

83. *Rhetoric* II.5, 1382b31-31; cp. b28-1383a12.
84. *Rhetoric* II.5, 1383a5-8. Those who have lost all hope of escape grow resigned and callous.
85. *Poetics* 13, 1453a5; *Rhetoric* II.8, 1385b14 ff.
86. *Rhetoric* II.8, 1386a24-27.
87. *Poetics* 13, 1453a5-6.
88. *Rhetoric* II.8, 1386a24-25.
89. *Rhetoric* II.8, 1385b19 ff.
90. *Rhetoric* II.8, 1385b23-27. Cp. *Politics* VIII.7, 1342b19, where an educated audience (*hoi pepaideumenoi*) is contrasted with a vulgar one.
91. Since it is an incredibly complicated subject, I would like to reserve for another occasion a discussion of the general conditions required for emotional identification.
92. *Poetics* 13, 1453a5-6; *Rhetoric* II.5, 1383a10-13.
93. One might lamely try to keep the objection alive by saying that when we feel pity we are identifying with the chorus. But then the question arises: why should we identify with the chorus? The only plausible answer is that the chorus is in some way expressing our views. And if that is so, we are again led back to the conclusion that we believe that what happened to Oedipus could happen to us.
94. *Rhetoric* II.5, 1383a7-12.
95. E.g. *Poetics* 9, 1452a36-38, b5-7, b15-19.
96. I use "outside the theater" in the widest possible way: even the oral recitation of a tragedy counts for the purposes of this essay as going on "inside the theater."
97. See constraints (3)-(6).
98. If I may for a moment indulge my desire to be droll, let me put this in the language of modal semantics: In the virtuous man's opinion (and thus: in truth) the worlds in which he kills his mother, is killed by his mother, etc. are possible worlds and thus stand in an accessibility relation to the real world. All tragic worlds are possible worlds. However, all such tragic worlds are sufficiently removed from the actual work of a virtuous person (in ordinary circumstances) that they do not fall within the set of legitimately feared worlds.
99. *Rhetoric* II.8, 1386a32-35. Of course, Aristotle is here talking within the context of rhetorical persuasion, but his point obviously carries over to the theatre.
100. See Thompson Clarke, "The Legacy of Skepticism," *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972) 754-769.
101. *Psychagogoi*; cf. *Poetics* 6, 1450a33-36.
102. See constraints (4)-(6) above.
103. *Poetics* 13, 1453a7-17; 15, 1454b8-13.
104. *Poetics* 13, 1452b30-36.
105. *Poetics* 9, 1452a3-4; 10, 1452a20-21; 15, 1454a33-36; 16, 1455a17; 9, 1451a36-38.
106. Which was, of course, Hegel's choice.
107. See W. R. D. Fairbairn's account of "the moral defense" in "The Repression and the Return of Bad Objects," *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London, 1984).
108. Aristotle makes a related (though different) point at NE I.10: he reluctantly admits that even a virtuous person can suffer great misfortune however he offers the consolation that the virtuous person will at least bear his misfortunes nobly and with greatness of soul.
109. *Rhetoric* II.5, 1383a3-5.
110. For another treatment of skepticism and its relationship to tragedy see, of course, Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford, 1979). I would like to thank Giovanni Ferrarì both for the many lovely evenings in which we translated and discussed the *Poetics* together and for his criticisms of an earlier draft.

## From Catharsis to the Aristotelian Mean\*

Richard Janko

In this essay, I shall argue that Aristotle believed that catharsis can lead to virtue: our responses to the representation (*mimēsis*) of human action can habituate us to approximate more closely to the mean in our ordinary emotional reactions. Literature, and especially drama, can contribute to the formation and continuing education of mature citizens. Aristotle's views are central to continuing debates about public control over artistic representation and the mass media, and the role of art and the artist in education and society.

My argument builds on recent revisions of the influential view of catharsis as the purgation of undesirable emotions set out by J. Bernays.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of Aristotle's general theory of the emotions shows that there is a close connection between Aristotle's views on representation and catharsis. New textual evidence<sup>2</sup> clarifies how watching representations of actions can enable us to approach the virtuous mean.

### I

The notion of catharsis was of fundamental importance to Aristotle's theory of literature. Although he ends his definition of tragedy with the statement that

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tragedy "accomplishes by means of pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions" (1449b27), he gives us no full analysis of the concept. In the absence of such an analysis, scholars have relied primarily on *Politics* VIII and the extant *Poetics* to reconstruct Aristotle's views, supplementing these with his discussions of the emotions in the *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>3</sup>

Because the definition of tragedy makes the catharsis of pity and fear essential to the genre, the plots of tragedies are best structured in such a way as to represent the kinds of actions that are best suited to arouse those emotions (1452b32). A good tragedy should not depict the fall of decent men from good fortune into misfortune, since this does not excite pity or fear, but is *miarón*, "disgusting" (1453b36), literally "dirty" or "polluted," provoking feelings of shock or revulsion. This evidently constitutes the opposite of catharsis, whether we take that term to mean "cleansing," "purification," "purgation" or "clarification" (see below, Section IV).

The *Poetics* also specifically connects catharsis with *mimēsis*: the pleasure proper to tragedy is "the pleasure that comes from pity and fear by means of representation" (*tēn apo eleou kai phobou dia mimēseōs hēdonēn*, 1453b12). Aristotle distinguishes between feeling pity and fear because of real events (which is not pleasant), and feeling these emotions because of a representation (which is pleasant). This distinction is confirmed by 1448b10–12: we derive pleasure from looking at representations even of things that are in actuality painful to contemplate, like the most despised animals and corpses; these objects are "impure" – once again evoking the idea of catharsis.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Aristotle's response to Plato's attack on poetry is also a response to Plato's view of the emotions.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, when Socrates challenges those defenders of poetry "who are not poets but love poetry" to prove in prose that poetry is beneficial to society (*Republic* X 607d), Plato may already have had Aristotle in mind.<sup>6</sup> One of Plato's main objections to mimetic poetry is that it can nourish emotions – such as pity, lust and indignation – which would be better suppressed or restrained by the reasoning part of the soul (*Republic* X 605d–606d). Mimetic and dramatic poetry is dangerous because the arousal of such emotions may make it difficult to restrain them in one's everyday circumstances, putting the appetitive part of the soul in charge (606a–c). Even the temporary experience of being under the control of such emotions can permanently affect the soul of the spectator, since nurturing feelings of pity for others' sufferings on the stage makes it difficult to restrain such a reaction toward one's own misfortunes in life (606b).

If Aristotle's theory of catharsis is to hold, he needs to refute Plato on this point. Aristotle explains tragic catharsis by comparing it with the healing of **people suffering from ecstatic outbreaks of emotion (*enthousiasmos*); these people**

are cured by "cathartic songs," which excite their souls and thereby relieve their excessive emotions (*Politics* VIII 1342a2–16). Bernays argued that the catharsis which we obtain from watching a tragedy operates similarly, arousing and releasing undesirable feelings of pity and fear.<sup>7</sup> The weakness of his approach is his assumption that Aristotle held the same wholly negative opinion of the emotions that Bernays attributes to Plato, and would therefore regard them as needing to be cleaned out periodically. Aristotle recognized that well-balanced emotional reactions are a crucial factor in making correct choices and thus in forming and maintaining a settled good character.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes one *should* feel such emotions as pity, anger or fear, if they are felt towards the right object, to the proper degree, in the correct way and at the right time. Proper compassion, justified anger and the right degree of courage can and should affect moral choice (see e.g. *NE* III 1115b11–20). We must feel the emotions rightly for the circumstances: if we have too much fear, we are cowardly; if too little, we are foolhardy. Only if we feel the correct amount of fear relative to the situation do we attain courage. Virtue lies in our having such appropriate reactions, reaching the mean between the extremes relative to ourselves.

A disposition to feel emotion correctly in this way is essential to the development of good character.<sup>9</sup> If we force ourselves to act justly, but in fact long to act otherwise, we are self-controlled (*enkrateis*) but not fully virtuous, since our desires are not in tune with our actions.<sup>10</sup> Just as we become good by habitually doing good, until good action becomes a "second nature" to us, so too by feeling emotion appropriately we become habituated to having the correct emotional responses. Because the emotions also have a cognitive component, such reactions help us to take the correct decisions, so that we approach nearer to the virtuous mean.

## III

Aristotle's analysis of the educational role of *mousikē* in *Politics* VIII clarifies how poetry can contribute to virtue,<sup>11</sup> since by "*mousikē*" he means not only music, but also the poetry which was usually performed along with it, including drama (1340a14 ff.).<sup>12</sup> *Mousikē* has three functions – education, amusement and educative entertainment (*diagōgē*), which contributes to intelligence.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to ask whether *mousikē*

... contributes to the character and the soul. This would be clear, if we become of a certain sort in character by means of it. Actually, the fact that we do become of a certain sort [sc. because of it] is obvious for many reasons, especially the songs of Olympus. For it is agreed that these arouse the soul to ecstasy (*enthousiasmos*), and ecstasy is an emotion of the character connected with the soul. Again, when listening to representations (*mimēseis*) everyone comes to share in the emotion, even apart from rhythms and songs **themselves.** (1340a9–13)

Aristotle compares songs which arouse ecstasy in some people to "representations" which arouse a wider range of emotions in everybody; this comparison recurs in the later passage on catharsis. Among "representations" he includes unaccompanied mimetic poetry and even prose (e.g. mime), since *mimēsis* need not have "rhythms and songs" to accompany them (*Poetics* 1447a28–b23). He then introduces both the habituation of our emotions and the concept of *mimēsis* so central to the *Poetics*:

Since music happens to belong among pleasant things, and virtue is concerned with feeling delight correctly and loving and hating [sc. correctly], clearly one should learn, and become habituated to, nothing so much as judging correctly, i.e. feeling delight in decent characters and fine actions. Rhythms and songs contain especially close likenesses [*homoioimata*] of the true natures of anger and mildness, bravery, temperance and all their opposites; and of the other character-traits: this is clear from the facts – we are moved in our soul when we listen to such things. Habituation to feeling pain and delight in things that are like [sc. the truth] is close to being in the same state regarding the truth. (1340a14–24)

If listening to music can habituate us to feel the proper emotional reactions in real life, because it contains "likenesses" of emotions like anger or indeed pity, then dramatic poetry, which arouses emotion, must have the same effect. That Aristotle believed this is clear from the only place in the *Politics* where he refers explicitly to catharsis, VIII 1341b34 ff.:

We accept the division of songs proposed by some people engaged in philosophy into songs relating to (a) character, (b) action and (c) ecstasy . . . We can therefore state that the art of music should be used not for a single beneficial purpose but for several. In fact it should be used (a) for education and (b) for catharsis (as for what we mean by "catharsis," we shall speak without qualification now, but more clearly in the *Poetics*), and thirdly (c) for educative entertainment [*diagōgē*], for both rest and relaxation from tension. (1341b32–41)

By "songs relating to character," Aristotle apparently means non-narrative didactic poems like the moral maxims of Theognis; by "songs relating to action" he certainly means those which represent action, as do tragedy, comedy, and epic. He next matches up the three different types of songs with the purposes to which they may be put:

It is therefore obvious that one must use all the [sc. kinds of] melodies, but not use them all in the same way. (a) Those most related to character must be used for education, but (b) those related to action and to ecstasy must be used for listening to while others play them. (1342a1–4)

"Education" (*paideia*) here means the education only of boys (*paides*); Aristotle has been discussing which instruments boys should learn to play during their schooling. But everyone may benefit from the other two kinds of song, both of

which arouse emotion (the "songs relating to catharsis" arouse ecstasy, while those "relating to action" arouse a wider range of feelings, as he stated above):

For the emotion that arises violently in some souls exists in all, but differs in its degree, e.g. pity and fear as well as ecstasy. Some people tend to be taken over by this agitation [sc. ecstasy], but we can see that, as a result of the holy songs which they use to rouse the soul to a frenzy, they settle down as if they had attained healing, i.e. catharsis. It follows that this very same thing happens to people who are prone to pity, fear and emotion in general, and to the rest [sc. of us] to the degree that each participates in such [sc. emotions], and a sort of catharsis and relief, accompanied by pleasure, comes about for everyone. Likewise cathartic songs too afford people harmless delight. For this reason, those performers who are concerned with music for the theatre must be allowed to use such melodies and songs. (1342a5–18)

The repeated mention of "pity and fear" shows that Aristotle has tragedy specifically in mind. His argument runs as follows. We are all subject to the emotions to some degree, pity and fear (A) as well as ecstasy (B). Wild "cathartic" songs arouse ecstasy and bring about catharsis in the extreme case of people prone to this emotion (B'). "Songs relating to action" (specifically tragedy) have just such an effect on people who tend to feel pity and fear, to which we all are prone to some extent (A'). Just as this effect of tragedy is accompanied by pleasure (A"), so the "cathartic" songs too provide a "harmless delight" (B").<sup>14</sup> The legislator must allow both kinds of *mousikē* to be performed in the theater. Thus tragic catharsis has a part to play in the functioning of the state.

Aristotle clearly regards both types of song as appropriate for both catharsis and educative entertainment (*diagōgē*), which contributes to intelligence; *diagōgē* is for adults what play or amusement (*paidia*) is for children (*paides*) (1339a30).<sup>15</sup> He asked whether we should participate in music for (a) amusement and relaxation, or (b) to habituate our characters to feel delight correctly and become virtuous, or for (c) "*diagōgē* and practical wisdom" (*phronēsis*) (1339a15–24). Since he now omits to specify which songs (those relating to action or those relating to ecstasy) provide *diagōgē*, he probably took it for granted that both kinds of song do so. He has to argue for the more debatable proposition that songs relating to action can produce a "kind of" catharsis no less than do the "cathartic" songs in the extreme case of people prone to *enthousiasmos*.

The relation between catharsis and *diagōgē* may be closer than first appears. This passage suggests that they combine to perform for adults the function which *paideia* performs for children, i.e. the training of both the emotions and the intelligence, with the theater regarded almost as a form of adult education.<sup>16</sup> The emotions and the intelligence are interdependent: the emotions can play an important part in cognition, and vice versa. Thus catharsis and *diagōgē* seem to be negative and positive aspects of one and the same process: via catharsis, we moderate our tendency to feel inappropriate emotional reactions, and via *diagōgē*

we make intellectual progress towards intelligence. Both aspects of this process are needed if we are to achieve virtue.

#### IV

There is now general agreement that catharsis affects the spectators' emotions rather than the actions represented in the play.<sup>17</sup> Only by denying the relevance of the *Politics*, with its reference to the *Poetics* (VIII 1341b30), is it possible to regard catharsis as a "clarification" of the plot, i.e. the causal structure of the action.<sup>18</sup> A modified version of this theory applies catharsis to the emotions of both the characters and the spectators.<sup>19</sup> The *dramatis personae* of a tragedy may well come to recognize the cause of their misfortunes, and to feel regret when the nature of the *hamartia* which brought about disaster is made plain; and the depiction of their enlightenment on the stage will certainly contribute to the enlightenment of the spectators. But Aristotle lays little emphasis on this. For him, the final cause of the tragic action is its effect on the audience (cf. *Poetics* 1453b3-5), not on the *dramatis personae*, although the latter must certainly face a misfortune for the spectators to be moved.

The followers of Bernays<sup>20</sup> hold that catharsis consists in removing the spectators' excessive emotions, which are inherently undesirable. The best audience for a tragedy will then be composed of people pathologically disposed to feel excessive emotions, i.e., for those interpreters who relate catharsis to the theory of humors, with an excess of black bile. But Aristotle was strongly opposed to such physiological reductionism.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, Bernays' interpretation seems to imply a consequence that Aristotle would certainly reject: that the wise and virtuous do not benefit from the process.

Bernays' view that catharsis is a homeopathic process has also been criticized. E. Belfiore<sup>22</sup> has argued that the pity and fear aroused by a representation differ from those aroused by real events; the process of catharsis must therefore be allopathic, whereby different emotions drive out the normal ones, rather than homeopathic, whereby pity and fear drive out pity and fear. But the medical analogies in *Politics* VIII are nothing more than analogies.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Aristotle regarded the emotions evoked by representations as "likenesses" of the real emotions (1340a18 ff.). Like the translation of the term *catharsis*, the question of allopathy versus homeopathy is not a central issue: only when we can form a clear picture of Aristotle's theory on other grounds can we establish which of the many connotations of "catharsis" were more important to him, since in his time it could connote medical purgation, religious purification and intellectual clarification.

Catharsis is, as we saw, related to the concept of *mimēsis* itself. Golden<sup>24</sup> has argued that the representation of universal patterns of human action by means of fiction permits us to see those patterns more clearly, leading to a "clarification" (*catharsis*) that operates on a purely intellectual level. He equates the

pleasure we gain from tragedy with our cognitive pleasure when we recognize a representation of something as representing that thing (1448b9). But Golden goes too far in denying the importance of the emotions for catharsis. On the other hand, the many scholars who hold that catharsis is a purification or clarification of the emotions, by means of the *mimēsis*,<sup>25</sup> do not go far enough, since they neglect the way that practical wisdom involves feeling appropriate emotions in an appropriate way.<sup>26</sup> Like Plato, Aristotle thought that witnessing representations and having emotional responses to them can have habit-forming effects (*Republic* X 606a-c; *Politics* VIII 1340a14-24). The average Athenian citizen had the opportunity to see at least nine tragedies yearly at the City Dionysia. Because Aristotle puts such a heavy emphasis on our ability to learn from *mimesis* (including visual images and sketches, 1448b10 ff.), particularly when they arouse strong emotions, there is good reason to suppose that he thought that the experience of tragic catharsis could affect our emotional habits. Hence the end-result of catharsis is to dispose us to feel emotion in the right way, at the right time, towards the right object, with the correct motive, to the proper degree, etc.<sup>27</sup> H. House extended this view to its logical conclusion: he argued that catharsis "brings our emotions nearer to those of a good and wise man," i.e. nearer to virtue, which is the mean between the extremes relative to us.<sup>28</sup>

This approach resolves many difficulties. First, we need not ascribe to Aristotle a Platonizing view of the emotions which he did not hold. Nor should we attribute to him the kind of incoherence within his highly systematizing philosophy which is implied by a failure fully to exploit the *Politics* and *Ethics* in interpreting the *Poetics*. Instead, we obtain a deep and rich account of human psychology,<sup>29</sup> which answers the main criticisms leveled by Plato against literary representation, and draws on many interdependent strands of Aristotle's ethics, psychology, politics and aesthetics.

#### V

Other ancient sources for Aristotle's doctrine confirm our view of the educative function of catharsis.<sup>30</sup> In his *Commentary on Plato's "Republic"* I (p. 49 Kroll), Proclus states that Aristotle's *On Poets* rebutted Plato's proposal to expel the dramatic and mimetic poets from his ideal state:

It has been objected that tragedy and comedy are expelled illogically, since by means of these it is possible to satisfy the emotions in due measure [*emmetrōs*] and, by satisfying them, to keep them tractable for education [*paideia*], by treating the discomfort in them. Anyway it was this that gave Aristotle, and the defenders of these genres in his dialogue against Plato [*en tois pros Platōna logos*], most of the grounds for their accusation [sc. against him].

An echo of this same doctrine appears in Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* I 11:<sup>31</sup>

The potentialities of the human emotions that are in us become more violent

if they are hemmed in on every side. But if they are briefly put into activity, and brought to the point of due proportion [*to symmetron*], they give delight in moderation (*metriōs*), are satisfied and, purified (*apokathairōmenai*) by this means, are stopped by persuasion and not by force. For this reason, by observing others' sufferings (*pathē*) in both comedy and tragedy, we can check our own emotions (*pathē*), make them more moderate (*metriōtera*) and purify them (*apokathairōmen*). So too in holy rites, when we watch and hear shameful things, we are freed from the harm that derives from them in actuality.

Iamblichus does not name Aristotle as his source, but was familiar with some of his other lost dialogues. Both Neoplatonist testimonies confirm several important points about catharsis, for which Iamblichus (but not Proclus) uses the related terminology:

- (1) The emotions are not in themselves educated, but are to be kept "tractable for education," i.e. emotional excesses will no longer stand in the way of correct ethical choice.
- (2) The emotions are to be led to the point of due proportion, i.e. they will better correspond to the Aristotelian mean between the extremes.
- (3) The process involves *mimēsis*: by watching a representation of *others'* sufferings/reactions/emotions (*pathē* can mean all three things), we can attain the *catharsis* of our own.
- (4) Catharsis applies to both tragedy and comedy.
- (5) Catharsis is compared to the effect of certain sacred rituals which involved obscenity. Aristotle speaks of such rites in the same context as comedy (*Politics* 1336b13 ff.); it seems reasonable to suppose he also made this connection in the *On Poets*.

A third Neoplatonist, Olympiodorus,<sup>32</sup> preserves in his peculiar testimony the Platonic view of the emotions as inherently evil, but gives the same account of the aim of catharsis: "Aristotelian catharsis cures evil with evil, and, by the conflict of opposites, leads to due proportion [*symmetria*]." (Commentary on Plato's *First Alcibiades*, p. 54).

Finally, the *Tractatus Coislinianus* (TC), which I have argued to be a summary of Aristotle's lost *Poetics* II,<sup>33</sup> concurs:

Tragedy reduces the soul's emotions of <pity and> fear by means of compassion and dread. It wishes to have a due proportion [*symmetria*] of fear . . . There wishes to be a due proportion [*symmetria*] of fear in tragedies, and of the laughable in comedies. (TC III, IX)

Although these passages speak of *symmetria*, the *Tractatus* uses the term "catharsis" in its definition of comedy (IV).

Previous scholars' uncertainty about the Aristotelianism of these texts, their lack of detail and their tendency to speak of *symmetria* rather than *catharsis* explains why they have been neglected. But a new text from Herculaneum

reinforces the connection between catharsis and virtue. Herculaneum papyrus 1581 derives from the *On Poems* V of Philodemus, but the opinions expressed in it are clearly not those of the Epicurean philosopher. Although their author's name is not preserved, the language and content point to Aristotle or someone very close to him; their source is probably the *On Poets*.<sup>34</sup>

The opening fragments let us glimpse an argument that a poet represents a complete action, and that in a complete drama there arises, from the representation of fearful and pitiable events happening to others (*allosia*), a "tragic catharsis of pity, i.e. cathartic of pitiable things" (fr. 3). Someone (the poet?) "reveals in the story (*logos*) the catharsis of *hamartiai*" (fr. 4); and mention is made of "spiritedness" (*thymos*) and "correcting an error with a small correction" (fr. 5). We finally reach two fully readable scraps, separated by a sizable lacuna:

. . . Folly is present in the wisest of souls, and intemperance in the most temperate. Likewise there are fears in brave souls and jealousies in magnanimous ones. One can observe, regarding the [pleasures(?) of] life, that, during sleep [and when one is] in drinking-bouts [and] fevers and [in] emotional states [even the wise can fall into error(?) . . .].<sup>35</sup> (fr. 6)

. . . [We have concluded from] what we have agreed [that] a poet represents a complete action. It must be understood that poetry is useful with regard to virtue, purifying, as we said, the part [*to morion*, i.e. the related part of the soul?]. It must be added that every art can become [the origin] of what is best among the things that are in them [i.e. the arts] by nature . . . [two lines lost] . . . and produces catharsis . . . (fr. 7)

Here we have many elements of our interpretation of catharsis. The representation of universalized patterns of action apparently brings about a "clarification [*catharsis*] of *hamartiai*." The cathartic process can benefit everyone, even the wisest and most temperate of souls; we are all imperfect. Catharsis "purifies" part of the soul, probably its "spirited" part (cf. the reference to *thymos*);<sup>36</sup> hence poetry contributes to virtue. The last fragment presumably went on to say that the purpose of mimetic poetry is to produce catharsis, as one expects from the inclusion of catharsis in the *Poetics'* definition of tragedy. The fragments do not mention "habituation," "education" or *diagōgē*. However, the presence of folly (*aphrosynē*), the opposite of *phronēsis*, in the list of weaknesses common to everybody confirms that catharsis is related to *phronēsis*.

## VI

If we are to see how completely Aristotle aimed to rebut Plato's attack on poetry, two further questions must be addressed. These are (1) the range of emotions subject to tragic catharsis, and (2) the functioning of comic catharsis.

Plato criticized mimetic poetry for arousing a whole gamut of emotions, including pity, laughter, lust and indignation (*Republic* X 605d-606d). Although

Aristotle regards pity and fear as the emotions most essential to tragedy, there is evidence that he too thought tragedy (and indeed epic) arouses a wider range of feelings, which can all be the object of catharsis:

- (a) Aristotle says tragedy accomplishes "by means of pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions" (1449b27). "Such" (*toioutos*) is in this context as ambiguous in Greek as in English: it may mean "the aforementioned emotions," but can equally well mean "the aforementioned emotions and others like them."
- (b) He says that "all [sc. the effects] that have to be produced by speech fall under reasoning [*dianoia*]; these are . . . the production of emotions, e.g. pity, fear, anger etc." If the characters' rhetoric can arouse diverse emotions, so can their actions (1456b1).
- (c) He lists pity and fear as emotions aroused by tragedy and epic, specifically by Odysseus' tales in *Odyssey* IX–XII (*Rhetoric* III 1417a12).<sup>37</sup> Now a scholiast on *Iliad* I 1, discussing why Homer begins his epic with the word "wrath," explains that he does this "in order that, as a result of this emotion, the relevant part of the soul may be purified"<sup>38</sup> and he may make the hearers more attentive to the bulk [sc. of the poem] and accustom us to endure our pathé nobly." The expression "the part," *to morion*, recalls the Herculaneum papyrus (fr. 7). If this opinion goes back to Aristotle's *Homeric Questions*, we can add anger as an emotion subject to catharsis in epic poetry.
- (d) Finally, "pity, fear and emotion in general" are the feelings which are aroused in everyone, and given a catharsis, by watching performances in the theater (*Politics* VIII 1342a10 ff.).

Now pity, fear and anger are all emotions accompanied by pain (*lypē*, cf. *Ethics* II 1105b21, *Rhetoric* II 1382a21, 1385b13); the kind of suffering (*pathos* in its other sense) which arouses these emotions is painful. Thus, in Aristotle's view, tragedy and epic arouse, and lead to a catharsis of, painful feelings in general.

## VII

With this in mind, let us turn to the emotions associated with comedy, notably laughter. Plato had specified laughter and jokes as the undesirable pleasure in which we indulge when we watch comedies (*Republic* X 606c); he also lists laughter among a whole range of emotions, including anger and fear, at *Philebus* 50a–b. Aristotle thought the emotion aroused by comedy is laughter,<sup>39</sup> because he relates comedy to the nature of the laughable, just as he later relates tragedy to actions which arouse pity and fear (1449a33 ff.):

Comedy is, as we said, a representation of people who are rather inferior – not, however, with respect to every [sc. kind of] vice, but the laughable [*to geloton*] is [sc. only] a part of what is ugly. For the laughable is a sort of error

[*hamartēria*] and ugliness that is not painful and destructive, just as, evidently, a laughable mask is something ugly and distorted without pain.

Proclus and Iamblichus indicate that comedy, like tragedy, produces a catharsis (see above, Section VI). But the main evidence is the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, which defines comedy as "accomplishing by means of pleasure and laughter the catharsis of such emotions," as well as saying that comedy aims at "a due proportion of the laughable" (TC IV, IX). I have argued<sup>40</sup> that "pleasure" denotes the pleasurable emotions in general, including laughter, just as if Aristotle had said that tragedy achieves a catharsis of "pain and fear," i.e. the painful emotions including fear. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he lists the emotions as "anger, fear . . . and pity, and generally whatever is accompanied by pleasure or pain," but continues by restating these emotions as "being angry or being pained or feeling pity" (my emphasis) (II 1105b21 ff.). We have no right to emend the *Ethics* to remove his shorthand expression for "feel painful emotions."<sup>41</sup> My interpretation entails the unobjectionable proposition that tragedy depends for its effect on painful emotions, comedy on pleasant ones.<sup>42</sup>

The *Nicomachean Ethics* helps to clarify the "catharsis of pleasure and laughter" (IV 1127b34–1128b9). Aristotle discusses how we may best attain the mean relating to "intellectual entertainment together with play" (*diagōgē meta paidias*, 1127b5). This involves achieving the mean, wit, which is the middle way between the extremes of boorishness and buffoonery (*bōmolochia*):

Those who go to excess in the laughable are thought to be buffoons and vulgar persons, striving after the laughable by any means and aiming more to arouse laughter than to speak decorously and avoid paining the butt of their jokes. (IV 1128a4–7)

Aristotle concludes his discussion by resuming the three ways of attaining virtue in social behavior. One should aim at the mean (1) between obsequiousness and surliness, (2) between boastfulness (*alazonia*) and understatement ("irony," *eirōneia*) regarding one's own merits, and (3) between buffoonery and boorishness (1128b5–9):

The ways which we have mentioned of attaining the mean are three. They all concern social intercourse in words or actions of some kind, but differ in that one of them [sc. boastfulness] relates to truth, the others relate to what is pleasant [*to hēdu*]. Of those relating to pleasure [*hēdonē*], one [sc. buffoonery] is displayed in our amusements [*paidiai*], the other [sc. obsequiousness] in our social contacts in the rest of life.

Here, then, is the explanation of the *Tractatus'* comic catharsis of "pleasure and laughter" – we can attain the mean concerning *to hēdu* or *hēdonē*, by purifying our tendency to excess or deficiency in laughter and amusement. This is confirmed by TC XIV, where the characters of comedy are given as "the buffoonish, the ironical and the boasters," traits discussed here in the *Ethics*. Both irony and buffoonery appeared in the "lost" continuation of the *Poetics*.<sup>43</sup>

## VIII

These arguments suggest the following conclusions. Tragedy depicts people who are *spoudaioi*, meaning both "good" and "serious." Comedy represents the opposite kind of "inferior" people, *phauloi*, but within them only a subcategory, those who are laughable (*geloioi*); some "inferior" types are so evil that they are not funny. A good tragic plot hinges on a great *hamartia* committed by a *spoudaios*, which leads to a painful or destructive event. Comedy too depends on a *hamartēma* (the word means the same as *hamartia*), but one without painful or destructive results (1449a35). The *mimēsis* of the *hamartia* arouses the appropriate emotion to the proper degree; its catharsis enables us to moderate our own tendency to err in life in respect of that emotion.<sup>44</sup>

Since, in watching tragic dramas, we are watching the sufferings of characters who are only represented, we derive no harm from this experience, as we might from "real" events. Instead, we benefit, because our propensities to diverge from the mean in feeling the emotions are reduced. Moreover, dramatic mimesis leads us to the correct emotional response to the characters' plight via our moral and cognitive judgments about them, since their personalities and actions are vividly represented as universal patterns of action. Our enhanced perceptions can improve our capacity for moral judgment, practical wisdom and virtue. The drama we watch is no evanescent experience. On the contrary, feeling such appropriate emotional reactions can habituate us to achieve and maintain the proper standard in our moral choices, leading toward the mean in emotional terms and hence to practical wisdom and virtue.

The catharsis of the pleasant emotions in comedy offers similar benefits: we learn to laugh at the right objects and to the proper degree. Moreover Aristotle would add, with his usual optimism, that we learn not to laugh at actions which cause excessive pain to others, whereas the buffoon does not mind whether his jokes injure their object.<sup>45</sup> For the mature citizen, both tragedy and comedy are a civilizing force. The pity and fear aroused by watching *Oedipus the King* might lead a timorous man to realize that his own fears are exaggerated, and that his own misfortunes are not so terrible; yet the same play might arouse in a powerful and confident person, prone to feel and behave arrogantly toward others, the thought that even the mightiest ruler may one day need the sympathy and help of those weaker than himself. Similarly, laughing at a comedy might make a real-life buffoon realize how foolish he seems at the dinner-table, but might make a prude relax from his prissiness. All these reactions conduce to the mean.

This theory of catharsis provides a subtle and effective response to Plato. The essential difference between the two lies in Plato's pessimism about the way ordinary people are liable to confuse imitation and reality, mistaking the extreme situations portrayed on the stage for everyday social norms, to be followed in life. Aristotle is more sanguine, believing that people can distinguish representation from reality. He denies that they will naively carry their emotional reactions to **representations over into their lives. Far from becoming habituated, as Plato**

fears (*Republic* X 606a–c), to the emotional weaknesses which drama depicts and evokes, Aristotle's spectators will, through the process of catharsis, come to acquire appropriate emotional reactions.

These contrasting attitudes have very different implications for the relationship between society and the arts. The Platonic legislator would maintain strict control over the content of literature, and would ban Homer, tragedy and comedy from the ideal state; these forms of popular entertainment are too corrupting, not only for the emotionally immature but even for the Guardians.<sup>46</sup> Although the Aristotelian legislator will not control the content of these arts, he must protect the young from their effects (*Politics* VIII 1336b1 ff.). Since he proposes to ban indecent talk which minors might hear, he thinks that the legislator must also forbid them

to observe either pictures or speeches [*logoi*] that are indecent. Let the authorities take care that no sculpture or painting is a representation of such [sc. indecent] actions, unless in the temples of those gods before whom custom allows even scurrility . . . But as for younger people, they must not be allowed to be spectators of either lampoons or comedy until they attain the age at which they may already share in reclining at supper and getting drunk, and education has made them all immune to the harm arising from such things. (*Politics* VIII 1336b13–24)

Aristotle regards minors as Plato regards the whole populace – immature and impressionable. He might even have endorsed Plato's critique of drama, if it had concerned only the young. But, since he has more faith in education than does Plato, he not only rejects controls over the literary forms available to adults, but also values the emotional and intellectual enlightenment which they can bring; he trusts in the mature and educated judgment of the better class of spectators to discriminate good from bad art, and to award the prizes accordingly. Portrayal of extremes of action is necessary for the adult audience to experience the appropriate emotional reactions to the full; but it may mislead minors who lack enough experience of life to distinguish *mimēsis* from reality.

This passage implies that Aristotle expected comedy to include obscenity and invective. By his own poetic criteria, "the contents of comedy must deviate from the ethical norms of polite social intercourse," since, "if one is to represent morally inferior people, one must (logically) represent them doing and saying morally inferior things."<sup>47</sup> It is striking – and perhaps telling – that Aristotle delayed his account of catharsis to the second book of the *Poetics*, which analyzed the rumbustious comedy of Aristophanes.<sup>48</sup>

## Notes

1. *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie* (Breslau, 1857), reprinted in *Zwei Abhandlungen über die aristotelische Theorie des Drama* (Berlin, 1880), and trans. in *Articles on Aristotle: 4, Psychology and Aesthetics*, eds. J. Barnes, M. Schofield and K. Sorabji (London, 1979), pp. 154–65.

2. See esp. M. L. Nardelli, "La catarsi poetica nel P. Herc. 1581," *Cronache Ercolanesi* 8 (1978) 96-103.
3. A cross-reference in the *Politics* (1341b40) suggests that Aristotle's main discussion of catharsis was in *Poetics* Book II; there was another account in the dialogue *On Poets*, a work more widely read than were the lecture-notes which comprise the *Poetics*. Cf. G. F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), p. 337n. For annotated translations of the fragments see R. Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics* (Indianapolis, 1987), pp. 56-65, 175-195; R. Laurenti, *Aristotele: I Frammenti dei Dialoghi* (Naples, 1987), pp. 211-300.
4. So J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago, 1975), p. 68.
5. For defenses of Plato's position see Alister Cameron, *Plato's Affair with Tragedy* (Cincinnati, 1978); J. A. Elias, *Plato's Defense of Poetry* (Albany, 1984); A. Nehamas, "Plato and the mass media," *The Monist* 71 (1988) 214-234. See further J. Moravcsik and P. Temko (eds), *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom and the Arts* (Totowa, 1982); G. F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry* (Chapel Hill, 1986), pp. 3-64. Aristotle makes no direct criticism of Plato in the *Poetics*, since all his students would recognize the *Tendenz* of his lectures, but named him explicitly in *On Poets* fr. 72-73 Rose (cf. M. W. Haslam, "Plato, Sophron and the dramatic dialogue," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 19 (1972) 17-38).
6. So G. F. Else, *The Structure and Date of Book 10 of Plato's Republic, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil.-Hist. Klasse 1972), Abh. 3, pp. 53 f.; idem, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, pp. 69 f.
7. Bernays (see n.1).
8. See W. W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion* (London, 1975); L. A. Kosman, "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), pp. 103-116.
9. See M. F. Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to be Good," in Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, pp. 69-92; cf. R. Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue," in Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, pp. 201-219, esp. 214 ff.; N. Sherman, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Education* (Diss. Harvard, 1982), esp. pp. 102-151.
10. See A. O. Rorty, "Akrasia and Pleasure," in Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, pp. 267-284.
11. The relevance to catharsis of this neglected passage was shown by C. Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 82-89, and Sherman, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Education*, pp. 162 f.; cf. A. Rostagni, "Aristotele e Aristotelismo nell'estetica antica," *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* II (1922) 1-147, esp. 43-53 (reprinted in his *Scritti Minori I: Aesthetica* (Turin, 1955), pp. 76-237); Janko, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 58, 181 f.
12. Lord, *Education and Culture*, pp. 85-89.
13. On *diagōgē* see A. E. J. Schendler, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (Diss. Michigan, 1954), pp. 84-97; Lord, *Education and Culture*, pp. 75-85; C. Wagner, "'Katharsis' in der aristotelischen Tragödiendefinition," *Grazer Beiträge* 11 (1984) 67-87, esp. 79-81; and S. G. Salkever, "Tragedy and the Education of the Demos: Aristotle's response to Plato," in *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, ed. J. P. Euben (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), pp. 274-303, esp. p. 286.
14. Since scholars have not understood that the first half of this sentence deals with the "songs relating to action," many have accepted Sauppe's emendation of *kathartika* to *praktika* at 1342a15, which forces into the text the reference of these songs which is rightly felt to be needed. Lord lists the scholars who have adopted or rejected this emendation (*Education and Culture*, p. 132, n.49), rightly dismissing it himself, as did Rostagni (*Scritti Minori I: Aesthetica*, p. 54).

15. Cf. above, n.13.
16. Cf. Lord, *Education and Culture*, pp. 102-104, and Salkever, in Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*. Schendler, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, pp. 97-118, implausibly argues that catharsis is the aim of tragedy, *diagōgē* that of comedy.
17. For surveys of older work on catharsis see the references in Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 225, n.14; for more recent work see P. Somville, *Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote* (Paris, 1975), pp. 78-95; L. Golden, "The Clarification Theory of Catharsis," *Hermes* 104 (1976) 437-452; D. Keesey, "On some recent interpretations of Catharsis," *Classical World* 72 (1979) 193-205; D. E. White, *A Source Book on the Catharsis Controversy* (Diss. Florida State University, Tallahassee, 1984); S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986), pp. 350-356.
18. So Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 224-232, 423-447; H. D. F. Kitto, "Catharsis," in *The Classical Tradition: Literary and Historical Studies in Honor of Harry Caplan*, ed. L. Wallach (Ithaca, 1966), pp. 133-147. Cf. too H. D. Goldstein, "Mimesis and Catharsis Reexamined," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25 (1966) 567-577.
19. So D. Keesey, *Classical World* 72 (1979) 193-205; J. P. Anton, "Mythos, Katharsis and the Paradox of Tragedy," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1985) 299-326; and eventually Else himself, in *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, pp. 158-162, esp. 161 f.
20. Bernays' view (above, n.1) was anticipated by H. Weil, "Ueber die Wirkung der Tragödie nach Aristoteles," *Verhandlungen der 10. Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner in Basel 1847* (Basel, 1848), pp. 131-140. He is followed by, e.g., D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 273-290; C. Gallavotti, *Aristotele, Dell'arte poetica* (Verona, 1974), pp. 230 ff.; E. Flores, "La catarsi aristotelica dalla *Politica* alla *Poetica*," in *Poetica e Politica fra Platone e Aristotele, Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, Sezione Filologica-Letteraria* 6 (1984), pp. 37-49.
21. Cf. M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 264-289, 502 n.17.
22. E. Belfiore, "Pleasure, Tragedy and Aristotelian Psychology," *Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985) 349-361; "Wine and catharsis of the emotions in Plato's *Laws*," *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986) 421-437, esp. 432 ff. For another attack on the idea of homoeopathy, see J. Lear, "Katharsis," *Phronesis* 33 (1988) 297-326, esp. 301.
23. Cf. M. Nussbaum, "Therapeutic arguments: Epicurus and Aristotle," in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, eds. M. Schofield and G. Striker (Cambridge and Paris, 1986), pp. 31-74, esp. pp. 53 ff.
24. L. Golden, "Catharsis," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 93 (1962) 51-60; (with O. B. Hardison), *Aristotle's Poetics* (Englewood Cliffs, 1968), pp. 114-120; "Mimesis and katharsis," *Classical Philology* 64 (1969) 145-153; "Katharsis as Clarification: An Objection Answered," *Classical Quarterly* 23 (1973) 45 f.; "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (1973) 473-479; "The Clarification Theory of Catharsis," *Hermes* 104 (1976) 437-452; "Aristotle on Comedy," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42 (1984) 286-298. S. G. Salkever in Euben (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*, simply equates the effect of tragedy with the sort of catharsis of false opinions provided by dialectic in Plato's *Sophist* 230b-d. On the *Sophist* see also Wagner, *Grazer Beiträge* 11 (1984) 75.
25. Cf. P. Somville, *Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote*, pp. 92 ff.; idem, "Katharsis et esthétique chez Aristote," *L'Antiquité classique* 40 (1971) 607-622; Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad*, pp. 52-68; R. Dupont-Roc and J. Lallot, *Aristote: La Poétique* (Paris, 1980), pp. 188-193; Belfiore, *Classical Quarterly* 35 (1985) 349-361 and 36, 421-437; Lear, *Phronesis* 33 (1988) 297-326.
26. The view that poetry conduces to virtue was widespread in antiquity. The brilliant



- reconstruction by D. Delattre of Philodemus, *On Music IV (Cronache Ercolanesi 19 (1989) 49–143)* shows that the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon adapted to his own purposes Aristotle's whole theory of catharsis as reconstructed here; see further R. Janko, "A first joint between P. Herc. 411 and 1583 (Philodemus, *On Music IV*), forthcoming in *Cronache Ercolanesi 2 (1992)*.
27. Cf. (in order of date) Rostagni, *Scritti Minori* pp. 123 ff.; H. House, *Aristotle's Poetics: A Course of Eight Lectures* (London, 1956), pp. 105–112; Lord, *Aristotle's Theory of Moral Education*; Sherman, *Education and Culture*; I. Smithson, "The Moral View of Aristotle's Poetics," *Journal of the History of Ideas 44* (1983) 3–17; A. Paskow, "What is Aesthetic Catharsis?," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 42* (1983) 59–68, substantially repeated in "A Meditation on Aristotle's Concept of Catharsis," in *Philosophy and Culture: Proceedings of the XVIIIth World Congress of Philosophy* (Montreal, 1988), III, pp. 709–714; R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London and Berkeley, 1984), pp. 139–151; idem, *Aristotle: Poetics*, pp. xvi–xx, 181–190; Wagner, "Katharsis"; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, pp. 378–391; Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 184–200, 350–356; P. Simpson, "Aristotle on Poetry and Imitation," *Hermes 116* (1988) 279–281; D. J. Depew, "Politics, Music and Contemplation in Aristotle's Ideal State," in *Aristotle's Politics: A Cultural Reader*, eds. F. D. Miller and D. Keyt (Oxford, 1991). For pre-Bernaysian holders of this view see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 352 f.; for a recent critique of it see Lear, *Phronesis 33* (1988) 297–326.
28. House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 112 f.; cf. Smithson, *Journal of the History of Ideas 44* (1983) 17; Janko, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. xviii–xx; Laurenti, *Aristotele: I frammenti dei Dialoghi*, pp. 266–268. The connection is understood by Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 352 f., but is not made explicit in his main account of catharsis.
29. The striking parallels with modern cognitive psychology merit deeper investigation. For starting points see Belfiore, *Classical Quarterly 35* (1985) 358, n.26.
30. For more extensive commentary on the relevant passages see Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics*, pp. 186–90; Laurenti, *Aristotele: I frammenti dei Dialoghi*, pp. 264–268.
31. Both passages are wrongly included among the fragments of the *Poetics* by R. Kassel, *Aristotelis De Arte Poetica* (Oxford, 1965), p. 52 (he omits lamblichus' last sentence). They are both dismissed by Lord, *Education and Culture*, pp. 176 f., apparently because they agree with the *Tractatus Coislinianus*! Lord assigns this theory to the Neoplatonists, but it is already parodied by Lucian, *Vera Historia 1 1* (cf. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, 148).
32. Cf. A. Ničev, *L'Enigme de la catharsis tragique dans Aristote* (Sofia, 1970); "Olympiodore et la catharsis tragique d'Aristote," in *Studi in Onore di A. Ardigizoli* (Rome, 1978), pp. 641–659; *La Catharsis tragique d'Aristote* (Sofia, 1982). See also Lord, *Education and Culture*, pp. 164 f., and Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, p. 147. Ničev's own interpretation of catharsis is an unacceptable variant of the theory that it means intellectual clarification (cf. the critique by Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 355).
33. *Aristotle on Comedy*, with the comments of J. Barnes, *Phronesis 20* (1985) 103–106. Not the least of the ironies surrounding my book on the *Tractatus* was the simultaneous publication of an article by V. Janković, "Tractatus Coislinianus," *Živa Antika 34* (1984) 87–94, arguing (in Serbian) that the question ought to be reopened. Nonetheless, the importance of the *Tractatus* is often disparaged. M. Heath, while "willing to believe that the *Tractatus* descends from an epitome of *Poetics II*," dismisses it as "an obscure and contentious little document" ("Aristotelian Comedy," *Classical Quarterly 39* (1989) 344–354, esp. 344). The sheer difficulty of this epitome is no reason to neglect it.
34. Nardelli, *Cronache Ercolanesi 8* (1978) 96, n.4, shows that the doctrines are those of Aristotle, not Theophrastus, but does not suggest from which work they derive. She

- assigns the text to *On Poems* Book IV (p. 99), but see R. Janko, "Philodemus' *On Poems* and Aristotle's *On Poets*," Section VI, forthcoming in *Cronache Ercolanesi 21* (1991). For the numeration and sequence of the fragments see Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics*, p. 187. The moral elements in the theory led D. F. Sutton to assign it not to Aristotle, but to a successor who turned Aristotle's (Bernaysian) tragic catharsis into "a moralizing defence of poetry" ("P. Herc. 1581: the Argument," *Philosophia: Epeteris tou Kentrou Ereunēs tes Philosophias Athēnōn 12* (1982) 270–276).
35. For this last point cf. NE I 1102b4, VII 1151a1 ff. and further parallels in Nardelli, *Cronache Ercolanesi 8* (1978) 102.
36. Cf. Lord, *Education and Culture*, pp. 160–164, who argues that the emotions affected by tragic catharsis are those associated with the spirited part of the soul. P. A. Vander Waerdt develops this point, showing that the harnessing of citizens' *thymos* (which results in a desire to rule) is a major question in Aristotle's *Politics*, and that intelligent and thymoeidetic citizens may find the locus of their happiness in the leisured enjoyment of music, poetry and the arts ("Kingship and Philosophy in Aristotle's Best Regime," *Phronesis 30* (1985) 249–273, esp. 258–260).
37. The terms used are *oiktos* and *deinōsis*, but these are synonymous with *eleos* and *phobos* (Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, pp. 136 f.).
38. *Him' ek tou pathous apokatharsēti* with schol. AT, but the verb is paralleled (*Scholion Graeca in Homeri Iliadem I* (Berlin, 1969), p. 3). The bT scholia ascribe part of the same opinion to Zenodotus (*ibid.*, p. 4).
39. Contra: Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 275, n.1, and in G. A. Kennedy (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. I: Classical Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 182 f. But at 1453b5 Aristotle speaks of tragedy as arousing "shivering and pity," referring to a physical symptom of fear. On the cathartic function of comic laughter see Lane Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy* (New York, 1922), pp. 60–76; Schendler, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, pp. 97–118; D. F. Sutton, *Self and Society in Aristophanes* (Washington DC, 1980), pp. 69–79.
40. *Aristotle on Comedy*, pp. 156–160. Contra: D. Lanza, "La Simmetria impossibile," in *Filologia e Forme Letterarie: Studi offerti a Francesco della Corte V* (Urbino, 1987), pp. 65–80, esp. pp. 67 f.; L. Golden, "Aristotle on the Pleasure of Comedy," (this volume).
41. Among others T. H. Irwin, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis, 1985), p. xxiii, reads *phobēthēnai* for the manuscripts' *lupēthēnai*, the *lectio difficilior*, which is printed by I. Bywater in his Oxford Classical Text (Oxford, 1894).
42. Cf. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, pp. 150, 160 f., on TC III–IV. Plato, perhaps already responding to Aristotle, seeks to complicate this by seeing a mixture of pleasure and pain in comedy, in that we are pleased at others' pains (*Philebus* 50b–c); on this see M. Mader, *Das Problem des Lachens und der Komödie bei Platon* (Stuttgart, 1977), and C. Hampton, *Pleasure, Knowledge and Being* (Albany, 1990), pp. 64–67. Some who dispute the value of the *Tractatus* suggest that Aristotle held this Platonic theory (e.g. Halliwell, in *Classical Criticism*, p. 182 f.). Aristotle might well have approved of it as an explanation of why we enjoy invective, but could not have applied it to comedy as he defines that genre at *Poetics* 1449a33 ff. Golden, "Aristotle on the Pleasure of Comedy" (this volume), identifies righteous indignation as the emotion aroused by comedy, but, since this is a painful emotion (*Rhetoric II* 1386b9–11), it is incompatible with the requirement that the laughable in comedy exclude pain and destruction (*Poetics* 1449a32–7).
43. See *Rhetoric III* 1419b2 ff. with Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* pp. 216 f.
44. Lucas, *Aristotle: Poetics* pp. 288 f., proposed that comic catharsis, especially in the Old Comedy of Aristophanes, worked by means of "the imaginary suspension of many among those restraints and restriction which make civilized life possible," comparing

the testimony of Iamblichus. But he rejected this because the emotions purified by comedy are common to everyone, whereas only a few benefit from enthusiastic music; and because, on this theory, the emotions aroused by the representation are undesirable ones in the case of pity and fear. Lucas' ascription to Aristotle of a Platonic view of the emotions prevented him from developing his insight.

44. This was Plato's complaint against comedy at *Philebus* 48a–50e.

46. Nehamas, *The Moralist* 71 (1988) 214–234, suggests that, in Athenian society, poetry held the same place as does television in ours; Plato's views are closely comparable to those of modern critics of the mass media. He indicates that the proper response to the critics of television is to follow Aristotle: to classify and explain the different genres of programs.

47. M. Heath, *Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989) 344–354, esp. 345. In *Aristotle on Comedy*, pp. 204–206, I represented Aristotle as concerned to ban indecent speech generally, overlooking the importance of the exemption which he grants to comedy and iambus. My error was to assimilate his thought too closely to Plato's.

48. As Heath remarks (*Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989) 353f), his argument discredits the frequent claim that Aristotle could not have approved of Aristophanic comedy, despite *Poetics* 1448a25–28, where he names Sophocles, Homer and Aristophanes as if they were the best exponents of the three major genres he intends to discuss (cf. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy*, p. 249, versus Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 273 and n.30). The *Tractatus*, of course, uses Aristophanes as the basis of its analysis of comedy.

## Aristotle and Iphigenia

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In Chapter 14 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that the best kind of tragedy is exemplified by Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (*IT*): "the best is the last; I mean for example in the *Kresphontes* Merope is about to kill her son, but she recognizes him and does not kill him, and in the *Iphigenia* sister [is about to kill] brother . . ." (1454a4–7).<sup>1</sup> Few modern readers have agreed with Aristotle about the superiority of this tragedy. In the view of most scholars, the *IT* is either an inferior tragedy, or it is not really a tragedy at all. H. D. F. Kitto calls the *IT* a "romantic melodrama," a kind of drama in which the emotions are "lightly engaged," and in which there is no "tragic theme" or "intellectual profundity."<sup>2</sup> M. Platnaur, ignoring Aristotle, remarks that the *Iphigenia* "has never been ranked as among its author's greatest plays," and that it "is not a tragedy at all."<sup>3</sup> Bernard Knox sees the *IT* plot type as the ancestor of Western melodrama, in which we have "not tragic catastrophe but hairsbreadth escape from it."<sup>4</sup> T. B. L. Webster says that this play is "light-hearted,"<sup>5</sup> and according to Anne Burnett<sup>6</sup> and Dana Sutton, it closely resembles the comic satire play.

Why are modern evaluations of Euripides' play so radically different from that of Aristotle? The question is an important one, especially since we cannot dismiss Aristotle's admiration for the *IT* as mere individual eccentricity. Because Aristotle's preference for the dramatic type modern readers tend to scorn as "melodrama" appears to have been shared by Greek playwrights and audiences,<sup>7</sup> a study of Aristotle's reasons for preferring the *IT* can tell us much about Greek tragedy as a whole, as well as about the philosopher's own views. In attempting to see Euripides' *IT* through Aristotle's eyes, this essay begins by examining some modern assumptions about tragedy that can lead us to focus on very different aspects of the *IT* from those that were of central importance for Aristotle. These differences in perspective mean, in effect, that our *IT* is not the same play as Aristotle's. After a brief discussion of Aristotle's theory of the tragic

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