dialectical principle of his philosophy,⁴³ however, Hegel also emphasises from the outset of this section the unity of the split moments of subject and object, I and being, individual and universal, consciousness and substance. This unity is found in self-consciousness that is in-and-for-itself. Thus, Hegel actually aims to oppose philosophies like Kant's which do indeed end up with a divided universe of subjects over against objects, of the things as they appear and the things in themselves and so forth.

In the 'ethical world', the moment of splitting is visible in the existence of two types of community. Hegel first mentions the community of the citizens of a nation (*Volk*). This is the Spirit that can be called 'human law'. Hegel defines it only briefly on three levels: that of the 'known law, and the prevailing custom', of 'government' and 'authority (*Gültigkeit*) which is openly accepted and manifest to all' (329/§448). This is the sphere of Spirit as conscious of itself. It is a community which is public and 'is conscious of what it actually does'. Subsequently, Hegel opposes the human law to the other ethical power, that of the 'divine law'. In the final section of the foregoing chapter on Reason (chapter V), Hegel has already introduced the 'unwritten and infallible laws of the gods' ('*der Götter ungeschriebenes und untrügliches Recht*') with a reference to *Antigone*: 'They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting – Though where they came from, none of us can tell' (322 (referring to *Antigone* v. 456f.)/§437).⁴⁴ Hegel explains these verses as referring to the 'eternal' character of those laws which are 'grounded not in the will of a particular individual, but [are] valid in and for itself' (321/§436). These are the laws that simply 'are, and nothing more' ('*Sie sind, und weiter nichts*', 322/§437). In section VI on Spirit, Hegel speaks in a similar way about the community ruled by this divine law as 'of immediate substance or substance that simply is' (*unmittelbar oder seiend*) (330/§450). The latter community is called a 'natural ethical community'

⁴³ Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 66: "Dialectic" in Hegel always means the development and sublation of a contradiction. Yet "sublation" always carries the sense of "conservation" in addition to that of "annulment". The resulting concept or proposition is supposed to contain both sides of the dissolved, sublated contradiction.

⁴⁴ The same verse is quoted in a formulation by Hegel himself in the remark to §144 of his *Philosophy of Right*, which deals with the unconscious character of the moral human being (*sittliche Mensch*). References to *Philosophy of Right* will mention the paragraph numbers only, as these are uniform for the German original (edition by Georg Larsson (based on Gans' commentaries) of Hegel's *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1821; Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1911) and English translation (*Philosophy of Right*, translated by Thomas Malcolm Knox (1952; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967)).

and identified as that of family. In opposition to the conscious character of the community of the nation or state, family is called ‘unconscious’, although this characterisation does not reoccur immediately. The entire section subsequently elaborates on this community of the family. The ethical power of the state, the nation and citizenship, however, are mentioned only in passing, as the opposite of family, but are not treated in a separate section.

The Peculiar Ethical Character of Family

The first themes Hegel discusses in dealing with family as an ethical community are the characterisations by means of which it was introduced: the terms ‘natural’ and ‘immediate’. The reason for further explanation seems to be that these terms are inconsistent at first sight with the very ethical character of family. Hegel states the ethical is not concerned with ‘the *natural* relationship of its members’ or any ‘*immediate* connection of separate, actual individuals’, but with the universal.⁴⁵ As a result of this inconsistency of being both natural or immediate and ethical, ‘the peculiar ethical character’ of family is a question (330/§451). Apparently, this character is not obvious.⁴⁶ Because of the universal character of the ethical, Hegel states in his subsequent explanation, contingent factors, like feeling or love (*Empfindung, Liebe*) do not constitute the ethical basis of the family relation (331/§451). Likewise, it is not as accidental that familial acts are ethical, like ‘rendering some assistance or service in a particular case’ in order to promote happiness, or the sequential acts of educating, or helping ‘in time of need’ (331/§451). These definitions of what moral acting in the context of family is *not* are then followed by brief affirmative statements: acting towards family members is directed both towards ‘the individual as such’ and to ‘the individual *qua* universal’.

This very general analysis of the complex ethical character of family is then suddenly specified by a discussion of the action that expresses this ethical character in its true sense. This is the action that ‘no longer concerns the living but the dead’ (332/§451). It is within this focus of acting towards the dead that interpreters with an interest in the presence of *Antigone* in this section may start to descry familiar elements. This deed – which is not

⁴⁵ Compare Goossens, who speaks of a paradox regarding the divine law: it is a ‘principle of singularity’ but ‘in its pure universality’ and thus concerns ‘not the particular determinateness of the single individual, but singularity as the element of every existence’ (‘Ethical Life and Family’, 179).

⁴⁶ This difficulty may be why Hegel does not elaborate on state and citizenship in the section, but only on family, for the sphere of the human law is conscious and universal.

explained in more detail here – is called universal and individual at the same time, which recalls the core ambiguity or tension of the family sphere. On the one hand, it concerns the deceased as an individual as it ‘embraces the entire existence’ of the dead family member in his or her particularity. Being dead, however, also means being ‘a *universal* being freed from his sensuous, i.e. individual, reality’ because one is ‘raised out of the unrest of the accidents of life’ (332/§451). Death as such, however, is something immediate and natural, ‘not the result of an action *consciously done*’ (332/§452). The duty of the family member is precisely to turn the unity and universality of being dead into something conscious. This is done by ‘taking on [one]self the act of destruction’ (*über sich nehmen*) that in fact has happened to the dead family member (332/§452). By thus ‘wedding’ the family member to ‘the bosom of the earth’, the individual is raised to the level of the universal (333/§452). This acting of the family members towards the dead is indicated by Hegel as ‘the perfect *divine* law’ (334/§453). This is positive ethical acting towards the individual. Hegel then labels all other ethical actions as belonging to the human law. Here, the term ‘natural’ returns as the opposite of this acting. Hegel states that acting according to the human law is negative in the sense that it raises ‘the individual above his confinement within the natural community to which he in his [natural] existence belongs’.

The ethics of family thus turns out to be a very peculiar one, with its exemplification of being ‘concerned with the dead’. At the core of the analysis of this ethics lies the term ‘nature’. Despite its problematic connotations within an ethical framework, Hegel keeps using it. He does not make explicit why exactly and in which sense he wants to use the term ‘natural’ for family, but limits himself to clearing away any possible misunderstanding of the term. The example of the familial care for the dead adds another level of meaning to this concept of the ‘natural’ and the ways in which family is and is not ‘natural’. Death itself is called natural, and the conscious acting of family members towards the dead ‘interrupting the work of Nature’ (333/§452). Although Hegel starts by opposing the divine law of the family to that of the human law of the people as citizens, the discussion concerning the natural character is not elaborated in terms of this opposition. It is the problematic connotation of ‘nature’ within an ethical framework that bothers Hegel. Apparently, an elaboration of the opposing sphere of what is not natural is not regarded as helpful. With respect to our question of why Hegel deals with family in opposition to the people or the nation, a first answer seems to be that he somehow wants to allow for the level of the ‘natural’, ‘immediate’ and ‘unconscious’ in his ethics, difficult though it may be.

The Divine Law of the Family

The distinction between the human and divine law does return when Hegel subsequently discusses the topic of the ‘differences and gradations’ of both laws. He explains this topic as casting light on the specific internal movement and operation of these laws, as well as on ‘their connection and transition into one another’ (334/§454). The latter remark already shows that Hegel does not aim to present the two laws simply as opposites, but also with an eye to their very close relationship and a kind of overlap. Again, these gradations are discussed more elaborately for the divine law than for the human law. The human law is said to live in the government, the community and the independent associations that are its parts. The unity of this community is negative in that it gives the parts ‘the feeling of their lack of independence, and keep[s] them aware that they have their life only in the whole’ (335/§455). This negative character also means that the human community ‘possesses the truth and the confirmation of its power in the essence of the Divine Law and in the realm of the nether world’ (335/§455).⁴⁷ Apart from their close connection, the latter remark also seems to indicate that the realm of the human law is based on that of the divine law, although it is rather opaque how precisely the latter is the ‘truth and confirmation’ of the former.

Second, as regards the gradations of the divine law, Hegel mentions the family relations of husband and wife, parent and child, and brother and sister, ordered in ascending gradations of ‘purity’. The designations ‘immediate’ and ‘natural’ return as characterising the relationship between husband and wife (336/§456). Again, this natural character is seen as in opposition to its being ethical. As a result, it is not this relationship as such that Hegel calls ‘real spirit’, but it is only in the child that the relationship is said to actually exist. The tension between the natural and the ethical is also present in the second relation, that of parent and child. Both relations are characterised by a ‘dutiful reverence’ (*Pietät*) towards each other – a term which is not explained any further. As regards the relationships between parents and children, Hegel emphasises that the parent–child relation differs from that of the child with the parents. The emotion that affects the first is that the parents have their reality not in themselves but in the child, which becomes more and more independent of them. The child–parent relation, on the other hand, is emotionally affected by the fact that it has its origin in the unity of other human beings who pass away.

⁴⁷ The term ‘nether’ (*unterirdisch*) is only later opposed to that of the ‘earth’ (*Erde*) (339/§460), ‘the light of day’ (341/§463). In the next section (b), when Antigone is mentioned explicitly, it is opposed to that of the ‘upper world’ (351/§474).

Hegel then contrasts the brother–sister relation with the first two. We could again hear implicit references to *Antigone* in this special interest in the brother–sister relation. Hegel argues that the brother–sister relation is not, unlike the husband–wife connection, characterised by ‘desire’ (*begehren*). Here again the point is the non-natural character of the relationship.⁴⁸ Hegel states that the brother and sister are of the same blood but qualifies this seeming confirmation of its naturalness with the remark that it ‘has reached in them a state of rest and equilibrium’. This is rest in the sense of not being disturbed by the ‘desire’ and emotions found in the first two relations (336/§457). This relationship is therefore called ‘unmixed’ and ‘pure’. Brother and sister are ‘free individualities in regard to each other’. This desire-free character of the brother–sister relation was one of Butler’s central points of contention with Hegel (*Antigone’s Claim*, 17). Indeed, Hegel does not consider an incestuous brother–sister relation. This may be explained as the result of a lack of awareness of the double character of the incest prohibition as promoting a certain behaviour while at the same time ‘producing and maintaining the specter of its transgression’ (Butler, *Antigone’s Claim*, 17). This contention seems to be largely inspired by Lacan and seems to overlook Hegel’s own agenda – that is, the analysis of the brother–sister relation as less ‘natural’ than that between husband and wife. This is a remarkable view of blood relations and one that might have interested Butler as well, given her problems with assigning the status of ‘natural’ to the family.

Subsequently, Hegel focusses on what the brother–sister relation means for the sister, which may again be read as a confirmation of Antigone’s hidden presence. Here one finds the infamous passages in which Hegel speaks about the feminine in general. His language for this characterisation is again that of the tension between individual and universal, and natural and ethical. Hegel here confirms sisterhood as the highest ethical form but also links it to the divine law as the sphere not of the ‘daylight’ and of ‘existence in the real world’ (336/§457). The ethical awareness of the divine law is not conscious but ‘intuitive’ (*Ahnung*).⁴⁹ On the other hand, Hegel emphasises the universal, and not the contingent ‘feeling’ as the basis of the woman’s relationships: ‘her interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire’. Here Hegel starts to distinguish it from the ethical life of the man, albeit briefly. For a man, the two sides – that is,

⁴⁸ A synonym for this desire, the German *Lust*, is again characterised a few lines later as ‘natural’ (337/§457).

⁴⁹ Not being conscious is used at the beginning of the section as a synonym of the ‘natural’ and ‘immediate’ character of family.

those of the universal and the individual – being a citizen and conscious as well as those of desire and freedom, are separated (337/ §457). ‘He passes from the divine law, within whose sphere he lived, over to human law’ (338/ §459). The woman lacks this state of consciousness. She is the ‘head of the household and the guardian of the divine law’.

These are of course the kind of passages on man and woman to which many feminist approaches take offence because of their generalising or essentialising character. The point of the section, however, turns out to be not simply the opposition between the two sexes. Hegel goes on to emphasise the relationship between the sexes. As regards brother and sister, the sister receives in her brother a recognition which is pure – that is, not natural or contingent, like in the case of husband and wife (336/§456). Hegel confirms this by stating that ‘the loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest’ (338/§457). The position of the brother is subsequently described as moving from the sphere of family into that of true, self-conscious ethical life. This difference and the interlocking of the two ethical positions is then explained once more in terms of the ‘natural’ and ‘immediate’. On the one hand, the sexes ‘overcome their [merely] natural being and appear in their ethical significance’. On the other hand, they are individual and therefore appear in a naturally different consciousness, as the ‘antithesis of the sexes’. But as soon as Hegel has stated this difference, he goes on to emphasise the unity of the two sexes and the interdependence of the two spheres, powers and laws. Both spheres need to be there. ‘Neither of the two is by itself absolutely valid’ (339/§460).⁵⁰ The human law proceeds from and returns to the divine law; the divine law becomes real and active in the human law. Hegel concludes the section by emphasising this ‘union of man and woman’ as constituting ‘the active middle term of the whole’ and the unity of the human and divine law (341/§463).

A close reading of this part of the *Phenomenology* brings out its complexity first of all. The project of showing the reasonability of the development of Spirit in the dialectical process of splitting and becoming or being one is difficult. As regards ethics, this way of thinking means that the sphere of moral acting cannot simply be opposed to that of nature. Hegel attempts to show how they presuppose each other or go together. Moral acting in the world is not just a matter of consciously weighing the situation but also of immediateness and intuition. Hegel could have elaborated this in the abstract, but he is convinced that this dialectical structure is also real.

⁵⁰ Compare Hoy, ‘Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique’, 179, 187.

Then he could have tried to show how the two sides are present in specific ethical actions. However, he chooses a different route – that is, substantiating the dialectics in two different kinds of human community. The problem with this elaboration is of course that it creates the impression of the one being the ‘natural’ while the other is the truly ‘ethical’ community. This is not what Hegel actually says, as we have seen. He distinguishes the two communities as both ethical and, in a sense, natural. Moreover, as soon as he has distinguished them, he goes on to point out their unity and interdependence. He spends the greatest part of his argument on the community of the family. This is the most difficult side of the dialectic as it is the ethical sphere that appears to be least ethical. Family is characterised as the implicit, internal and unconscious, and, in that sense, ‘natural’ sphere. Again, this does not mean that Hegel finally opposes family as the sphere of nature to that of the nation as the conscious, ethical community. Rather, he attempts to show the complicatedness of nature and morality by creating a very dynamic view of reality and of what is at stake in ethics. It is hard to summarise some definite outcome of this complex exercise of thinking together what seems to logically rule each other out. Perhaps this is precisely what the outcome is: Hegel shows the difficulty of the ethical sphere as not just one of freedom and individual decision-making according to universal rules, but something much more complex.

Hegel's Brief References to Antigone

This discovery of the complexity as central outcome of this section contrasts with the contemporary readings. They reproach Hegel for providing a static view that essentialises by appointing specific ethical characteristics to phenomena as if they were given in nature, in particular to the sexes. The problematic character of this undertaking appears clearly in the way Hegel deals with Antigone. The outcome of his interpretation is a marginalised Antigone, locked up within the feminine and the family and made dependent upon the male sphere of conscious, public life. This is not what we found in Hegel's text so far. We saw how the movement of splitting is permanently accompanied by that of becoming and being one, also as regards man and woman. With respect to *Antigone*, we have so far only found remarks that might be regarded as hints. The conclusion of the section on the sister that ‘the loss of the brother is irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest’, read against the background of the acting of family members towards the deceased as the ‘perfect divine law’, seems to hint at Antigone's burial act.

The only explicit *Antigone* quotation – apart from the one on divine law cited earlier in this chapter – is found in the section called ‘Ethical Action. Human and Divine Knowledge. Guilt and Destiny’ (VI.A.b). Hegel contrasts this section with the foregoing one. So far, he explains, he has only dealt with the situation in which ‘no deed has been committed’ (342/§464). This is the abstract reality of the situation of the ‘order and harmony of its two essences, each of which authenticates and completes the other’. This section did not yet account for the dynamics of action itself. Ethical action disturbs the ‘peaceful organization and movement of the ethical world’ and creates a ‘transition of opposites’. Again, Hegel refers to the difficult going together of the ethical and the natural or immediate to explain this. He characterises the acting as self-consciousness, which is the ‘pure direction of activity towards the essentiality of ethical life – that is, duty’ and therefore ‘immediate’ or, because of its ‘implicit’ character, something ‘natural’ (342–3/§465). There is no conflict here between the two laws because ‘ethical consciousness . . . knows what it has to do, and has already decided whether to belong to the divine or the human law’. A conflict arises, however, because this ‘immediate firmness of decision’ directed at only one law goes together with, or becomes real, in a self. This real self is confronted in the world with the other law, to which it does not adhere, and which it regards as ‘without rights of its own’ (343/§466).

Hegel thus points out that ethical action is not so much arriving at a decision out of a situation of ‘indecision’ (342/§465) as acting according to duty, the immediacy of ‘knowing what one has to do’. This is always one-sided and conflictual in reality. Hegel characterises acting subsequently as guilt, which may be surprising as its conflictual nature seems inevitable and not something for which one is responsible. To follow the one law is to forsake, even violate, the other and therefore a crime (*Verbrechen*) (345–6/§468). ‘Innocence, therefore, is merely non-action, like the mere being of a stone, not even that of a child.’ While this guilt is thus presented as inevitable, Hegel goes on to specify a ‘more inexcusable’ guilt. This is the act of committing the crime knowingly – that is, knowing ‘beforehand the law and the power which it opposes’ (348/§470). It is here we find the explicit reference to *Antigone*. She is mentioned as example of this inexcusable guilt of committing the act knowingly. Hegel even quotes a passage from Sophocles: ‘Because we suffer we acknowledge we have erred.’⁵¹ Again, it is hard to tell what precisely Hegel means by this

⁵¹ This is a quotation from the peculiar final speech of *Antigone* (see note 12), which we referred to at the end of our analysis of the play. It is taken from her remarks on whether her act of burying her

specification, but he goes on to argue that this acknowledgement is in fact the moment of the end of the 'conflict between ethical purpose and actuality'. This is also the end of the self, of ethical individuality, however, that exists only in the universal and is thus destroyed by its opposite. This destruction, Hegel states, is the same for both levels of the divine and the human law. There are no further remarks on Antigone specifically. Rather, she is mentioned as an example of how acting always works, whether it is based on the human or the divine law. The aspect of the 'acknowledging' is again not specific to her but is just another necessary moment in the dialectics of ethical acting, that of unity and therefore also of the destruction of the individual.

The distinction between what is natural versus ethical remains central to the dialectic. These terms are again taken up when the final implicit reference to *Antigone* is found – that is, to her brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, although without mentioning their names. They are mentioned as the expression of the conflict between, on the formal side, the ethical order and unconscious, contingent nature or, on the side of content, that between the divine law and the human law (350/§473). Nature allots being male the contingency of living as two brothers, but this is not possible in the ethical realm, where only one can rule. Their equal right in the end destroys the brothers. The community can honour only one of the deceased, however; the government deprives the other of the final honour. By doing so, the conflict arises in a substantial way, as that between the human and the divine law. At first, as the law of darkness, and the underworld, the divine law succumbs to the more powerful one of the daylight and the earth (351/§474). In doing so, however, the public world has lost its internality and thus 'consumed its own essence'. As a result, the 'victory' of the human law turns out to be its 'downfall'.

Here (351/§474), Hegel suddenly changes the terminology that frames the conflict and returns to the terms of the family versus the community of the state, which had not been mentioned since the end of the foregoing section that dealt with their intricate relation and unity (338–40/§458–61).

brother is approved by the gods, which contrasts with her earlier claims of the divine character of the law she follows. Lloyd-Jones translates this verse 926 together with the foregoing one as: '(925) Well, if this is approved among the gods, (326) I should forgive them for what I have suffered, since I have done wrong.' Subsequently, Antigone continues by considering the other option: '(927) but if they are the wrongdoers, may they not suffer (928) worse evils than those they are unjustly inflicting upon me'. Since the passage concerns the indeterminate character of how Antigone's acting should be judged, it is surprising that Hegel refers to it to underline that crimes can be knowingly committed. On the aptness of Hegel's reference to this passage, see also Butler (*Antigone's Claim*, 34), who points out the differences in translations of this passage.

He asserts that the dishonouring of the 'sacred claims of the family' by the community is avenged by the dead 'whose right is denied'. The powers evoked by the dead destroy the community of the human law (351/§474). This destruction is then once more positioned within the dialectics between divine and human law. Subsequently, this opposition is called, for the first time in this section, that of the spheres of manhood and womankind (352–3/§475). Again, they are depicted in their intricate interdependence. They suppress each other, make each other into enemies and pervert each other, but they also presuppose each other. Their destructive effects on one another cannot therefore remain without consequences: in the end, they both succumb (*zugrunde gehen*, 354/§475). 'The ethical shape of Spirit has vanished and another takes its place.'⁵²

This final passage (352–3/§475) is the one on which Butler's critique and that of many feminist authors mostly focusses: the sudden modulation from the tonality of the *Antigone* story to that of 'womankind'. It contains the famous passage portraying womankind as 'the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community' (352/§475). It is here that Butler sees the effacement of *Antigone* being completed by Hegel's performing the 'very generalization that *Antigone* resists' (*Antigone's Claim*, 36). This criticism does not account, however, for what we discovered as crucial to Hegel's aim: to show how the two laws *both* incorporate individual and universal moments, and presuppose each other as the different type of community that also destroys it. Indeed, the *Antigone* story is no longer clearly present in this section, as Butler observes. The language is much more general, but it is hard to read this passage as isolating the two spheres of man- and womanhood and placing the first above the second. It shows, rather, their entanglement. The remarks on the suppression and succumbing of the sphere of family 'presided over by womankind' are paralleled by similar ones concerning manhood as expressed in the nation, community and government. The irony lies in that womankind in fact continues to remind the sphere of manhood of its dependence on the sphere of the family, a dependence that, in its ultimate form, becomes clear in the downfall of the public community. Butler does not account for Hegel's attention to the interrelatedness of the two spheres. Nor does she refer to the last remarks of this section, where Hegel returns once more to the immediate and natural character of the acting. This conclusion confirms the central place of the tension between nature and morality in the argument as a whole. It is here

⁵² This new shape of Spirit seems to be that of the next section (VI.c) on the 'legal status', which deals with the universal unity of isolated, legally equal individuals.

expressed in the most affirmative way as: 'nature as such enters into the ethical act'. It is this coming together of nature and ethical acting, then, that reveals 'the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in the beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium of the ethical Spirit itself (351/§476).

The Complexity of Family Related to Its Nature as Mystery

We turned to Hegel to analyse his view of family and his interpretation of *Antigone* because of the lively but ambivalent interest in it in contemporary studies. The great fascination with Hegel and the affirmation of his understanding of the individual as fundamentally embedded in relations do not harmonise with the mostly critical tenor of the Hegel reception. The interpretations are dominated by their opposition to the dualistic character of Hegel's thinking about family and state, women and men, and his reading of *Antigone* in that light. Hegel is criticised for not doing justice to the diffuse and variable nature of gender or family and for his marginalising view of *Antigone*. What came to light in our reading of Hegel, however, was not this clear-cut arrangement of binary oppositions, but the continuous ambiguity of the movements of distinction and unity. Hegel's *Phenomenology* introduces a world view of its own and a different way of posing the problems and trying to solve them than is found in contemporary discussions. It is the world of the unfolding Spirit that splits and becomes one, a unity of opposites. Hegel analyses the tensions and contradictions necessarily related to this dynamic process with respect to their reasonability, and this analysis finds its expression in the systematics of his dialectical method. In this analysis, family comes into view when this systematics is put to the ultimate test – that is, when the question is raised how this dialectic takes place in the reality of moral acting. Family is the context in which one lives this moral complexity. Here it comes to light that moral acting is not just a matter of following the correct universal moral rules, but something much more immediate and intuitive. 'Nature' is Hegel's term for indicating this other side of our acting which points to the given side of life. When reading Hegel's *Phenomenology*, we saw him wrestling primarily with the problem of how to express this ambiguous character of acting. We often concluded that he evokes this complexity more than he clarifies it.

These conclusions need not be interpreted in a negative way, however. Again, it may be the moment of an impasse in understanding that points to the complexity of the issue at stake and the need for a different kind of

reflection, one that is open to family as mystery. In our own reading of Hegel, we could not recognise the feminist view that he would evoke family as a clear, distinct sphere of life with a specific shape, well-defined roles and positions for its members, and correspondingly articulated rules on how they should act. At first sight, Hegel might give the latter impression because of his emphasis on the strong presence of the natural and the immediate in the sphere of family. In that sense, the private sphere of family differs from the public community. Relationships and roles are found to be given, already there, and are not established on the basis of free choice or in relation to having specific skills, as we already indicated in Chapter 1. The crucial place Hegel assigns in familial acting to the care for the dead – with overtones of *Antigone* – revealed that family is not simply natural, but also actively and consciously gives shape to nature. Hegel brings to light this complex coming together in morality of active choice and what at first sight seems entirely incongruous with it – nature, contingency and immediate sensations – in dealing with the special kind of community of the family. This complexity can be seen as a way to elaborate family as mystery. It reminds us, moreover, of the way in which this mystery character was evoked in our reading of *Antigone*. Here, the family tie turned out to be a question and not a phenomenon with a well-defined meaning and status. The tie is unnamed but implies an appeal to which each family member has to respond. They do so in entirely different ways. In a similar way, on the one hand, family in Hegel is a community that ‘simply is’, where eternal laws not shaped by human beings hold sway. In line with this, one could think of the family tie as unconscious, as not consciously established. On the other hand, however, care for the dead shows that the tie is also consciously shaped, that acting on the basis of such a tie is precisely an ‘interruption’ of nature. This view of family as a complex combination of the given and its interruption provides a specification of the character of family as mystery.

This reading of the passage on family in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* thus gives rise to a different kind of reflection than those found in the contemporary Hegel interpretations mentioned earlier. It resonates with Stafford’s analysis of the critical interpretations. Like Stafford, we noticed how much the notion of the ‘other side’ of the ethical and universal, that of nature, is at the forefront of Hegel’s argument. Stafford argues that contemporary interpretations are not sufficiently aware of this specificity of Hegel’s questions since they focus entirely on the problems of dualism, essentialising and marginalisation. On the other hand, they are clearly fascinated by Hegel’s dealing with this other side of freedom. A reflection that is

attentive to family as mystery creates room for a constructive way to take this 'other side' into account. In the following, we will explore whether this reflection can be further elaborated and specified.

An impetus for this exploration comes from the recent work of the Hegel scholar David Ciavatta. In analysing Hegel's view of Antigone, Ciavatta calls her a hero. Unlike the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism's* depiction of her, however, she is not a champion of something like family as such for Ciavatta. Rather, in a more delicate way, she is a champion of the 'unreflective dimension of ethical practice'.⁵³ Antigone shows 'the irreducibility and ethical necessity of this realm of incommunicable significance' (114). As the qualifications 'unreflective' and 'incommunicable' already indicate, Ciavatta's interpretation of Hegel's view of family highlights the ineffable character of the family sphere and its importance for morality that seems relevant to our interest in mystery. Moreover, he greatly appreciates this aspect of Hegel's thinking, which is remarkable given the dominance of critical views in recent receptions of Hegel's views of family and *Antigone*. To explore further the constructive contribution Hegel can make to our analysis of what the distinct moral character of the family tie might be, Ciavatta's interpretation thus seems highly relevant. In addition, taking Ciavatta's views into consideration enables us to also look briefly at the other passage in Hegel on *Antigone* that has attracted attention in the current debate – the one in his *Philosophy of Right*.

Hegel and the Unreflective Morality of Family

It is remarkable that, given the ubiquity of the fierce and fundamental criticism of Hegel, Ciavatta defends Hegel's view of family as a distinct sphere characterised by an unreflective kind of morality.⁵⁴ Moreover, he does not even enter into an elaborate discussion with the critics discussed earlier in this chapter. The danger of arriving at a conservative, conformist preservation of the status quo, including its discriminating and marginalising tenor, is not real for him. It is not that he is unaware of the deeply

⁵³ David V. Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious in Hegel's Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 51.

⁵⁴ This defence is found in Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*. For summaries of this focus, see, for example, 6–10, 49–51. Our analysis of Ciavatta's interpretation of Hegel focusses, besides this book, particularly on his 2006 article with the same theme ('The Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy: Hegel on Familial Ties and the Modern Person', *Philosophical Forum* 37/2 (2006): 153–81. Other relevant articles are 'On Burying the Dead: Funerary Rites and the Dialectic of Freedom and Nature in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 47/3 (2007): 279–96; and 'The Family and the Bonds of Recognition', *Emotion, Space and Society* 13 (2014): 71–9.

problematic character of lining up the family, woman and nature. Ciavatta argues that such a lining up goes against Hegel's own view. Relating the complete immersion in the familial sphere to specific family members – that is, to women on the basis of certain natural characteristics – is inconsistent with Hegel's view of the process of Spirit as always transforming nature.⁵⁵ That the project as such of understanding the 'specific character of the family' as a distinct social sphere or structure of human life is deeply problematic is, however, not a view with which Ciavatta takes issue. On the contrary, his research on Hegel is an endorsement of this Hegelian project, the topicality of which he underpins by drawing parallels to twentieth-century phenomenology and psychological theories.

Intersubjectivity and Recognition in an Unreflective, Immediate Manner

According to Ciavatta, Hegel deals with family in order to express how central intersubjectivity is to one's relating to the world and thus to being a self. Understanding this relation of the self to the world is the translation of what in Hegelian terms is called the actuality of the Spirit. Intersubjectivity should be read here more specifically as mutual recognition.⁵⁶ Only as beings immersed in practices of intersubjective recognition is it possible to experience the world and to relate these experiences to oneself as a subject. The special position of the community of family within this general intersubjectivity is what Ciavatta wants to understand. This interest implies that the different kinds of communities, in particular the private domain of family and the public ones of civil

⁵⁵ Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 68–72. Compare also 88 and 217n58, where he refers to Mills' *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* and Butler's *Antigone's Claim* as examples of interpretations that incorrectly 'assert that Hegel himself straightforwardly regards familial roles . . . as naturally fixed, static, and ahistorical'. According to Ciavatta, Hegel shows that people 'experience their own familial self-identification as fixed in this way', but aims to point out an 'inherent tension in this self-identification' that makes one aware of 'other ways of making sense of identity'. This note reveals that Ciavatta is aware of Butler's problems regarding family as a distinct sphere and refers to her own view as opposed to Hegel in 'that kinship structures are ultimately plagued by contingency and indeterminateness'.

⁵⁶ Ciavatta takes into account Hegel's ethical views on family and recognition in both *Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right*. We will refer to general views based on both works first, and later to Ciavatta's views on aspects specific to one of them. Although Ciavatta emphasises that Hegel's focus in the *Phenomenology* is on the family of the ancient Greek world while the later *Philosophy of Right* deals with the modern, 'bourgeois' family, he argues that intersubjective recognition is characteristic of both (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 60, 91–3; 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 156). In his article 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', he focusses entirely on the *Philosophy of Right* apart from the analysis of the brother–sister relation in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (169–70) and a few other remarks.

society and state, should be clearly distinguished from each other.⁵⁷ Family offers unique practices of recognition that do not occur in civil society. Furthermore, these two domains contrast with each other: they both offer something different that cannot be translated into the discourse of the other. However, they are also related in the sense that they presuppose each other, albeit within a specific hierarchy. Family is the primary community on which the civil sphere subsequently builds. Ciavatta aims to understand in what sense family can be analysed as having its 'own internal logic'.⁵⁸

Ciavatta analyses Hegel's interest in this logic of the family as having a critical purpose. Hegel regards the modern civil sphere, more precisely the state, as the sphere in which the subject arrives at real freedom. The ideal of freedom concerns in particular the independence of individuals who can make up their minds consciously and transparently and thus act on the basis of a rational consideration of laws or principles.⁵⁹ Hegel's quest for the logic of the family breaks open this view of being human and acting morally. It lays bare the ethical significance of the level of immediate, unreflective experiences and feelings which are always shaped by human relationships. For Ciavatta, the relevance of this critical project lies in that it provides an alternative for the 'privileging of the I's interiority'. This privileging is visible both in twentieth-century phenomenology and in Kant's critical philosophy due to their focus on experience as an 'autonomous source of meaning'.⁶⁰ Hegel, on the other hand, takes into account the importance of mutual recognition for relating to oneself and the world. This focus on the critical potential of Hegel's interest in intersubjectivity and recognition recalls our analysis of the positive part of Butler's elaboration of Hegel's views.⁶¹ Butler, however, would definitely disagree with any affirmation of the importance of distinguishing between family and the public spheres in order to

⁵⁷ The third part of the *Philosophy of Right* on 'Ethical Life' is clearly divided in three sections: family, civil society (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and state (*der Staat*). The *Phenomenology* does not order its section on the 'Ethical World' (VI.A.a) in this threefold way, but uses the principal distinction between the divine and the human law. It groups the latter two public communities together in the 'nation' (*Volk*), although it also speaks sometimes of the 'citizens of the nation' (*Bürger des Volkes*) (329/§447). We will go into the differences between the two works in the main text.

⁵⁸ With this aim, Ciavatta distinguishes himself from other contemporary interpretations of family in Hegel. They explain the logic of family as much more subservient to the modern view of the individual person ('Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 155n6; see also 156, 164 and *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, e.g. 58). We will return to this debate in the main text.

⁵⁹ For example, Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 153–4 and passim; *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 89–90, 128–9.

⁶⁰ Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 19.

⁶¹ For example, one may think of Butler's attention to the 'irrecoverable' character of the primary level of dependency relationships that form us and guide our acting (Butler, *Giving an Account*, 20).

understand their unique contribution. What is it that makes Ciavatta all but suspicious of this dualistic approach?

To understand his affirmative use of Hegel, Ciavatta's analysis of Hegel's view of Antigone is a good starting place. On this point as well, Ciavatta does not engage in the critical project of reading the Sophoclean *Antigone* against the grain of Hegel's own interpretation, as we have seen with Butler and others. He refers to the play as an apt expression of the core of Hegel's view of the importance of family for morality. As cited earlier, Ciavatta calls Antigone the hero of the unreflective ethical demands and as such, exemplary of the moral necessity of the realm of the family. The unreflective character for him is visible first of all in that Antigone feels the obligation to bury her brother in spite of the interdiction but 'does not claim to *understand*' it in a 'rational, reflective manner'.⁶² This unreflective character of her acting is further specified as 'without hesitation', 'as though she could not imagine herself not doing it'. Ciavatta explains this self-evident character as corresponding to the 'unquestionable, unwritten, living' character of the law she follows, a 'demand written into the very nature of things'. Moreover, he interprets it as an act on which 'her very identity as sister hinges'.

For this first portrait, Ciavatta refers primarily to the *Phenomenology* and focusses on the tension between the private and the public spheres or the law of singularity and that of universality. Family differs from the public community. In the family, one finds mutual recognition as singular individuals that defines one's self-identity (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 58).⁶³ This recognition is made or broken by the existence of these particular family members. They are non-substitutable – a characteristic which recalls our exploration of the given character of family in Chapter 1.⁶⁴ This mutual recognition in family relations by means of which people become a particular self is contrasted with that of the public sphere. The 'general recognition of a wider community' regards

⁶² Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 51–2. In his 2007 article, Ciavatta points out the unconscious character of the compulsion to bury in the section of the *Phenomenology* (330–3/\$451–2) discussed previously: 'its origin and explanatory rationale is ultimately and essentially concealed from those who are compelled by it' ('Burying the Dead', 295). In this sense, those who perform this ritual are 'opaque to themselves' (296). Nevertheless, these actions are 'a necessary stage in freedom's self-development'.

⁶³ Ciavatta refers to a passage in the *Phenomenology* (336/\$456) as expressing this 'law of singularity' without making explicit which sentences he means. Hegel characterises here the husband–wife relationship as 'in the first place the one in which one consciousness immediately recognizes itself in another, and in which there is knowledge of this mutual recognition', albeit this is only recognition on the natural, not on the ethical level.

⁶⁴ See pp. 24–5. Again, this term 'non-substitutable' is not a direct reference to a formulation in Hegel.

individuals as ‘ultimately contingent, substitutable representatives among others’ (58). Moreover, there is a second contrasting sphere and potential source of conflict, that of the natural world characterised by ‘contingency and externality’. Ciavatta formulates the contrast as follows: ‘whereas in the natural world a being’s singularity is precisely what *separates* it from all others – making its body spatially external to all other bodies, for instance – in the family this singularity is precisely what joins selves to one another’. Thus, family is ‘engaged in a process of *spiritualizing nature* – that is, of making an otherwise indifferent, external world of nature into a site for the realization of intersubjective recognition’.

The latter relation, in particular of morality to what is natural, is the background against which Ciavatta interprets Hegel’s use of the figure of Antigone. He regards Hegel’s speaking in the *Phenomenology* of the ethical purity of the sister–brother relationship, which we also have analysed, as indeed referring to *Antigone*. Antigone is visible in Hegel’s characterisation of what acting as a sister means: denouncing ‘bare, natural life’, like ‘natural impulses for food, comfort, or general self-preservation’ (76). In refuting her self-preservation, Antigone ‘stands as a hero’. Thus, she is contrasted with her sister Ismene, who ‘seems more compelled by her natural fear of death than by her duty of recognizing her brother qua brother’. Yet, Ciavatta argues, Antigone’s way of acting should not be understood as conscious, resulting from deeply reflective deliberation and in that sense denouncing ‘natural life’. Rather, Hegel presents it as though it were *natural* (88).⁶⁵ ‘Family identities are taken up . . . precisely *as* fixed and given’ – that is, as quasi-natural. Acting as a sister is not a choice, but an ‘immediate feeling . . . that follows naturally from her own character.’⁶⁶ Being a sister is not an individual, particular identity that Antigone shapes all by herself. Ciavatta interprets Hegel’s view of the act of burying as a ritual ‘made in advance, behind her back’, one that is ‘*natural* to the self, issuing from it *as though automatically*’ (89). For this interpretation, Ciavatta refers again to Hegel’s quotation from Sophocles concerning the everlasting but unknown character of the family laws (89n61 (*Phenomenology* §437 end section V)). This quasi-natural acting makes

⁶⁵ Ciavatta refers to the section in the *Phenomenology* which deals with the ‘immediate’, ‘implicit’ and ‘natural’ character of ‘ethical consciousness’ (342–3/§465), which we have also analysed.

⁶⁶ Ciavatta argues elsewhere that, as Antigone’s acting is analysed as based ‘solely on her feeling of what is demanded of her as a sister’, ‘feeling’ is not always contingent, but may ‘ground and express the deepest layers of my self-identity as a whole’ (‘Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy’, 173n65). This attention to the importance of feeling and affection for moral acting relates to the general argument of Ciavatta’s book as well, particularly the third part (‘The Affective Basis of Familial Ethicality’) – for example, 116–19, 121–30.

Antigone all but a ‘conscientious objector’ (88) who opposes her view to that of others. The imperative to bury her brother is ‘immediately and self-evidently operative in the objective world’ (89).

It is clear that this interpretation of Antigone is far from that of Butler and others or even precisely the kind of interpretation against which they argue. It reduces Antigone to a sister and thus interprets her exceptional, rebellious acting as an outlaw in the public sphere as a necessity based on her family position.⁶⁷ Ciavatta, however, defends this view vigorously and seems oblivious to any danger such as locking people up in the status quo, denying them a dissenting view of their own, and making women especially passive instruments of tradition and custom.⁶⁸ Furthermore, he argues that Hegel brings to the fore the specific logic of the family as a criticism of any narrow-minded focus on the modern ideal of freedom. For this interpretation, he refers more elaborately to the later *Philosophy of Right* than to the earlier *Phenomenology*. Here, Hegel makes a much more clear-cut distinction between the private and the public sphere than in the *Phenomenology*.

In the section of the *Philosophy of Right* on ‘Ethical Life’, Hegel distinguishes three communities: the family, civil society (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) and the state (*der Staat*). Civil society is the context in which individual freedom may be fully realised. This freedom means being independent, consciously choosing one’s direction (*Philosophy of Right*, §153–4). The relationships that conform to this context are those of contract – that is, those to which individuals freely consent (§155). The logic of the family is contrasted with this sphere of self-reflecting, free individuals: in the family, people are not independent persons, but ‘members’ (§158). In the family, I am not ‘in selfish isolation but win my self-consciousness only as the renunciation of my independence and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me’ (§158A).⁶⁹ Hegel even calls family ‘one person and its members . . . its accidents’ in the sense that an

⁶⁷ For a summary of this criticism, see Hoy, who refers, apart from her own view, to Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim* and Mills’ *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (‘Hegel, *Antigone*, and Feminist Critique’, 183). Ciavatta analyses Butler’s interpretation as centred around the moment in Sophocles’ play in which Antigone consciously claims the burial as hers, while he argues that, for Hegel, this moment displays the ‘actual confrontation between the family and political community’, which is the result of the fact that family also aspires to the ‘universal recognizability, or to *conscious expression*, of its actions – a form of recognition which is proper to political community’ (218n64).

⁶⁸ Ciavatta provokes such criticism in particular when he characterises Antigone’s acting as ‘marrowless’, ‘restorative or conservative . . . rather than productive’, ‘like the repetitive acts of housework’ or ‘conserving the only way of life she knows’ (88, 89).

⁶⁹ The capital ‘A’ refers to the ‘Addition’, clarifications by students present at Hegel’s lectures. They were added by the first editor of the lectures, Eduard Gans.

'identification of personalities' takes place (§163). It is this unity that he calls the 'ethical mind' (*der sittliche Geist*).

The way in which this unity is subsequently elaborated in the *Philosophy of Right* seems to differ from the *Phenomenology*. It is found first of all in marriage, while in the *Phenomenology*, the brother–sister relation is the most purely ethical family relation.⁷⁰ The love of husband and wife is a less-pure form of ethic characterised by desire, which is overcome in the sister–brother relationship (335–7/§456–7). As we will see, Ciavatta does not regard this as a fundamental difference, however. It is rather a result of the opposition to the public sphere that is more emphatically present in the *Philosophy of Right*. In line with its public character, marriage may be interpreted as a contract between freely consenting individuals. Hegel, however, emphasises that marriage is, just like the family, becoming 'one person' (*Philosophy of Right*, §162). This means renouncing one's 'natural and individual personality to this unity of one with the other'. It is thus precisely in marriage that the specific logic of the family over against the public one comes to the fore. Its 'ethical core' is that the spouses become 'embedded in each other's characters as agent' and cannot think of themselves and their acting outside of their relation with the other's acting.⁷¹ As a result, Ciavatta concludes that the 'logic of the marriage bond' is actually close to that of sibling relations as analysed in the *Phenomenology*.⁷² 'For each of these relationships involves such merging of singular selves into one singular nexus, into the form of "one person"'.⁷³ Ciavatta points out the critical character of this logic of the family. It brings to light 'how deep-rooted and unreflective our involvements in our familial networks can be, and thus to how thoroughly our individual self-identities can be informed by intersubjective forces that are not in our immediate and conscious

⁷⁰ Ciavatta explains this as a result of Hegel's reading of Sophocles' *Antigone* (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 68–9), in particular Antigone's final speech ('Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 169n50), the peculiar character of which we have already pointed out.

⁷¹ Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 176.

⁷² Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 170. See also Ciavatta's summary of his interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right* as 'akin to' the family of the *Phenomenology*, with reference to Antigone (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 93). He concludes:

I will argue that, despite appearances, for Hegel even marriage involves such a prereflective identification with one's unique relationship to a particular other, for though marriage partners may voluntarily enter into their relationship as separate persons, what ultimately constitutes the *ethical* character of marriage is not simply a voluntary, self-conscious act of will ... but rather an intimacy and orientation whereby one's specific relationship to the other self gradually comes to be woven into one's practical self-identity and into one's very bodily actuality.

⁷³ Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 102.

control'.⁷⁴ This insight challenges any simple view of human beings as 'independent individuals, unconditionally free to reflect on, and be the self-conscious ground of, [their] own identities'.

The Inscrutable Character of the Family Tie

We turned to Ciavatta because of the impetus he seemed to give to a further exploration of the value of a mystery approach in taking into account the complex character of morality which family embodies. A mystery approach would be able to elaborate constructively on the complex, tensive combination of freedom and its 'other side' that Hegel sees exemplified in the family. In Ciavatta's interpretation, this general framework of the great ethical issue of how to understand acting between freedom and givenness emerges much more clearly than in those of Butler and the feminist views. Ciavatta emphasises that there are different levels in making moral decisions and in acting: there is a personal one, but there is also the pre-personal level of the family. Ciavatta interprets Hegel as expressing precisely this pre-personal level in terms of a greater ethical weight of nature. One may object that Ciavatta's view is too clear-cut to fit a mystery approach. Ciavatta understands family as the setting where the 'alienation and estrangement' to which nature gives rise due to its indifference, externality and contingency is overcome (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 5). In the setting of family, people may feel 'at home' in nature or the world and may develop a 'sense of belonging'.⁷⁵ He emphasises the relation between the nature discourse and that of the immediateness of feeling, as the un- or pre-reflective level that is primary in ethics. Family is the 'main locus' (20) of this level of morality, and this is why Hegel has to pay attention to this phenomenon in his analysis of how the Spirit realises itself.⁷⁶ In these firm conclusions, Ciavatta seems to go beyond the complex views of at least the *Phenomenology* and arrives at a moral theory of family that is much more clear-cut and univocal than Hegel's. A sense of mystery is not prominent in these analyses.

⁷⁴ Ciavatta, 'Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy', 158.

⁷⁵ Compare chapter 4, 'Feeling at Home in the Familial World', in Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*.

⁷⁶ In the introduction, Ciavatta argues: 'for Hegel the question of the meaning of "being in a family" is not, as it might seem at the outset, a merely marginal issue for philosophy, and one that is independent of Hegel's most basic metaphysical concerns'. This question gives insight into 'what it is to be a self . . . in relation to others . . . to the all-encompassing "spirit" . . . to the natural world, etc.' (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 4–5).

On the other hand, Ciavatta also emphasises the incommunicable character of the level of morality that family displays, which reminds us immediately of our understanding of family as mystery. This view is, moreover, reflected in Ciavatta's reading of Hegel's Antigone as a 'hero of the unreflective ethical demands'. Also, at this point, Ciavatta presents Hegel's thinking as critical. It goes against views of ethics as a rational deliberation on the basis of universal laws. The 'unreflective, unconscious dimension of our experience' present in our 'immediate, lived engagements' has a 'depth and richness' of meaning, Ciavatta argues, that cannot be articulated in 'conscious, rational terms' (9). This is not just a meta-ethical statement, but also something that is obvious from everyday experience.⁷⁷ Ciavatta gives the example that it is not possible for non-family members to sense the ethical authority family members have over each other. Of course, this authority can be stated in more general terms of respecting father- or motherhood, of rights of being a child or responsibilities towards siblings. Such general rules, however, would not do justice to what I actually experience in my specific relations to my family members. The inscrutability of this bond lies in that 'one would, in effect, have to *be me* . . . to fully appreciate the real significance and weight of my sense of loyalty and obligation to them' (67). Thus, as regards my relation to my father, Ciavatta argues, outsiders can 'never fully experience for themselves the *concrete immediacy* with which *his* singular presence carries *for me* the full weight of his ethical stature, the way *his* voice *in particular* – in its familiarity to *my* ears *in particular* – already and immediately resonates with the significance of his being my father and of his recognition of me as "one of his own"' (68). The authority of family members over each other is not based on universal rules, as is true of the sphere of civil society and the state. It is immediately experienced due to the intertwinement of their lives. Family members cannot perceive each other as strangers or individuals among others, just like outsiders cannot conceive of them as family members.

The inscrutable character of the family tie is also pointed out in an inward sense. Acting on the family tie deprives the individual of his or her self-awareness and conscious decision-making, as was visible in Ciavatta's view of Antigone as the 'non-conscientious objector'. Ciavatta argues that 'certain aspects of the singular self are systematically denied or concealed

⁷⁷ As regards the *Phenomenology*, Ciavatta argues that, despite its 'rationalist, or overly intellectualist' character, it is this level of 'concrete, lived experience of human practical existence' that is spelled out with respect to the big questions of metaphysics and logic implied in it (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 10).

within the familial realm' (89). This may be called the paradox of the 'law of singularity' that characterises the family. While this law is concerned with the recognition of the singular as non-substitutable and incomparable, it also conceals the individual by the force of the law itself – that is, by privileging the family tie as the basis for acting above individual rational choice based on universal rules. In bringing to light this moment of 'dispossession' of oneself and 'concealing' from oneself present in family life, Hegel provides an 'alternative model of human agency' (90).

A third moment that resonates with a mystery approach, finally, is Ciavatta's warning that Hegel's alternative ethical model should not be misunderstood as 'a normative ideal' of moral acting in general. Rather, it makes us aware of a 'real potentiality inherent in self-consciousness itself' that is the condition of the independently acting individual (90). Ciavatta also speaks of this potential of the family sphere as 'a structurally necessary background condition' or 'a sort of spiritual bedrock' upon which 'all of the more developed and reflective practices of intersubjective recognition are founded' (8–9).⁷⁸ Firm though 'bedrock' may sound, acting on the family tie should not be seen as a clear-cut moral rule. Ciavatta rather calls attention to the potency of the unreflective basis from which conscious moral reflection starts. Together with his emphasis on the inscrutable character of this unreflective family morality, the incommunicability of its experience to outsiders, and the concealment of the individual family member, these aspects deepen the understanding of the family tie as mystery.

Acknowledging Inextricable Relations and an Open View of Family

It is precisely this thinking in terms of 'necessity' and 'stages' or 'bedrocks' that Butler would regard as morally dangerous because of its conservative implications, the tendency to turn the contingent into a hard necessity. Nevertheless, she would agree with Ciavatta's project of correcting a one-sided ethical starting point that focusses on the free, rationally choosing individual and the force of universal rules. Both Butler and Ciavatta call for attention to the inscrutable ways people are implicated in each other and become a self or become aware of themselves through intersubjective recognition. To that extent, both of them have a sense of mystery. Butler would not agree, however, with taking family as 'most fully exemplifying'

⁷⁸ According to Ciavatta, there is a 'tendency to downplay or neglect' this importance in Hegel scholarship (*Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 11).

this mystery character of morality.⁷⁹ She views this interdependence as something we are confronted with unremittingly, in all kinds of settings and not primarily in the family. Butler's aim in pointing out this interdependence is to make us reflect on its limits: who are the ones with whom we show or do not show solidarity by, for example, grieving over their death? From Butler's perspective, the fiercest criticism may be that a focus on family as the exemplary case of incommunicable interdependence suggests that 'family' is somehow an unambiguous category, especially when distinguished from 'the state' or the public sphere. Thus, it simply endorses dominant ways of family life and organising the public sphere and lacks the critical power to challenge the exclusion of minorities from it. Butler's aim is to 'overcome the schism' – dominant in Arendt – between 'acting and interdependency', as categories belonging to the public and private sphere respectively (*Notes Toward*, 45). Acting is always already potentially political as well as determined by interdependence. This does not become visible if one approaches family as the exemplary sphere of interdependence and acting on intuitions or feelings.

Earlier, we concluded that Butler's critique should be taken into account in our project to preclude any easy getting beyond the impasse and heading for the mystery. Does this critique not hit Ciavatta just as well? He does not consider other candidates than the family as possible contexts for discovering the unreflective level of morality, nor does he go into the problematic conservative tendency inherent in the use of family as an unambiguous category. This may be a result in part of the fact that his primary aim is to understand Hegel. He does concur with many aspects of Hegel's approach as convincing for today as well. His advocacy of a Hegelian reevaluation of the unreflective level of ethics does not inspire him to spell out why precisely family is the context in which we discover this level. The examples he gives of family life mainly serve to illustrate the basic character of recognition and intersubjective intertwinement. They point out the impossibility of experiencing oneself apart from the other. Such examples seem to be related primarily to the high intensity of the relationships in the family: the continuity of the relationship and the fact that much time is spent together. Ciavatta does not go into an explanation of how the 'merging with others' comes into existence precisely in the family. Is this absence of explanations or justifications a result of a lack of intellectual rigour, which may be risky given the excluding power of such family notions? Or may it be interpreted as his analysis of the distinct character

⁷⁹ Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 8, compare 43, 52.

of family with a highly necessary feeling for its inscrutable character, its being a mystery?

Ciavatta's way of describing the intertwinement of family relations by means of brief examples like that of the father may be analysed as an example of what Marcel calls the 'evoking' of family as mystery. Moreover, the aim of Ciavatta's evocation of the unreflective character of morality in a family is to recall a side of morality that has become obscured. This critical purpose resonates with the aim of Marcel's evocation of mystery as recalling something that 'previously one had entirely lost sight of' (Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 66). Ciavatta's attention to the inherently unconscious and incommunicable character of the family tie gives a better understanding of this obscuring. Second, Ciavatta's view of family does not seem incompatible with a fundamentally open way of speaking about the family. His focus on the immediate and unreflective character of what he calls the 'experience of inextricability' in the sphere of family seems a good example of an approach that precludes the occurrence of the question for the 'legitimate forms' of family life.⁸⁰ Family exists wherever this inextricability is experienced. Of course, the difficulty lies in that recognition within the context of family is not just any form of recognition that results from the feeling of being 'implicated in each other' and of being non-substitutable, nor is it any experience of dispossession of oneself rooted in the experience of a larger unity of which one is a part. As a result, the question of what in family leads to this specific kind of experience may arise again. The aspect of durably and intimately living together, which leads to knowing each other 'inside out', is at least implied in the way Ciavatta thinks of this recognition, although he does not refer to this explicitly. Although this aspect may be associated with some 'traditional' picture of children growing up with their so-called biological parents, it does not in principle exclude other forms.

This may be illustrated by relating Ciavatta's insights to some examples of family experiences in 'non-standard' forms of family relations from Robinson's *Housekeeping*. We may think of the strong presence of Helen – Ruth and Lucille's deceased mother – in Ruth's experience. Many of Ciavatta's characterisations of the intimacy of family apply to this relation, although it is no longer physically real, and Helen has been

⁸⁰ In his article 'The Family and the Bonds of Recognition', Ciavatta explains this Hegelian analysis of the 'experience of inextricability' in relation to modern psychotherapy, and describes it as 'those whom I recognize as family (for better or worse) are those with whom I am involved in an ongoing, unreflectively constituted practical cycle or system of interaction, and those whom I have internalized into my very way of relating to myself, others, and the world at large' (78).

'replaced' first by her mother and later by her sister. In a similar way, Ruth keeps dreaming of a reunification with Lucille after she has consciously left the family. Ruth recounts with delicate attention their intimate sharing of all the uncertain times after their mother's death. Their bond is another example that the family tie does not cease to be meaningful when family members are no longer in each other's presence, here because Lucille leaves. As regards the danger of exclusion that Butler points out, the relationship between Ruth and Sylvie is an interesting example. At the end of *Housekeeping*, Ruth and Sylvie are anything but dutiful citizens of Fingerbone. They become transients and in that sense are examples of being excluded from normal public life. However, the reason for this is not that they do not live up to the standards of dominant family life. Rather, the opposite seems true. Their firm but never explicitly formulated intention to stay together, despite Sylvie's shortcomings in 'housekeeping', has to do somehow with their being family members. This family tie is not respected by the inhabitants of Fingerbone, however. The two are excluded in spite of their apparent conformity on the level of being family members. In the neighbourhood assessment of the legitimacy of Sylvie's guardianship, running a household in a neat and orderly way is regarded as more important than family ties. Thus, examples of being 'inextricably bound up' with each other and carrying 'these others around with us in all of our dealings' are not difficult to find outside the sphere of the standard family patterns.⁸¹ Again, this gives rise to the idea that precisely these situations in which the family tie is experienced under pressure, beyond standards and conventions, bring the family tie to light.

Comparing Ciavatta's self-evident concurrence with the Hegelian distinction of family and state with Butler's aversion towards it also finally raises questions as regards Butler's way of dealing with kinship and fundamental dependence. Is it not both too easy and too demanding? It seems to take the easy road by not giving any further thought to family as an aspect of being human. Taking Butler's 'radical kinship perspective' means considering the topic of family as closed because the notion as such would imply a reductionist perspective that fosters discrimination and exclusion. The specific familial problems of dependence and lack of recognition that result from being inextricably intertwined in this specific way thus do not receive special attention either. Moreover, Butler's refusal to go into the specific character of family may be too demanding. She aims for a more vital awareness of our fundamentally relational nature, which means an interdependence with all other human beings, even stretching

⁸¹ Ciavatta, *Spirit, the Family, and the Unconscious*, 2.

beyond inter-human relations to the environment we live in. Is it not asking too much to pass over the everyday experiences of dependence that most people have in the context of family as not deserving separate analysis, in order to point out this relatedness on a much more general and thus abstract level? Perhaps Butler's agenda is simply too engaged with current political issues to offer room for the seemingly less acute issue of the family. If one really wants to account for the fact that human beings are 'from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond [them]selves, implicated in lives that are not [their] own', it does not seem far-fetched to also pay attention to – at least in the course of life – primary forms in which this sociality is lived in the family.⁸² Of course, these primary forms may also be taken as a stimulus to acknowledge dependence and responsibilities beyond the family. That does not do away, however, with the strong ways in which these are experienced in the family, not just in positive ways, but also and even more visibly in situations of pressure and problems.

Conclusion: The Unnameable Family Tie and the Divine Law

The aim of this chapter has been to provide our investigation with enough focus to enable the ethical analysis of what family might mean, while also respecting its character as mystery. In a first, tentative way, we formulated this focus as a tie. Speaking about a tie that is specific to family implies speaking about family as a distinct sphere. In line with the character of family as mystery, we approached this tie as something that is usually not referred to explicitly among family members but is nevertheless a strong impulse for acting. Thus, the tie comes to light in different experiences and actions without being named. Following our first explorations in the novel *Housekeeping*, we noticed that it is in particular when it is under pressure and not self-evident that the tie becomes visible. In these situations it turns out to be an impulse for acting and something people are answerable to and can be called to account for. Again, however, the tie has this character of an impulse and implies responsibility without these being made explicit. The focus on the experience of a tie was also chosen because of its openness to different forms of family life. Moreover, it does not lead to what Marcel calls a 'problem approach', which lacks attention to the open, fundamental question of what family is about. Finally, the family tie seemed a good beginning because of its obvious associations with givenness. The focus on

⁸² Butler, *Precarious Life*, 28.

the family tie provided us with a starting point to engage in dialogue with different kinds of texts and thinkers. These were chosen because of their connections with the literary sparring partner of this chapter, Sophocles' *Antigone*. What has this dialogue yielded?

The Family Tie as Mystery

In this dialogue, 'the family tie' has proven a meaningful phrase that enables further analysis of what family is about. Speaking about this tie also turned out to be more complex than we suggested at first. We assumed that *Antigone* could evoke the tie in its unnameable yet strong self-evidence as a basis for acting, even sacrificing oneself. A close reading of the play, however, confronted us with the paradox that the tie is presupposed in the way the family members behave towards each other, but is interpreted in completely different ways by each of them. The tie exists, but as something that is disputed. What it is and what obligations follow from it cannot be defined in general. This character of the family tie as mystery was exemplified in that no general formulation of the law to bury one's kin is given. We subsequently analysed these outcomes critically by taking into account Judith Butler's views. Her reading of *Antigone* questions the heart of our project by objecting to any approach to family as a separate sphere over against the public one. Does not the idea of a distinct family life based on an ineffable tie lead to an uncritical acceptance of dominant family patterns and the exclusion of alternative ones? Is not all acting, also that of the family, contingent, political, based on specific norms that should be open for discussion with respect to their justness? Butler directs these questions primarily at Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone*, which led us to our own reading of Hegel's view of family in the *Phenomenology*. We expected to find an emphatic analysis of family as a sphere of its own, but we arrived at a different conclusion. In dealing with family, Hegel brings to the fore first of all the complexity of the interrelatedness of morality and what he calls 'nature' or the 'immediate'. Ciavatta's analysis of Hegel's family views finally enabled a more constructive elaboration of what the moral character of the family tie might be. Ciavatta also emphasised its unconscious, unreflective character and the corresponding problem of communicating it.

The dialogue with these interpretations of *Antigone* thus points out the complexity of the family tie, its disputable character, its dangers and its incommunicability. These are not simply negative or critical contributions to our project, however, nor do they simply serve as warnings against

possible pitfalls. The moments of an impasse in understanding the family tie confirmed and deepened the insight into family as mystery. We recognised at several moments Marcel's insight that the inscrutability of family has to do with the fact that we are personally involved in the issue and cannot deal with the meaning of family as a general problem which can be solved objectively. In addition to this basic sense, *Antigone* evokes family as mystery in that the family tie becomes visible much more as a question than as a well-delineated fact with clear implications for acting. Thus, the family tie appears as something family members have to relate to, something they are answerable to, but not in the sense that the behaviour corresponding to it can be formulated in general. Insofar as the family tie appears in Antigone's act of burying Polynices, it becomes visible as a tie that goes beyond the boundaries of life and means a responsibility to the deceased as well, to Polynices as well as to her parents. Butler's view contributes to a more general awareness of being related as mystery by emphasising the opacity of acting. Acting always takes place on the basis of and is conditioned by a fundamental relatedness and dependence on others of which we are not fully aware and that is beyond rational comprehension. Although she does not associate this with the family, she underlines the view of relationality as mysterious. This may even be seen as a reason behind her opposition to family as an obvious, clear, distinct sphere. Such obviousness does not tie in with the opaque character of interrelatedness. Hegel also struggles with this opacity in trying to come to grips with the influence of nature in morality. Finally, Ciavatta acknowledged it most fully in his analysis of family as confronting us with the importance of the level of feeling, and immediate, unreflective acting in morality.

Acting on the Family Tie as Obeying a Divine Law?

There is one aspect implied in the character of family as mystery as inspired by Marcel's use that we did not yet evaluate separately – that is, that of the feeling for the sacred. References to this religious level are not hard to find in *Antigone*, as we already indicated in our analysis of the play. From the start of the play in the dialogue with Ismene, Antigone claims divine approval of her decision to bury her brother. Over against Creon, the elderly also suggest that the gods are involved in the mysterious burial, which Creon of course fiercely rejects. Standing accused before Creon, Antigone also invokes the law she has acted on as divine and as such, opposes it to Creon's 'mortal' proclamations. Here, we find the characterisation of the 'unwritten and unfailing ordinances of the gods', which

Hegel also quotes: 'For these have life, not simply today and yesterday, but for ever, and no one knows how long ago they were revealed.'⁸³ We already pointed out that Antigone never provides a formulation of what this divine law proclaims. It is precisely its unwritten character that makes it a divine law. As such, this also suggests that it is obvious; it does not need to be made known. Tiresias points out to Creon that the gods are offended at his refusal to bury and refers to the divine refusal of prayers and sacrifices as proof. Creon denies this accusation first by claiming that human beings cannot 'pollute the gods'. When he changes his mind after the elderly confirm Tiresias' counsel Creon's confession does not consider this point of the divine character of the obligation to bury. On the contrary, Creon bewails his unhappy fate, explaining it as 'that a god bearing great weight struck my head, and hurled me into ways of cruelty' (1271–5). He does not explicitly admit that he has willingly broken divine law.

In the recent interpretations of *Antigone* analysed in this chapter, this claim of obeying divine laws does not receive elaborate attention. Insofar as these readings emphasise the exceptional, rebellious character of Antigone's act, as in Butler and other feminist approaches, this does not come as a surprise. Following the divine law would be at odds with the idea of a heroic Antigone who consciously arrives at her decision on the basis of rational deliberations. Emphasising the divine character of the law she obeys would detract from the public character of her deed and its critical power. When we read the play with an eye to the character of the family tie as mystery, however, this incommensurability does not rise. Rather, the references to the unknown origin of the law and its unwritten character become apt formulations of this character of mystery. Invoking this divine authority need not to be counted against the heroic character of Antigone's acting. For precisely the staging of the play as a family conflict shows that not all family members are sensitive to this divine call to bury one's relatives and to be prepared to risk their lives for it. Is her acting less heroic if she is not following her own autonomous decision but consciously obeying a divine law? On the other hand, the unwritten character of the law does indeed point to its self-evident character. Antigone is not the hero inspired by a call no one could have heard. What she does seems to be a self-evident duty: burying the dead, in particular the dead to whom we are intimately related. Her obeying a divine law is being answerable to the family tie, which is also a phenomenon of everyday life. Her heroic character, then, lies in her highlighting the importance of this tie in the public sphere.

⁸³ *Antigone*, 456–7, see also note 44.

Thus, she becomes a dangerous rebel. Introducing the family tie in public breaks open the injustice of Creon's ruling and unmasks the cowardice of the bystanders.

That the family tie functions to break open the injustice of Creon's system can be considered more generally. Many ideologies, from slavery to Marxist communism, have tried to eliminate the family tie because of the danger it poses to the totalitarian order, or attempted to incorporate it completely into this order as in National Socialism. The sphere of family is always risky because of its closed character, its being a sphere of its own out of reach of the state. However, this should not be misunderstood as implying that it is clear what it means to respect the family tie or that it is an obvious good, a sphere in which everything works out well. Pointing out the critical potential of the family tie is not simply a call to cherish the family. That would be a glorification of it. Paying attention to the divine character of the law Antigone follows should not be misinterpreted as implying such a magnification either. Nor does it imply that we know precisely what the family tie is or are simply called to respect it.

The question that rises when we do take these Antigonean references to the gods into account is why it is precisely the sphere of family that permits us to catch, to quote Marcel, 'a glimpse of the meaning of the sacred bond which it is man's lot to form with life' (*Homo Viator*, 82). Why is it that the family tie brings one into contact with a transcendent dimension and a corresponding attitude of what Hegel calls 'dutiful reverence' (*Pietät*) or piety? It is remarkable that this piety arises in a setting of everyday life. Hegel emphasises the immediacy and naturalness of acting in this setting as well as its universal, non-contingent character. He highlights this character in two forms of family life that reflect the divine law. First, it is exemplified in the honouring of the dead family members as 'the perfect *divine* law'. This act separates the dead family members from the impersonal category of being dead and raises them to the level of ethical universality – that is, without separating or distinguishing them from the community as particular individuals. By honouring their dead family members, people take part in the destruction that has befallen them. Second, Hegel relates the divine law to sisterhood as the highest ethical form, the level of universality. In the sister's relationship to the brother, she is not inspired by the particularity of desire but intuitively aware of the divine law. Why does Hegel highlight these aspects as exemplifying the divine law?

It is here that we can anticipate the theme of Chapter 3, that of givenness. 'Givenness' might be a term that lends itself to expressing the common characteristics of both the moment of acting towards a dead

family member and acting in sibling relations. These are settings in which one is confronted with the inescapability of life: they concern relations which are not chosen. People find themselves in these situations, but not in the sense that these are facts with a self-evident meaning or a meaning that can be proved. People are put in a specific position. This position has strong implications, including moral ones, but not ones that can be formulated in general. Moral duty seems to be experienced as a divine one precisely at the moment when it cannot be formulated in concrete rules nor ascribed to contingent, particular feelings. It is a duty that is implicated in the family tie. The family tie becomes a given in the sense that this duty is not chosen and is inescapable, as well as in the sense that a deeper meaning, perhaps life itself, is experienced. This burial has to be performed because life itself is at stake – it cannot be left undone. In these respects, the experience of givenness resonates with our approach to family as mystery. This mystery character relates to the observation that givenness cannot be spelled out in general as a rule for all family members. It is a mystery also in that not every family member seems sensitive to this experience of givenness. Not every family member is sensitive to this moment of being put in a position of respecting an inescapable situation regarding its deeper, moral implications. Not everyone is open to the sacred.

For Antigone, facing the death of her brother means burying him despite his treason and having to pay with her own life. This is her divine duty, implied in her sisterhood, so it seems. For Ismene, however, sisterhood becomes a moment of ‘givenness’, not when she is faced with her brother’s death, but when she is faced with her sister’s death. When Antigone is sentenced to death, she shows solidarity with her sister and finally also with her dead brother. Creon, on the other hand, refuses the position the family tie puts him in. For him, there are no eternal laws: he proclaims the laws of the moment, for laws must be relevant to the time in which they are formulated, open to the contingency of the present. The family tie is nothing outside of punishing both sisters for the burial and finding his son and wife dead. What counts for him is whether the laws are respected, whether one is a dutiful citizen of the polis or an enemy, a traitor. Thus, he is portrayed as lacking sensitivity to the sacred. The attitude of ‘dutiful reverence’ necessary to experience a given interdependence seems alien to him. His answer to the appeal of the family tie is a negative one.

The references to the notion of givenness in this reflection on mystery and sensitivity to the sacred character arise on the threshold to Chapter 3,

where it becomes our main focus. In that chapter, we will ask what might be the moral significance of characterising the family tie as something non-chosen, as already there. In analysing the ethical weight of this givenness, the question of its sacred character will inevitably return. Here, we will also need to go into the most well-known formulation of this givenness as something 'natural', a relation of blood, biology or genetics. The critical voices of this chapter will of course stay with us, for the dangers of claiming absoluteness for the contingent still loom large. In very different ways, however, Hegel and his interpreters, Butler and Ciavatta in particular, also have deepened our understanding of the 'other side' of freedom and its critical relevance for an ethics of our time. Thus, they have confirmed the ethical tasks of accounting for experiences of givenness and also of dependence as urgent ones. In Chapter 3, we investigate what family as a phenomenon can reveal to help us make sense of givenness in our time.