

PLEASURE, TRAGEDY AND ARISTOTELIAN PSYCHOLOGY

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* defines fear as a kind of pain (*lypē*) or disturbance (*tarachē*) and pity as a kind of pain (2.5.1382a21 and 2.8.1385b13). In his *Poetics*, however, pity and fear are associated with pleasure: 'The poet must provide the pleasure that comes from pity and fear by means of imitation' (τὴν ἀπὸ ἔλεου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως δεῖ ἡδονὴν παρασκευάζειν 14.1453b12–13).¹ The question of the relationship between pleasure and pain in Aristotle's aesthetics has been studied primarily in connection with *catharsis*. *Catharsis*, however, raises more problems than it solves. Aristotle says nothing at all about the tragic *catharsis* in the *Poetics* except to state that tragedy accomplishes it.² Though he gives a more complete account of *catharsis* in the *Politics*, the context of this passage is so different from that of the *Poetics* that its relevance is questionable.³ A more promising, but largely neglected, approach to Aristotle's theory of tragic pleasure and pain is through a study of his psychological works.⁴ Here, Aristotle describes a number of emotional and cognitive responses to kinds of objects that include works of art. These descriptions support an interpretation of the *Poetics* according to which (1) a tragedy is pleasurable in one respect and painful in another, and (2) pity and fear, though painful and not in themselves productive of pleasure, are nevertheless essential to the production of the *oikeia hēdonē*, 'proper pleasure', of tragedy. This interpretation has the advantage of not depending on a particular view of *catharsis*. It also makes much better sense than alternative views, once its seemingly paradoxical aspects are explained with the help of the psychological works.

According to this interpretation, Aristotle holds that painful emotions, pity and fear, contribute to the pleasure of tragic *mimēsis*, not that emotions which are painful in real life can become pleasurable, and not painful, in aesthetic contexts. That is, the pity and fear we experience while watching *Oedipus the King* are painful, just as they are in real life, and not different, pleasurable, 'aesthetic emotions'. There is no reason to suppose that Aristotle believed, as has often been claimed, that tragic pity and fear

¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have used the following editions of Aristotle's works: R. Kassel, ed., *Aristotelis De Arte Poetica Liber* (Oxford, 1965); Kassel, ed., *Aristotelis Ars Rhetorica* (Berlin and New York, 1976); W. D. Ross, ed., *Aristotelis Politica* (Oxford, 1957); Ross, ed., *Aristotle, Parva Naturalia* (Oxford, 1955); R. Hicks, *Aristotle, De Anima* (Amsterdam, 1965); M. Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, 1978).

² *Po.* 6.1449b27–8. The word occurs in the *Po.* only here and at 17.1455b15, where it is used of the ritual purification of Orestes in Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*.

³ *Pol.* 8.1341b32ff. says that music can be used for *catharsis*. Good arguments against applying this account to the *Po.* are given by G. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 440–3 and H. D. F. Kitto, 'Catharsis', in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. L. Wallach (Ithaca, NY, 1966), 134–6. I cannot begin to discuss the complicated *catharsis* question here. Some bibliographical surveys of the vast literature on the subject can be found in Else, 225–6; P. Somville, *Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote* (Paris, 1975), 78–95; L. Golden, 'The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*', *Hermes* 104 (1976), 437–52. K. Bennet, 'The Purging of *Catharsis*', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21 (1981), 204–13, provides a refreshingly sceptical survey of the problem, concluding that 'it seems wisest to purge *catharsis* of its accreted meanings and declare a decent thorough-going scepticism concerning Aristotle's intent' (p. 211).

⁴ Though isolated passages of the psychological works are sometimes mentioned in connection with the *Po.*, there has never been any sort of systematic study of the relevance of these works to the *Po.*

are at all pleasurable.⁵ Pity and fear, in Greek usage, were painful emotions, with the specific physical manifestations of weeping and wailing (pity) and shuddering, chill, and pounding of the heart (fear).⁶ Aristotle does not define pity and fear in the *Poetics*; on one occasion (14.1453b5) he substitutes *phrittein*, 'to shudder', for 'fear' in his account of the effects of tragedy; and the *Poetics*' account of pity and fear is in accord, once we have interpreted 1453b12–13 correctly, with ordinary Greek usage. All this is evidence that pity and fear are painful emotions in the *Poetics*, just as they are in Aristotle's other works.

Moreover, the view that tragic pity and fear are themselves pleasurable and not painful would involve Aristotle in serious philosophical difficulties. In his theory, tragedy produces pity and fear (14.1453b1, b12–13 and *passim*) and it is an imitation of, and thus is similar to,⁷ fearful and pitiable events (9.1452a2–3). It is not clear what this would mean if 'pity' and 'fear' meant one thing when used in connection with the events imitated and another when used in connection with the imitation. This problem does not arise, of course, if we take Aristotle literally: tragedy is an imitation of (painfully) pitiable and fearful events, and is recognised as such, because it produces (painful) pity and fear in the audience. Tragedy makes us weep and shudder; this is why we say that it is an imitation of pitiable and fearful events.

Aristotle's account of pity and fear must also be distinguished from the view that while these emotions are painful, they may also produce pleasure. For example, weeping may be seen as painful but as also affording the pleasure associated with filling a physical or psychological need or with relieving a burden. This idea probably lies behind Homer's statement that Achilles 'took pleasure in weeping' (*Il.* 24.513).⁸ It is especially prominent in the aesthetic theories of Aristotle's predecessors. Gorgias writes that those listening to poetry are filled with 'desire that loves grief' (*pothos philopenthēs*: *Encomium of Helen* 9). Plato's *Philebus* includes fear among the emotions in which pleasure is mixed with pain and writes that the audience at a tragedy feels pleasure and weeps at the same time (47e–48a). His *Republic* also discusses and condemns the poet's ability to 'fill' 'the pitying part of the soul' that is 'starved for weeping' (10.606a–b). Aristotle, however, never uses language in the *Poetics* that suggests this view of pity and fear.⁹ His phrase, 'pleasure that comes from pity and fear by means of imitation', has an entirely different meaning.

With these clarifications in mind, then, let us first consider how a tragedy can be pleasurable in one respect and painful in another.

⁵ This is argued, for example, by S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed. (New York, 1951), 254–73; E. Schaper, 'Aristotle's Catharsis and Aesthetic Pleasure', *PQ* 18 (1968), 131–43, esp. 139. L. Golden, 'Epic, Tragedy, and Catharsis', *CP* 71 (1976), 77–85, correctly argues that the pleasure of tragedy arises from *mimēsis* and not from pity and fear, which are painful emotions.

The problem of 'aesthetic' emotions has not yet been solved by modern philosophers. For a good recent discussion see M. Eaton, 'A Strange Kind of Sadness', *JAAC* 41 (1982), 51–63.

⁶ See W. Schadewaldt, 'Furcht und Mitleid?', *Hermes* 83 (1955), 129–171; M. Pohlenz, 'Furcht und Mitleid? Ein Nachwort', *Hermes* 84 (1956), 49–74; H. Flashar, 'Die medizinischen Grundlagen der Lehre von der Wirkung der Dichtung in der griechischen Poetik', *Hermes* 84 (1956), 12–48.

⁷ Readers who share Goodman's objections to 'similarity' may substitute a phrase such as 'sharing of properties'. I use the term 'similarity' in this paper because Aristotle is clearly committed to the concept. See Butcher 127, who cites G. Teichmüller, *Aristotelische Forschungen* (Halle, 1869), ii. 145–54, and R. Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory* (London, 1972), 2–7.

⁸ Cf. *Il.* 23.108 and *Od.* 4.102–3.

⁹ Contrast *Rhet.* 1.11.1370b22–9, where Aristotle analyses the 'pleasure in lamentation' described by Homer in *Il.* 23.108 as pain due to the absence of someone and pleasure in remembering him.

In *Poetics* 4 Aristotle describes the cognitive differences between viewing imitations and viewing objects imitated:

Though we feel pain in seeing some things, such as the shapes of the most ignoble animals and corpses, we take pleasure contemplating the most accurately made likenesses [*eikones*] of these things. The cause of this is that learning [*manthanein*] is most pleasant not only to philosophers but equally to others, though they have only a small share in this. For this reason, they take pleasure seeing the likenesses, because while they contemplate they learn and conclude what each thing is: for example, that this one is that one [*hoti houtos ekeinos*]. For if one has not seen the thing previously, it will not give pleasure *qua* imitation [*hē mimēma*] but because of the workmanship or the colour or for some other reason (1448b10–19).

One thing this passage tells us is that there are two ways of viewing an imitation. To enjoy something *qua* imitation is to conclude that there is a certain relationship (*hoti houtos ekeinos*) between a likeness (*eikōn*) and that of which it is the likeness. That is, to enjoy something *qua* imitation involves contemplating it *qua* likeness. This kind of pleasure does not come from observing or learning about properties intrinsic to the object, but only from learning about its relationship to some other object.

It is also possible, however, to view and enjoy an imitation not *qua* likeness but *qua* object in its own right, with a certain shape, colour and qualities of workmanship. Shapes and colours are clearly properties intrinsic to the object, but what about workmanship? In one sense, workmanship is reducible to colours and shapes, since it produces these. In another sense, however, it is the skill of the artist, as evidenced by the work he has produced. To enjoy workmanship in this latter sense, we must focus on those features of the object that make it an artifact: the intricate patterns into which the marble is carved, the delicacy of the brush strokes. If, as is likely, Aristotle has this kind of appreciation in mind, *Poetics* 4 is really outlining two different ways of viewing an imitation *qua* thing in its own right. It can be viewed:

- (1) *qua* artifact that does not represent anything;
- (2) *qua* object with colours and shapes.

Since the two responses require us to focus on different aspects of the object, they cannot take place simultaneously.

The second response, viewing something *qua* object with colours and shapes, might be (i) the reaction we have to abstract art, or to representational art viewed as though it were abstract. There is another possible interpretation, however, for which we must turn to a passage in the *De Memoria*.

After stating that perception makes an impression in the soul that is like a picture (*zōgraphēma*: 450a27–30), Aristotle explains that when we remember something we are aware of this impression not as a thing in its own right but as a likeness of something we have perceived previously:

For the animal drawn on a panel is both an animal [*zōon*] and a likeness [*eikōn*]. One and the same thing is both, but the being of the two is not the same, and it is possible to view it both as an animal and as a likeness. In the same way one must suppose the image [*phantasma*] in us to be something in its own right and to be of another thing. In so far, then, as it is something in its own right, it is an object of contemplation or a *phantasma*. But in so far as it is of another thing, it resembles a likeness and a reminder (450b21–7).

A portrait of Coriscus (the example Aristotle gives just after this passage) is both something in its own right and a likeness of Coriscus, and may be viewed in either of these two ways.

What does Aristotle mean when he writes of viewing an animal drawn on a panel as a 'thing in its own right' and not as a likeness? It is unlikely that he means (1)

viewing it as an artifact that does not represent anything, since he calls it a *zōon* and compares it to a picture in the soul. He might mean (i) viewing it as an object with abstract shapes and colours. He might also mean, however, (ii) viewing it as an animal shape but not as a representation of an animal. When we view something in this way we do not mistake a drawing for a real animal or 'suspend our disbelief': we have neither belief to affirm nor disbelief to suspend. We simply identify the lines as an animal shape.¹⁰

There is good reason to think that (ii), regarding something as a non-abstract image that does not represent, is what Aristotle has in mind in *DM* 450b21–7. First, he writes that to view the animal drawn on the panel as a thing in its own right is to view it as a *zōon*. It is unlikely that this term means 'figure', as Sorabji argues.¹¹ The picture in Aristotle's example is a portrait of Coriscus, and his point is that we can view it without recognising it as a portrait of Coriscus, not that we can view it as a mere collection of abstract shapes (a 'figure') without recognising the shape as that of a man. And, as Aristotle points out in *Categories* 1a, the drawn *zōon* is 'a man' even if only 'homonymously'.

The most important reason for accepting (ii), however, is that Aristotle compares the *zōon* that is not seen as a likeness to a thought or *phantasma* in the soul that does not serve as a reminder. Aristotle does not (except in special, clearly defined cases) think of images or *phantasmata* as mere abstract shapes and colours.¹² This is very explicit in the *De Insomniis*, for example, where Aristotle compares dream images to shapes seen as people or animals. In one very interesting passage, he writes that 'the marks joined together on walls sometimes, because of a slight resemblance, appear to be animals (*zōa*) to those in fever' (460b11–13). Thus, far from insisting that pictures of animals, or images of animals in the soul, appear to us as abstract shapes, Aristotle dwells on important cases in which abstract shapes appear to us as animals.

In the *De Memoria* also, the *phantasma* in the soul that does not serve as a reminder of Coriscus is certainly seen not as abstract shapes – lines joined together – but as a man shape. When we come to remember, we do not say, 'Ah, these lines form the shape of a man', but, 'The man in my thought is Coriscus, whom I've seen before'. Thus, Aristotle clearly means what he says: to see an animal drawn on a panel as a thing in its own right is to see it as an animal but not as a likeness of an animal.

This response (ii) is clearly different from (1) viewing something as an artifact that does not represent anything, for it requires focusing on different aspects of the drawing. It is, instead, a form of (2) viewing an imitation *qua* object with colours and shapes that do not represent anything. To see a picture as an animal is necessarily to see it *qua* object with animal shapes and colours. And one can enjoy the colours and shapes of an imitation *qua* thing in its own right by enjoying a beautiful horse shape. Since Aristotle does not consider abstract art in *Poetics* 4, it is likely that this is what he means when he writes of people who do not view imitations *qua* likenesses enjoying colours and shapes.

We conclude, then, that (ii) is the correct interpretation of (2) and that there are two possible cognitive responses involved in viewing an imitation *qua* thing in its own right. It can be viewed:

- (1) *qua* artifact that does not represent anything;

¹⁰ On the notion of a non-abstract image that does not represent see E. H. Gombrich, 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse', rpt. in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (London and New York, 1971), 1–11, and N. Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, 1976), 21–6.

¹¹ *Aristotle on Memory*, 84.

¹² On *phantasia* see further below and note 23.

- (2) *qua* animal shape but not *qua* representation of an animal.

On the other hand, we may view an imitation *qua* likeness. Another passage in the *De Memoria* can help us to understand better what this involves:

... it is not possible to think without an image [*phantasma*]. For the same effect occurs in thinking as in drawing a diagram. For in the latter case, though we do not make any use of the fact that the size of the triangle is determinate, we none the less draw it with a determinate size. And similarly someone who is thinking, even if he is not thinking of something with a size, places something with a size before his eyes, but thinks of it not as having a size (449b31–450a5).¹³

This kind of thinking involves focusing on certain aspects of a drawing or a *phantasma* while failing to focus on others, such as the size of a triangular figure.¹⁴ It is obvious that we in fact do the same sort of thing when we view a picture as a likeness of Coriscus. We focus on what makes it a likeness of *Coriscus*: for example, on the mole on its right cheek. If, on the other hand, we view the painting as a thing in its own right, we might focus instead on what makes it a human shape: two arms, one head, etc. The people in *Poetics* 4 who view imitations *qua* likenesses would focus, similarly, on those features that make them similar to that which they represent.

There are, then, three relevant cognitive responses to a visual imitation. We may view it as a thing in its own right:

- (1) *qua* artifact that does not represent anything; or
- (2) *qua* animal shape but not *qua* representation of an animal.

Or we may view it:

- (3) *qua* likeness, grasping a relationship between the imitation and something else of which it is the likeness, focusing on those features of the imitation that make it similar to the original.

We cannot view something as a likeness and at the same time view it in one of the other two ways. Nevertheless, both (1) and (2) are in some sense prerequisites for (3). To view something as a likeness of an animal we must first realise that it is an artifact, and it must have appeared to us as an animal shape. Thus, the difference between people who view imitations *qua* likenesses and those who do not is that while the latter have only the first and/or second response, the former go from the first two responses to the third, or perhaps switch rapidly back and forth. Some aesthetic responses, such as appreciation of illusionist art, would require great skill in this switching from (1) to (3).

This analysis of the cognitive responses of those viewing imitations can also help us to understand Aristotle's account of emotional reactions to imitations in *Poetics* 4. He writes, in the passage cited above, that we experience pain in viewing certain shapes of real things but pleasure in viewing likenesses of these shapes. Our pleasure, Aristotle is careful to explain, comes from learning about a relationship, that is, from the third response.

This pleasure must not be confused with another sort of pleasure described in *Politics* 8.1340a23–8:

The habit of feeling pain and pleasure at things which are similar [*homoiois*] is nearly the same as that of feeling pain or pleasure at the real things. For example, if someone takes pleasure viewing the likeness [*eikōn*] of something for no other reason than because of its shape, his view of the thing of which it is a likeness will necessarily be pleasant also.

¹³ Sorabji's translation, *Aristotle on Memory*.

¹⁴ See Sorabji *ad loc.* and 5–7.

This passage has been thought to contradict *Poetics* 4.¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that the *Politics* passage is not a statement of a general rule that we derive the same pain or pleasure from imitations and from originals. What it says is that we react in the same way to an original and to an imitation only if we view the imitation *qua* thing in its own right, having a certain shape, and not *qua* likeness: 'If someone takes pleasure viewing the *eikōn* of something for no other reason than because of its shape', which is 'similar' to the shape of the original, both will give the same pleasure. The *Politics* passage refers to the kind of pleasure people get who view an imitation only as a thing in its own right. The *Poetics* passage, on the other hand, distinguishes this pleasure from that of grasping a relationship.

While the example given in the *Politics* passage is one of feeling pleasure, the passage also states that the same account can be given of feeling pain. Presumably, then, if we feel pleasure when we view a beautiful shape as a thing in its own right, we will feel pain while viewing an ugly shape as a thing in its own right. This is surely the case of those in *Poetics* 4 who view likenesses of shapes that give pain but who do not view them *qua* likenesses. They will feel pain in viewing an ugly shape, but they might also feel pleasure in viewing a beautiful colour. If, moreover, they also view the imitations as artifacts, they may feel pleasure in viewing their workmanship. Those who view them *qua* imitations, however, have all three responses. They will, then, like those who view imitations as things in themselves, experience pleasure in viewing the colour and workmanship and pain in viewing ugly shapes. In addition, however, they will have the pleasure of grasping a relationship.

This account of responses to the visual arts also helps to account for responses to tragedies. A tragedy *qua* likeness, (3), is a representation of people weeping, doing certain actions, speaking, etc. *Qua* thing in itself (2), it is people weeping, and not actors making sobbing noises and wiping their eyes. The play also uses costumes, masks, scene painting, dance steps, histrionic skills, etc. Each of these latter can be seen in two ways: (a) as representing a part of what the play as a whole imitates, or as contributing to the imitation as a whole, and (b) as an artifact that does not represent. Thus, what is worn by the person on the stage is both (a) a costume representing Oedipus' robe, and (b) clothes. To see the play *qua* artifact, then, is to view what is worn *qua* clothes; to see the play *qua* likeness requires us to view it as a costume. All three responses are, then, applicable to tragedy. We can view the tragedy:

(1) *qua* artifact that does not represent anything (*qua* clothes and not *qua* costumes);

(2) *qua* people weeping, doing certain actions, etc.;

(3) *qua* likeness, as actors representing people weeping, etc.

In the third case we will get the pleasure of grasping a relationship. We cannot see the play as a likeness, however, unless we first realise that it is an artifact and see it as people weeping. When we see it as people weeping we will have the painful reactions of pity and fear.

Aristotle tells us that the good tragedian must 'construct his *mythos* [plot] so that the hearer of the things that come about [*pragmata*] should shudder and feel pity at these happenings. This is what one would experience at hearing the *mythos* of the *Oedipus*' (*Po.* 14.1453b4–7). The pity and fear are reactions to the imitation (the *pragmata* or *systasis pragmatōn*) and not to that of which it is the imitation (the *praxis*), though this also is pitiable and fearful. It is not, for example, our memory of real-life

¹⁵ See, for example, L. Golden, 'The Purgation Theory of Catharsis', *JAC* 31 (1973), 475–6.

events we have seen that causes pity and fear but the imitation itself. Aristotle is very explicit about this: the fearful and pitiable [*to phoberon kai eleeinon*] should come 'from the structure of events itself' (*γίγνεσθαι... ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων*: 14.1453b1–2) and the 'structure of events' is the 'plot' (*mythos*), which is not the action (the thing imitated), but the 'imitation of the action' (6.1450a3–5).¹⁶ This emotional reaction does not result from or depend on grasping a relationship between likeness and original. Nor is it easy to see how it could result from viewing the tragedy as artifact. It is instead a result of the second response: viewing the tragedy as people weeping.

Pity and fear, then, are painful emotions analogous to those we would experience in viewing ugly shapes in a painting. They are automatic responses of the same kind as those we have in real life: pain at seeing someone weeping. Both in real life and at the theatre, of course, our pain might be prevented by various factors. If we learn that the real-life person is only pretending to be weeping, we may cease to see him/her as a person weeping and instead see him/her as someone doing something very different: pretending to be weeping. At the theatre also we might see the play as (2), people pretending to weep. This is not, however, the same thing as seeing a play as (3), a likeness of people weeping. It might, for example, be a preliminary to seeing the play as a likeness of people pretending to weep.

It is now clear how the same tragedy can give both pleasure and pain. Imitations can be viewed in three different ways, two of which, (1) and (3), will always give pleasure, and one of which (2) can give either pleasure or pain. Beautiful shapes and pleasant situations give pleasure, in imitations as in real life, and ugly shapes and painful situations give pain. Thus, to an audience that sees a play correctly – as a likeness of people weeping – the play will give pain, *qua* people weeping, and pleasure, *qua* likeness.

In order to understand more clearly how pity and fear are essential to the production of tragic pleasure we must examine in more detail Aristotle's psychology of pity and fear. Aristotle says relatively little about pity in the psychological works. We will therefore first examine his views on fear and then consider to what extent pity is similar.

At *De Anima* 432b29–433a1 Aristotle describes a particular kind of response to fearful or pleasant objects:

Even when the mind *does* think of a practical object, it does not at once give orders to avoid or pursue. For instance, it often thinks of something that provokes fear or pleasure, but does not give the command to be afraid – though the heart moves, or if it is a case of pleasure, some other part.¹⁷

This statement, interpreted in the light of other passages in Aristotle's psychological works, describes a response of which aesthetic emotion is a paradigmatic example.

De Motu Animalium 703b4–8 also discusses movements of the heart in the absence of a 'command':

[Animals] also display involuntary movements in some of their parts... By involuntary I mean such movements as those of the heart and the penis; for often these are moved when something appears, but without the command of thought. (Nussbaum's translation)

¹⁶ On the distinction between *praxis* and *mythos* (= *systasis pragmatōn*) see J. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1962), 24–5. The *pragmata* in this passage and at 1453b13–14 should not be confused with *praxis*, the action imitated, but are equivalent to the *systasis pragmatōn*, the *mythos*. For this point, and a good discussion of some of the other problems presented by this passage, see Else, 408–12.

¹⁷ Translation of D. J. Furley, 'Aristotle on the Voluntary', rpt. in *Articles on Aristotle*, J. Barnes, M. Schofield, R. Sorabji, eds. (New York, 1977), ii. 57.

In these two passages Aristotle distinguishes automatic physiological reactions to objects of pursuit or avoidance (a pounding of the heart at the appearance of an enemy or an erection at the appearance of a sexual object) from movements that are voluntary and occur at the 'command of thought'.

The distinction is explained lucidly by Furley:

Both the brave man's and the coward's heart beats faster when the enemy's tanks begin to move forward, but only the coward deserts his post on the gun. Why? The heartbeat is apparently caused by a natural sequence of changes: the chill of fear is an inevitable result of seeing the enemy's tanks, and the chill causes some physical part to contract, and this causes the heart to thump... the terrifying mental image necessarily produces a primary reaction – the chill which makes the heart jump, but the secondary reaction, 'being afraid', depends on the 'command' given by the mind.... Thus the brave man cannot avoid the primary chill of fear at the sight of danger; but *because of his training* he has no further painful feeling.¹⁸

Numerous passages in Aristotle's biological and psychological works state that fear produces chilling in the region of the heart, which in turn produces a pounding of the heart, trembling and pallor.¹⁹ Unfortunately, however, Aristotle does not give a clear account of the physiological differences between these involuntary reactions and the voluntary reactions, also associated with chilling, that lead to flight.²⁰ The details of the psychological differences are also unclear.²¹ However, Aristotle does definitely hold that desire [*orexis*], and in most cases a judgement of some sort, is necessary to the voluntary reactions. For example, he states in *De Anima* 1 that emotions, *pathē*, are 'form in matter' [*logoi enyloi*]. Anger, he explains, is 'a certain movement of a certain body... because of something and for the sake of something'. It has a 'matter' which is 'a boiling of the blood or heat around the heart', and a 'form' which is 'a desire [*orexis*] to give pain in return' (403a25–b1). Aristotle does not specify the 'form' of fear in this passage. In *Rhet.* 2.5.1382a21–2, however, he defines fear as 'a certain pain or disturbance at the appearance of an approaching destructive or painful evil'. The desire that characterises fear could only be a desire to seek safety in flight.²² The person who is *afraid* in the technical *De Anima* 1 sense is, then, someone who not only has certain physiological reactions but also has a desire to flee, dependent on the 'command' of the mind. The commands of the mind are emotions, from which actions (flight) may or may not result. The coward flees; the continent man is afraid

¹⁸ Furley, 222–3. See also the excellent commentary of Nussbaum, 382–3.

¹⁹ Nussbaum, 350 and 355, cites *Resp.* 479b19ff. and 480a13ff., *Prob.* 888a12ff. and 902b37–9, *PA* 650b27ff., 679a25–6, 692a23–4. See also the numerous examples given by Flashar, and his discussions.

²⁰ This point is discussed by Furley, 222 and Nussbaum, 155–6. The problem cannot be solved without a full investigation of Aristotle's views on the body–soul relationship, a topic well beyond the scope of this paper. For bibliography and discussions see Nussbaum, 143–64; W. F. R. Hardie, 'Aristotle on the Soul and Body', *PQ* 14 (1964), 53–72; R. Sorabji, 'Body and Soul in Aristotle', *Philosophy* 49 (1974), 63–89; H. M. Robinson, 'Mind and Body in Aristotle', *CQ* 28 (1978), 105–24.

²¹ Again, I cannot deal fully here with many of the details of Aristotle's psychology of emotion. For some recent discussions see D. J. Allan, 'Aristotle's Account of the Origin of Moral Principles', rpt. in *Articles on Aristotle*, ii, 72–8; W. Fortenbaugh, 'Aristotle's *Rhetoric* on Emotions', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 52 (1970), 40–70, and his *Aristotle on Emotion* (London, 1975); L. Kosman, 'Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics', in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980), 103–16; E. Garver, 'The Meaning of *ΘΡΑΥΣ* in Aristotle's *Ethics*', *CP* 77 (1982), 228–33; S. Leighton, 'Aristotle and the Emotions', *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 144–74.

²² Aristotle does not explicitly state that flight is the aim of fear. Although, as Leighton points out, 149, this raises some interesting questions, it does not, I believe, create difficulties for my interpretation.

but stands his ground (*DA* 433a 6–8). The brave man experiences chill and pounding of the heart but is not ‘afraid’ in this technical sense.

This analysis can help us to understand the aesthetic situation. At the theatre the best kind of audience is in some respects like the brave man in the presence of an enemy. They perceive objects as frightening and experience an automatic physiological response, but their minds do not give the command to be afraid. Of course the analogy does not hold in all respects. The brave man, unlike the theatre audience, is in a situation that requires some practical action (standing one’s ground) for which he can be praised, and in which he must correctly judge that he is in the presence of danger.

In the case of the best kind of audience, and the brave man, physiology is separate from psychology. This is not true of other kinds of audience. Young children might, like the coward, actually run away from a monster in a horror film. Or, like the continent man, they might want to run away, but remain so they will not be laughed at.

Aristotle comes closest to describing the aesthetic case in *De Anima* 3.427b 21–4:

When we judge [*doxazomen*] that something is terrible or frightening, we at once have the corresponding emotions [*sympaschomen*], and similarly if we judge that something is cheering. But with respect to *phantasiai* we are just as if we were viewing terrible or cheering things in a picture.

Aristotle does not explicitly tell us either the meaning of *sympaschomen* or the reaction to which it is opposed. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that he is drawing a contrast similar to the one made at *De Anima* 432b 29ff. between the ‘command to be afraid’ and the involuntary movements of the heart. *Phantasia*²³ and picture-viewing produce the primary reactions of chill and pounding heart, while *doxa* produces the secondary reactions that constitute the *pathos* of fear: physiological reactions plus desire. Other passages support this view. Thus, the *De Motu Animalium* tells us that *phantasia* produces heating and chilling:

Of necessity the thought and *phantasia* of these [*sc.* the objects of pursuit or avoidance] are accompanied by a heating and chilling (*DMA* 701b 34–5).

Alteration is caused by *phantasiai* and sense-perceptions and ideas. For sense-perceptions are at once a kind of alteration and *phantasia* and thinking have the power of the actual things. For it turns out that the form conceived of the... pleasant or fearful is like the actual thing. That is why we shudder and are frightened just thinking of something (*DMA* 701b 16–22: Nussbaum’s translations).

These primary, involuntary physiological reactions caused by *phantasia* can be succeeded by the secondary reactions of the *pathos* in the technical sense when the mind ‘commands’ or ‘asserts’:

For the thinking soul *phantasmata* have the same function as objects of sense-perception. When it asserts or denies good or bad, it avoids or pursues (*De Anima* 431a 14–17).

Aristotle’s psychological works, then, support the view that *De Anima* 427b 21ff. means that when we see imitations of terrible things we experience chill and pounding of the heart without a command to be afraid. The other view, going back to Themistius, that we experience *no* reactions,²⁴ not only does not take these other

²³ *Phantasia* is another controversial topic I cannot fully investigate here. See the discussions of J. Freudenthal, *Über den Begriff des Wortes φαντασία bei Aristoteles* (Göttingen, 1863); Nussbaum, 221–69, with her bibliography; G. Watson, ‘φαντασία in Aristotle, *De Anima* 3,3’, *CQ* 32 (1982), 100–13. In what follows I do not mean to assume that *phantasia* is a sort of picture-viewing, but merely to point out some parallels between the two activities.

²⁴ ‘We do not experience the corresponding emotions at all, but like those contemplating things drawn in pictures, we do not experience any reactions at all [*paschomen ouden*]’: Themistii *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, ed. R. Heinze (Berlin, 1899), p. 89, 18–19. The

passages into account; it also fails to make good sense of the fact that Aristotle writes of 'those viewing terrible or cheering things'. If he means that we view frightening things in a picture but do not view them *qua* frightening, he has expressed himself very badly. It is true that, just as we may see or think of an image of a triangle of a particular size but think of it not as having a size (*De Memoria* 449b31ff.), so we may think of or see an image of something that happens to be frightening (a lion) but focus only on its non-frightening aspects (a four-footed animal). But we can hardly have an image of something under the description 'frightening' without thinking of it as frightening. And what could it mean to say that we think of something as frightening without experiencing any reaction associated with fear?²⁵ The other view is less problematic.

This analysis of Aristotle's views on fear, then, leads us to see that the reactions we experience when viewing fearful things in aesthetic situations are like those we experience in a certain kind of real-life situation. We experience the same involuntary responses – chill and pounding of the heart – that we do in real-life situations. If these disturbances are painful in real life, they are also painful in aesthetic situations. They may be less intense, and therefore less painful, in aesthetic situations, but they are not different in kind. In aesthetic situations, however, we do not, if we are the best kind of audience, have a 'command to be afraid', so that we do not seek safety in flight. This response also is not peculiar to aesthetic situations, but occurs in many real-life situations, such as that of a brave man facing an enemy. Strictly speaking, in the terms of *De Anima* 1, neither the brave man nor the theatre-goer is 'afraid', for neither has the desire to flee. Aristotle does not always use technical psychological terminology, however, as when he states in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the brave man feels fear, and in the *Poetics* when he attributes fear to the audience in a theatre.

This analysis of 'aesthetic' fear is plausible. We do in fact weep and feel our hearts pounding when we are in aesthetic situations and these physiological responses do not appear to us to differ from those we experience in real-life situations. Modern psychological studies have shown that people asked to imagine frightening situations report feeling fear and experience increased heart rates and other physiological reactions, without, of course, actually running away. This passage from Peter Lang's 1980 study might almost be a translation into modern scientific terminology of *De Anima* 432b29ff.:

...it becomes appropriate to define an image as emotional only if its conceptual network includes response propositions from the three systems which are normally part of an affective reaction. ... These are verbal expressions (e.g. 'I hate you', 'I feel anxious'), overt motor acts (e.g. avoidance, attack, performance deficits), and patterns of visceral organ activity and somatomotor tonus. The imagery context normally restricts both overt verbal expression and gross motor behavior. However, the motor sub-program, as revealed by the pattern of somato-visceral activity, can be monitored during imagery using contemporary bio-electric recording techniques.²⁶

passage is cited with approval by Hicks, *ad DA* 427b23, who states that those viewing pictures are 'wholly unaffected'. These statements are especially difficult to account for since both Hicks and Themistius connect *DA* 427b21ff. with *DA* 432b28.

²⁵ Norman Dahl has called my attention to some interesting complications. First, I might think of something as frightening without experiencing any reaction associated with fear if I judge that something threatens my safety without becoming emotionally aroused. (I know that smoking is hazardous to my health, but I continue to smoke without fear.) However, this is a special case that does not fit Aristotle's examples discussed above. A second complication arises when our fear is aroused by the object of which a picture is a likeness. This response depends on viewing the imitation *qua* likeness and differs from the automatic physiological reactions to the picture *qua* thing in its own right with which Aristotle is concerned in our examples, and in the aesthetic case.

²⁶ P. Lang *et al.*, 'Emotional Imagery: Conceptual Structure and Pattern of Somato-Visceral

Aristotle's psychological works are less helpful for an understanding of aesthetic pity than for an understanding of fear. It is uncertain how Aristotle would distinguish involuntary from voluntary movements in the case of pity. Certain physiological reactions are associated with pity, as others are with fear: pity involves wailing and weeping.²⁷ These reactions, however, are not involuntary and automatic in the same way as those associated with fear. Pity, in Greek thought, is an essentially human emotion, dependent on an awareness of the common human lot; the easy-living gods are usually exempt from suffering and pity, and it is not extended to or felt by animals.²⁸ Nevertheless, these reactions are involuntary in some sense, for we do not simply decide to weep when we see someone suffering (though of course we may suppress the actual tears or decide to let them flow). The 'voluntary' movements that might be associated with pity are also unclear, for the role of desire seems to be different in the two emotions. If fear necessarily involves a desire to seek safety, and cannot exist where there is no possibility of safety (*Rhet.* 2.5.1383a 5–8), we often feel pity for people in completely hopeless situations, for example for those who suffer death or old age.²⁹

On the other hand, these very differences make aesthetic pity much less in need of explanation than fear. If pity in real life need not involve a desire to aid someone, we do not need to explain why we do not feel the desire to rush onto the stage and prevent the tragedy from occurring. All that needs explaining in the case of pity is how it contributes to aesthetic pleasure. Here, the same account can apply to both pity and fear, for pity, like fear, involves involuntary, painful physiological reactions (weeping) that are necessary in some way to the production of aesthetic pleasure. Thus, the interpretation outlined above can be applied to pity as well as to fear.

We are at last in a position to account for the role of pity and fear in producing tragic pleasure. In watching a tragedy as an imitation we have, as we have seen, three cognitive responses. We can view the tragedy (1) *qua* artifact that does not represent anything; (2) *qua* people weeping; and (3) *qua* likeness, grasping a relationship between the imitation and something else of which it is the likeness, by focusing on those features of the imitation that make it similar to the original. The emotions play an essential role in these responses. While seeing a tragedy we experience certain involuntary physiological reactions: pounding heart, chill, shuddering, weeping. These

Response', *Psychophysiology* 17 (1980), 180. Lang's 'bio-informational theory of emotional imagery' is extremely interesting in connection with Aristotle's views about images. See also his 'Imagery in Therapy: An Information Processing Analysis of Fear', *Behavior Therapy* 8 (1977), 862–86; 'Anxiety: Toward a Psychophysiological Definition', in *Psychiatric Diagnosis: Exploration of Biological Predictors*, H. Akiskal and W. Webb, eds. (New York, 1978), 365–89; 'A Bio-Informational Theory of Emotional Imagery', *Psychophysiology* 16 (1979), 495–512; 'Cognition in Emotion: Concept and Action', forthcoming in *Emotion, Cognition, and Behavior*, C. Izard, J. Kagan, R. Zajonc, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press).

²⁷ *Rhet.* 2.8.1386a 21 mentions weeping as a symptom of pity. Cf. the examples given by Schadewaldt, 142 n. 2: *Rhet.* 2.13.1390a 19, *HA* 608b 8, *Physics* 808a 23. According to Flashar, weeping, the symptom of pity, is caused, in Greek medical theory, by excess moisture (see esp. p. 36), and Aristotle, for example at *HA* 608a 13, also connects pity with moisture (p. 38).

²⁸ Pohlenz, esp. p. 57. An exception is *HA* 631a 19, which states that animals feel pity, or at least something 'like' [*hoion*] pity. This exception is noted by W. Fortenbaugh, 'Aristotle: Animals, Emotion, and Moral Virtue', *Arethusa* 4 (1971), 153.

²⁹ *Rhet.* 2.8.1386a 7–9. This distinction between pity and fear is argued for by Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion*, 79–83. See further, on the distinction between 'practical' and 'non-practical' emotions, his 'Aristotle on the Questionable Mean-Dispositions', *TAPA* 99 (1968), 203–31. For a different view, see Leighton, 145 and 169 n. 4, who writes that though Aristotle does not explicitly state the aim of emotions like pity and indignation, 'it is part of the larger concept of these emotions'.

are painful reactions of the same kind as those we experience in real-life situations, and they are reactions to the tragedy *qua* people weeping and not *qua* likeness of something pitiable and fearful. We weep while viewing Oedipus with his eyes put out because we see what appears to us to be a man in pain and weeping. We also view the tragedy *qua* artifact and realise that we are not in a situation in which we desire to flee or give aid. Finally, *because* we shudder and weep at the tragedy *qua* people weeping, we realise that it is an imitation of a pitiable and fearful event: that *this* plot is an imitation of *that* event. This pleasurable recognition requires us to focus on those features of the imitation that make it similar to the original, that is, on what is pitiable and fearful. In this way, painful pity and fear and pleasurable learning that *this* is *that* reinforce one another, with a physically disturbing involuntary response resulting in a pleasurable intellectual activity which in turn heightens our awareness of what is pitiable and fearful.

But the account is not yet complete. If the sole contribution pity and fear made to tragic pleasure were mediation of recognition, tragedy would seem to afford less pleasure than comedy, which combines pleasurable emotions with pleasurable recognition.³⁰ Aristotle is not committed to this view, however. His writings imply that pity and fear make the *oikeia hēdonē* of tragedy greater than the pleasure belonging to the opposite form of poetic imitation.

Tragedy is defined as imitation of a *spoudaia praxis* (Po. 6.1449b24), and it is this quality that distinguishes tragedy from comedy. Whether *spoudaia* means 'noble' or 'serious' here, it clearly describes an important event, worthy of serious attention.³¹ All tragic *praxeis* concern a significant change in the human condition from good to bad fortune or vice versa (7.1451a13–14). Good tragedies also contain *anagnōrisis*, 'recognition', which is a change involving the two greatest forces in the soul and in society: *philia*, 'love', and *echthra*, 'hate'³² (11.1452a29–31). Tragedy, in short, deals with the most serious and important aspects of human life: change, mortality, the constant threat of pain and death. It concerns events that arouse pity and fear. Thus, the tragic emotions are essentially connected with the object imitated by tragedy, the *spoudaia praxis*. Even if Aristotle did not say so, we might expect him to believe that contemplation of this object, which engages our emotions and intellect so deeply, affords more pleasure than contemplation of less significant matters. But Aristotle does explicitly state that perception or contemplation of an object most worthy of attention (*spoudaiotaton*) affords most pleasure (EN 10.4.1174b20–3). For this reason, recognition of a fearful or pitiable object affords more pleasure than recognition of a comic object.

This analysis of the tragic response can account for Aristotle's statement at *Poetics* 14.1453b12–13 that 'the poet must produce the pleasure that comes from pity and fear by means of imitation'. It can explain why we feel pleasure at the theatre without resorting to a theory of special aesthetic emotions or to speculations about *catharsis*, and it is based on what Aristotle himself says in his psychological works. By purging

³⁰ I am grateful to the anonymous referee of *C.Q.* for bringing this problem to my attention.

³¹ 'Serious' is the most common translation, given, for example, by Else, Butcher and Bywater. For a defence of the translation 'noble' and bibliography on this subject see L. Golden, 'Is Tragedy the "Imitation of a Serious Action"?', *GRBS* 6 (1965), 283–9. Golden explicitly notes (p. 288) that both his translation and the link between tragedy and pity and fear imply the seriousness of tragedy.

³² This point remains the same if we follow Else (pp. 343 and 349–51) in translating 'blood relationship' and 'enmity'.

some of the mysteries and paradoxes of the *Poetics*, this interpretation can help to reveal its keen psychological insights.³³

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