

OSU SYMPOSIUM:
The *Poetics* in Its Aristotelian Context

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Abstracts

1) Capra, A. (Università di Milano)

Aristotle and the anatomy of “myth”

This paper takes its cue from the very question that lies at the heart of the conference, namely the scholarly failure to look at the *Poetics* as part of Aristotle’s philosophy. The “isolation” of the *Poetics* is surely the product of its later tradition as a normative handbook for would-be poets, but it also depends on a number of internal features: unlike elsewhere in Aristotle, references to other works tend to be either absent or – at best – deeply ambiguous, as in the notorious case of *katharsis*. At 6.1449b28 *katharsis* is “brought about” by tragedy, something that is unparalleled in Aristotle. However, according to another interpretation of the verb *perainein*, *katharsis* is “completed” by tragedy, which according to Pierluigi Donini refers back to musical *katharsis* as described in the *Politics*, where Aristotle famously refers to the *Poetics* (8.7). In this example and elsewhere, interpretations differ bewilderingly: the mention of catharsis in the *Politics* has been used both to emphasise and to deny the “isolation” of the *Poetics*.

Despite the unusual lack of direct links to other works or to Aristotle’s philosophical project, ch. 6, with its division of tragedy into six parts, offers interesting indications that may help to place the *Poetics* within Aristotle’s encyclopaedia. *Ethos* has an obvious connection with *ethics*, whereas *dianoia*, as expressed in speech, is either *political* or *rhetorical* (τῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ ῥητορικῆς ἔργον, and cf. 19.1456a35, with its exceptionally unequivocal reference to the *Rhetoric*). The second and third most important parts of tragedy (δεύτερον and τρίτον), then, seem to suggest that *Poetics* is connected with *Rhetoric*, *Politics* and the *Ethics*, which, by and large, can be construed as the area of “humanities” within Aristotle’s encyclopaedia. Unsurprisingly, scholars have often emphasised the connections within this “humanistic” set of works, and yet it should be noted that the most important part of tragedy, its ἀρχή, is of course *mythos*, a word that Aristotle uses in an unprecedented, quasi-narratological sense. How can one construe *mythos* within Aristotle’s philosophy? I will survey a number of explicit and implicit parallels between the examination of plays, seen as non-performative or “dead” objects, and the observation of dead bodies of animals in Aristotle’s biology. This, I will argue, suggests that *mythos* is somehow the equivalent of bodily structure in Aristotle’s zoological works. As has been argued for other areas of Aristotle’s philosophy, here, too, the study of biology may have influenced Aristotle’s approach to less “scientific” areas. This possibly led Aristotle to strain the meaning of *mythos*, although traces of an older meaning can be detected at the very beginning of the *Poetics*. I will conclude by arguing that Aristotle’s *incipit* points to a passage from Plato’s *Phaedo*, featuring a miniature poetics. The following chapters, however, take leave of old myth and, through Aristotle’s innovative notion of *mythos*, firmly place poetics in a “scientific”, quasi-biological context. The *Poetics*, then, can be construed as Aristotle’s anatomy of tragedy.

2) Carli, S. (Xavier University)

Historia in Aristotle’s Philosophy

This paper offers an interpretation of Aristotle's remarks on *historia* in the *Poetics*. It suggests that, contrary to a widely accepted view, he does not understand history as a discipline that deals only with particulars and is thus wholly separated from poetry.

In the larger context of Aristotle's philosophy *historia* is understood as the preliminary stage of inquiry that prepares the ground for the investigation of the causes and principles. Specifically, its aim is to identify correlations between the attributes of the objects of a given field of study so as to make possible the formulation of hypotheses about scientifically significant kinds (*HA* 1.6.491a7-14). This theoretically motivated organization of the phenomena is an organic component of all fields of inquiry, including the philosophy of human affairs, which, among other things, relies on works of history to elaborate explanatory hypotheses (*Rhet.* 1.4.1360a34-7; *EE* 7.2.1236b9). This suggests that Aristotle regards works such as Herodotus' *Historiae* as providing bodies of data that are sufficiently orderly and organized to be of use in the investigation of causes, rather than collections of accidentally related events. The *Poetics* corroborates this hypothesis, as it indicates that the function of the historian is to report actual events (*ta genomena*) that do display causal connections (*Poet.* 9.1451b32-33; 23.1459a21-30), although they are not as orderly as the events imitated in works of poetry, which "speaks" (*legei*) not of what happens but of "events as they might happen (*hoia an genoito*) or are possible according to probability or necessity" (*Poet.* 9.1451a36-8). While history is for this reason less philosophical than *poiêtikê*, the facts that it brings to light causal relations of events whenever possible supports the conclusion that it has some connection with universality and philosophy.

3) Cinaglia, V. (King's College, London)

The Ethical Context of Poetics 5: A Possible Interpretation of Comic Hamartēma

This paper explores the concept of comic error in the context of Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Nichomachean Ethics*. In his commentary on the *Poetics* Else makes the comic *hamartēma* mentioned in *Poetics* 5, 1449a33-34, a counterpart of the tragic *hamartia* described in *Poetics* 13, 1453a8-12, others, like Lucas, Janko and Halliwell distinguish the two concepts. After having briefly discussed Aristotle's view on *hamartia* with respect to tragedy, this paper suggests a further possible interpretation of comic *hamartēma*. According to Aristotle, comedy is an imitation of people who are inferior (*phauloteroi*), not because of an unqualified vice (*kakia*) but because they present that share of the shameful that arouse laughter (*to geloion*; *Poet.* 5, 1449a32-34): their *hamartēma* should not be painful and destructive but laughable (*Poet.* 5, 1449a34-36). In this paper I suggest that comic *hamartēma* in *Poetics* 5 is intended mainly as an ethical mistake and that this kind of ethical mistake shares analogies with the kind of mistakes typical of the *akrates* (*EN.* 7.5-7), that is, someone who, being not completely wicked nor completely virtuous, fails to reason and act adequately being momentarily overpowered by his temper, desires and emotions. Contrary to the kind of error made by tragic figures, which brings undeserved suffering and arouse pity and fear, the mistake of the *akrates* can be, to some extent, related with the idea of comic *hamartēma* in the following respects: i) is not performed out of a completely evil character – it does not reflect an unqualified vice (*EN* 7. 4-6); ii) it is more likely that such kind of error will resolve into an happy ending because it is likely (*eikos*; *Poet.* 9, 1451b9-10) that characters as such (*akrates*) finally understand what they did wrong (because they know potentially what it is right to do) and, finally, iii) its ethical implications are easily recognisable by the audience that, from outside the stage, is able to understand clearly what is inappropriate, ridiculous (and should be avoided) in the characters' actions.

4) Cirillo, T. (University of Southern California)

Taxonomic Flexibility in the Poetics: Metaphor, Genos, and Eidos

“Excellence in diction” ensures that a poet’s work will not only achieve clarity, but that it will also avoid banality. The proper use of metaphor contributes to this excellence. In the *Poetics* Aristotle defines *metaphor* as “the transference of a strange word” (*onomatos allotriou epiphora*), meaning the transference of a word from one context to another or a transference of meaning from one term to another. Among Aristotle’s four types of metaphor (*genos-to-eidos*, *eidos-to-genos*, *eidos-to-eidos*, and analogical metaphor) the manner of transference varies significantly. On the one hand, the transference in *genos-to-eidos* and *eidos-to-genos* figures of speech occurs within a single domain (i.e. the superordinate *genos*) and suggests vertical movement within a hierarchy. On the other, *eidos-to-eidos* and analogical metaphors operate via systems of lateral substitution and comparison that often transgress *genos*/domain boundaries and are based on perceived, acknowledged, or demonstrable similarities. All types of metaphor described in the *Poetics* by Aristotle appear to be modeled on the genus-species system of taxonomic classification developed in the *Categories*. The utilization of an organized system such as taxonomic categorization in the composition of metaphors contributes to the clarity that excellence in poetic diction requires, but in the *Poetics* Aristotle imparts greater flexibility to this logical schema in order to suit the creative and dramatic needs of poetry and to avoid banality.

In particular, *genos-to-eidos* and *eidos-to-genos* figures of speech mimic the single-domain processes of predication and categorization found in the *Categories*. In the *Categories*, a *genos* can be predicated of an *eidos* (*Cat.*1b21ff., an example of “top-down” predication) in the same way that a word representative of a *genos* can be substituted for one representative of a subordinate *eidos* per Aristotle’s description of metaphors in which the transference of a word from *genos* to *eidos* occurs. Likewise, the “more familiar” and “more appropriate” (*Cat.*2b8-14) identification of things by their *eidos* (as opposed to their *genos*) anticipates the *eidos-to-genos* figures of speech described in the *Poetics*, in which a specific word is used in a more general context. In the *Categories*, however, “upward” movement from *eidos* to *genos* is not permitted. One cannot predicate *eidē* of a *genos* (an example of this based on the *Categories* would be if one were to say “man” of “animal,” when in fact the word “man” does not apply to all animals, whereas “animal” is predicable of all men). Categorical predication works in only one direction (top-down, *genos* of/to *eidos*), but in the composition of metaphors the movement and transference of words and meanings occurs laterally, top-down, and bottom-up. The taxonomic backdrop of metaphors provides these figures of speech with a logical clarity that make them intelligible at a cognitive level, yet at the same time the relaxation of movement through the classificatory hierarchy enables the composition of creative and vivid expressions that bring the action of the drama before the eyes of the audience.

5) Collins, J. (University of Southern California)

Performer Wisdom and Theoretical Philosophy

The *Poetics* focuses largely on the lessons learned not by performers but by spectators and auditors. In fact, we learn that the power or capacity of tragedy remains even when the elements of spectacle—the movements of actors (1462a10), the performance event, the masks and costumes, and the actors themselves (50b15-20)—have been removed. Even without spectacle, a tragic script possesses enough vividness (τὸ ἐναργὲς) to achieve its emotional effect on auditors.

A script successfully achieves its audience-centered goals through plot and structure of events (50a21). The mimesis of character (though it may be consequential to the emotional and physical disposition of a *performer*) is included by the poet merely for the sake of a character's actions which contribute to plot—the potent means of emotional effect on an audience (50a19-34).

However, Aristotle elsewhere argues that young people should learn and participate in music in order to become good spectators and judges of things that are fine later in life (*Pol.*VIII.6, 1340b35-9). Similarly, a young person should learn to draw and paint not in order that he might do well at purchasing furniture, but rather “because it makes him a θεωρητικὸν of the beauty of bodies” (VIII.3.1338b1-2). Music, drawing, and gymnastics educate habit before reason, experience before understanding, the body before the mind, in order that reason and mind might later in leisure engage in contemplative and critical activities. Acquiring physical discipline and endurance, skill in movement, in dance and song somehow lead later to theoretical discipline, noetic skill, and the capacity to recognize beauty and excellence. Participating in certain kinds of performance somehow makes for good contemplation though these activities seem to be diametrically opposed in nature and effect.

I am curious about this relationship between juvenile performer wisdom and adult spectator wisdom. It seems that engaging in certain kinds of performance can serve as a preparation—perhaps even a necessary preparation—for theoretical philosophy. The *Poetics* provides some of the aesthetic and ethical criteria for good habit formation. I am, of course, not the first to explore these connections. But rather than focusing on the treatises that explore the nature of theoretical philosophy and higher noetic functions (a common top-down model), I propose to use the *Poetics* together with psychological accounts from *de Anima*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics VIII* to determine first the effects of musical performance on young performers, and then the ways in which performer wisdom might prepare the way for theoretical wisdom.

6) Destrée, P. (Université Catholique de Louvain)

Can We Avoid Having a Polis in Aristotle's Poetics?

This paper proposes challenging both E. Hall's 'Is there a polis in Aristotle's *Poetics*?' (In: M. Silk (ed), *Tragedy and the Tragic*, OUP 1995) and Malcolm Heath's 'Should there have been a polis in Aristotle's *Poetics*?' (*Classical Quarterly* 59, 2009). Very roughly, Hall argues that the absence of any reference to the Athenian polis and its democratic institutions in the *Poetics* is a clear indication (in addition to its silence about the material organization of the competitions and festivals) that Aristotle wanted to 'depoliticize' (this is my word) tragedy both in its political meaning and in its anchorage in Athenian civic life. Against Hall's rather negative approach, Heath claims that in fact, poetry being in Aristotle's eyes a universal and natural phenomenon, there is no need for any particular polis and its institutions in the *Poetics*. Even if I do accept Hall's and Heath's view that Aristotle is to be considered as a philosopher approaching poetry from (what we would call) an aesthetical and literary perspective who is therefore not interested in the importance of the Athenian polis, I want to contend that politics in an Aristotelian sense is at the very core of his interpretation of tragedy. For when he repeatedly claims that kinship is, or rather *should* be, what is at stake in tragedy, Aristotle is making a normative claim that goes far beyond what we know from extant tragedies (and also surviving fragments) which are concerned with such a philia

(and it is no coincidence that Aristotle does not consider plays like *Philoctetes*, or the *Trojan Women* as paradigmatic).

The reason why Aristotle gives this *philia* so central a role in his understanding of what a good tragedy should be like is certainly 'aesthetical' in part, as describing kin killing each other is certainly more powerful for evoking pity and fear. But since family and *philia* between its members play a central role in his politics (see esp book 2 and his vehement critique of Plato's proposal to abolish the family), it is difficult not to see a political claim here as well: (as we can see from *Oedipus*, who is presented as an *apolis* - the word also appears in A's *Politics*), one reason why tragedy was considered of such a great importance for Aristotle might be that it showed how a citizen (in the case of *Oedipus*, the first of all citizens!) can fall outside the realm of the polis that constitutes an essential part of a human being (as *politikon zōon*).

7) Gabor, O. (Methodist College)

The Plot As The *Psyche* of Tragedy

In chapter VI of the *Poetics*, Aristotle says that the plot “is the first principle and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy.” We know from the *De Anima* that *psyche* is a substance in the sense of form of a natural body having life potentially. So, Aristotle says, if an axe were a natural body, then *being an axe* “would have been its essence, and so its soul; if this disappeared from it, it would have ceased to be an axe, except in name” (412b12-15). Similarly, if a plot disappeared from a tragedy, this one would have ceased to be a tragedy. We may even say, using the analogy from the *De Anima*, that if a tragedy were a natural body, the plot (or being-a-tragedy) would be its soul.

In this paper, I want to explore the connection between plot and tragedy in the light of Aristotle's analysis of *psyche* as the first actuality of a natural body in the *De Anima*. The analysis is fruitful on at least two levels. On the one hand, it can explain Aristotle's emphasis on the plot as being that which a tragedy is essentially. That is, a plot is a-tragedy-being-what-it-is (similarly, a *psyche* is a-natural-body-being-the-kind-of-natural-body-it-is). On the other hand, such an analysis can show how tragedies can be appreciated differently on a particular level. As tragedies, one particular tragedy is no more of a tragedy than another particular tragedy. *Oedipus* is no more of a tragedy than *Iphigenia in Aulis*, as Achilles is no more of a man than Hector. Essentially, both tragedies (and both men) are identical. Each tragedy manifests that which makes each of them tragedies: a plot. However, if we analyze the way in which each plot is actualized by the tragedian within his work—that is, how the plot is connected with the other elements of a tragedy—we may determine their quality. Similarly, an individual human's quality is determined by analyzing the way in which he or she actualizes his or her being a human.

Such an approach may show that Aristotle's *Poetics* may be seen as the application of his metaphysical principles. It has been said that Aristotle's biological works are his metaphysics at work. The present paper argues that the *Poetics* itself has a similar function.

8) González, J. (Duke University)

Cognition, Recognition, and the Psychology of Aristotelian Mimêsis

In *Poetics* 4 Aristotle famously articulated the psychology of *mimêsis* with the coordinate verbs *μανθάνειν* and *συλλογίζεσθαι* in the immediate context of recognizing what a painting depicts: ... συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος. Accordingly, interpretations of this passage range between a minimalist reading delimited by the (allegedly) cognitively trivial *phantasia* of pictorial *mimêsis* and a maximalist

reading that lends such *phantasia* a strong cognitive role. Disagreements often turn on the specific meaning of the verbs, whether μάθάνειν means ‘to learn’ or ‘to understand’ (or a combination thereof) and συλλογίζεσθαι is used in its technical acceptance of ‘to infer [syllogistically]’. Of fundamental import is how one is to understand the predication οὗτος ἐκεῖνος, what degree of discursive reasoning Aristotle assumes not only for his example but also for the more general and abstract *mimêsis* of action that is the focus of his treatise.

I believe that we are not helped much by focusing on whether and how the exercise of reason described by μάθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι is ‘cognitively trivial’. Even pure *noêsis*, the highest order of cognition, might be thought ‘trivial’ *qua* non-discursive. To pursue the question anew I propose to shift the emphasis from the coordinate verbs to the participle θεωροῦντας under which they are ranged. Aristotle’s psychology weaves together the perceptual and the cognitive aspects of dramatic *mimêsis* in a manner that is best grasped with reference to *theôria*. *Theôria* is a capacious notion that embraces both the popular spectating of festival performances and the highly intellectualized reflection that occurs in the mind’s eye of the philosopher. It designates an intensified mode of (in)sight that naturally entails *phantasia* in its connection both to *aisthêsis* and to the psychology of memory and judgment. *Theôria* ties into the emotions not only at the ordinary level of representational *phantasia* but also in connection with the contemplation of unchanging truths that Aristotle holds as the ideal of the philosophical life. In the *diagôgê* of the educated citizen festival *theôria* aspires to the ideal of ‘contemplation’ as ‘pure actuality of thought’. Such ideal does not involve discursive *mathêsis* but merely entails re-cognition of already known universals and the assent of one’s judgment to their goodness and truth. The cognitive psychology of tragedy, so far as it is instrumental to this ideal of *theôria*, is essentially a psychology of re-cognition, syllogistic only in that it relates dramatic particulars to universal patterns and mathetic only in that it reactualizes and confirms settled understanding. Although the overall shape of Aristotelian tragic viewing aspires to the experience of ideal *theôria*, Aristotle’s treatment also endows the *mathêsis* of tragedy with aspects of discursive learning and rational inference for two reasons: first, because the immediate apprehension of ideal *theôria* is the culmination of a process of attentive comprehension; and, second, because Aristotle’s theory embraces not only the fully educated citizen but also the one whose education is perfectible by dramatic spectating.

9) Heath, M. (Leeds University) – keynote speech – preview of his forthcoming book.

Poetical Animals: Aristotle, Anthropology and Poetry

Reading the *Poetics* in a global Aristotelian context is demanded by the ambitious interdisciplinarity of his work, and obstructed by the breadth of his interests, the obscurity of his style, and the dense, interconnected and exploratory character of his thought. There are methodological issues, too. What kinds of connection should we be looking for? Where should we start looking? Aristotle’s advice would surely be: experience will teach us what works best (e.g. *Pol.* 8.6, 1341a37; *Poet.* 24, 1459b32). So the striking diversity of the approaches represented at this conference is to be applauded.

My own current project takes its cue from the beginning of *Poetics* 4, where Aristotle briefly sketches an explanation of the production and consumption of poetry as a unique and universal human behaviour with reference to comparative, developmental and cognitive psychology (1448b4-19). If an animal species is observed to have some characteristic behaviour, we need to ask why—which is really two questions: what are the traits that enable and motivate the behaviour? And what does that behaviour contribute to that animal’s characteristic way of life? So I am trying to develop an anthropological approach that starts with humans as Aristotelian

animals; works upwards to their unique cognitive capacities, the consequently complex structure of human motivation, and the unique form of social existence which follows from that; and draws out of that an account of what, for Aristotle, constitutes living well for humans. This will, I hope, lead (*inter alia*) to a clearer understanding of what *kinds* of answer Aristotle might give to question of the function(s) and value(s) of poetry.

10) Lockwood, T. (Quinnipiac University)

Is There a Poetics in Aristotle's Politics?

Over the last few decades, scholars have become increasingly sensitive to the political aspects of Attic tragedy—for instance, that the context of Athenian tragedies was a major civic religious festival, that many tragic plots resonated with Athenian founding myths, and that specific plays could be read as commentary on Athenian civic events for Athenian citizens. Aristotle's *Poetics*, by contrast, is silent about the political context and content of the tragedies which it analyzes, silent to the extent that Edith Hall has claimed that Aristotle “cuts the umbilical cord which has tied poetry so firmly to the city state” (Hall, 1996). As Heath has shown, Hall's view goes too far insofar as it fails to recognize the place of Aristotle's philosophical anthropology—including ethical and political norms—immanent within the *Poetics* (Heath, 2009). But even if Heath is correct to say that Hall's image of a “divorce” between tragedy and polis misconstrues their relationship, the *Poetics* nonetheless remains silent on the performative and political elements of Attic tragedy.

Some scholars have sought to raise a voice for Aristotle concerning the political nature of tragedy by examining the account of *paideia* in his *Politics*, especially its last two books (*Pol* VII-VIII). Thus, Salkever finds a response to Plato's criticisms of poetry in the *Poetics* cum *Politics* (Salkever, 1986); Lord finds a general theory of civic literary and tragic culture in the *Politics*' account of *mousikê* (Lord, 1982). But as Ford has recently shown, the account of *mousikê* in *Politics* VIII will not bear such weight (Ford, 2004). *Politics* VIII presents a narrow notion of *mousikê* which is concerned primarily with instrumental music (both accompanied and unaccompanied with words [Ford, 2004; see also Woerther, 2008, and Drefcinski, 2011]). At the end of the *Politics*, there is certainly a voice for a musical education with a public or community component, but it seems far less than a chorus in praise of public tragedy, much less an endorsement of the performative and religious practices upon the stage of democratic Athens.

Although one cannot find the political or performative elements of Attic tragedy in the *Politics*, the text nonetheless explicitly refers to the *Poetics* (1341b40) and provides an account of music as a mimetic art capable of producing a form of catharsis (Sörbom, 1994). Although an account of music as a mimetic art with political significance is not the same thing as ascribing political significance to the mimetic art of tragedy, nonetheless the account of music in the *Politics* provides parallels to the account of mimetic art in the *Poetics*. The more difficult question—with which my paper closes—is why, in the account of political *paideia* in his best regime, does Aristotle elevate his account of *mousikê* over the sort of “tragic” *mousikê* so familiar to Athenians and readers of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

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11) Munteanu, D. (Ohio State University)

*The Better, the Worse, and the Like:
Types of Characters in Aristotle*

Even at a superficial reading, the distinction between the noble (*spoudaioi*) characters of tragedy and the vulgar (*phauloi*) characters of comedy is memorable in the *Poetics*. But is the division always so simple? I intend to examine Aristotle's classification of characters, in accordance to genre, within the same genre, and in relationship to other forms of art (e.g. painting, music). The examples from the *Poetics* will be put in a broader perspective by looking at the *Politics* and *On the Poets*.

Artistic imitation of people in action regards various types of characters in the *Poetics* (1448a1-8): these can appear better, worse, or such as we are, just as painters represent them (Polygnotus superior people, Pauson inferior, and Dionysius like us). Poets too imitate in a similar way (Homer better, Cleophon like us, Hegemon of Thasos and Nicochares worse, 1448a9-15).¹ After an account of how arts, particularly music, represent character and emotions in the *Politics* (1340a), Aristotle notes that, though visual arts do not represent character directly but only give indications (*semeia*) of character through colors and forms (while melodies do contain in themselves such representations), the young should not look at the works of Pauson but at the works of Polygnotus. I am interested in exploring several matters here. (1) How exactly do arts

¹ Zanker, who pays close attention to this passage in an article (2000), argues that the epithets should be understood in connection with social class and *not* as moral. Generally, my focus on the topic will be quite different from Zanker's. Specifically, while I do not deny possible social implications, I believe that the broader Aristotelian context (especially *Politics*) suggests that the epithets ascribed to characters should be taken to have a moral connotation.

represent character and emotions? In the *Poetics* drama and painting were linked as very similar, but they seem to have different imitative abilities in the *Politics*. Where does music stand as an art, and more broadly in relation to tragedy? (2) While Aristotle abstains from any moral judgment in how types of poetry and their characters may influence the young in the passage from the *Poetics*, this is not the case in the *Politics*. Then, perhaps, ethical value can be ascribed to epic and tragedy, based on the type of representation alone.

Finally (3) if generally Aristotle attaches epithets to characters in accordance to types of actions and to genre (comedy—vulgar, tragedy—noble; epic and tragedy—better than us; parody—worse than us), sometimes he seems to acknowledge differences within the same genre (e.g. tragedy). For example, wondering whether poets should be criticized when they represent things that are not true, Aristotle suggests that perhaps they ought not be criticized for representing things as they should be. He adds that Sophocles said that he himself represented people as they should be whereas Euripides portrayed them as they were (*Poet.* 1460b33-5; perhaps something of the sort is implied in *On the Poets* 3.7, where something is said regarding Sophocles, higher representation... sharing in emotion; cf. 3.5, and 3.6 – referring to Pausanias again). Aristotle appears to agree with this evaluation (that may or may not be historically accurate). My analysis looks at implications of this observation.

12) Nichols, D. (Saginaw Valley State University)

The Tragedy that Exceeds Aesthetics: What Aristotle's Poetics Can Tell Us about Human Learning

Aristotle provides us with a relatively clear and systematic aesthetic theory of tragedy in his *Poetics*. But he was far less transparent as to whether or not he entertained a tragic sense of life—one where human existence falls prey to a cycle of inevitable demise. I maintain that within his wider corpus we can locate existential principles that parallel the dominant features of his aesthetic theory. In particular, I will argue that the descriptions of tragic drama that Aristotle gives us in the *Poetics* shed light on the process of historical learning described in the *Metaphysics*. My argument rests largely on the similar uses in the two works of what it means to wonder, or *thaumazein*. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle associates the experience of wonder with the reversal of plot that occurs at the denouement of a tragic drama. In the *Metaphysics*, he describes philosophy as a process beginning from and continually propelled by wonder. Here the experience of wonder makes humans aware of their own ignorance and thereby prompts them to undergo a reversal of knowledge. In cases where this reversal involves not merely the supplanting of one idea by another, but the collapse of a larger horizon of interconnected meanings, the similarity to the tragic plot becomes more apparent. The characters of a tragic drama suffer the sudden destruction of their mythical world when the trajectory of that world turns out to make sense in a radically different manner than what they had originally anticipated. Of course, Aristotle's descriptions of learning are more progressive on the whole than they are destructive, just as the spectators of a tragic drama may gain wisdom from its plot reversal and benefit from a catharsis afforded by the ruin of the characters. We may infer from this that Aristotle recognized tragedy as an insightful albeit incomplete way of grasping the cycle of human learning.

13) Scheiter, K. (University of Pennsylvania)

Why Anger is not a Tragic Emotion for Aristotle

A successful tragedy, according to Aristotle, arouses pity and fear in us by depicting noble characters suffering undeserved misfortunes. When we see good people suffer we feel pity for them and fear that something equally terrible might befall us in the future. But why does Aristotle think that pity and fear are the only emotions aroused by tragedy? Why is anger not a tragic emotion? In ancient Greek tragedies the main characters are often slighted and become angry with their antagonists. In *Medea*, for instance, the title character suffers a terrible slight when her husband, Jason, leaves her in order to marry another woman. Why should we pity Medea, but not feel anger on her behalf? In order to answer this question we must turn to the *Rhetoric* where Aristotle offers a detailed account of anger (*orgê*), fear, and pity.

Aristotle defines anger as a desire for revenge due to an intentional slight. If tragedy were to arouse anger, then it would have to arouse a desire for revenge. On the surface this may not seem problematic. Surely we can desire revenge against characters in a play, just as we can feel fear and pity for these characters. But, as I will show, our desire for revenge, according to Aristotle, is more than simply a desire to see the wrongdoer in pain. The desire for revenge, I will argue, is a desire to personally inflict pain on the wrongdoer so that he will see that he should not have wronged us or those we care about. If we are to feel anger on behalf of Medea we must desire to seek revenge on her behalf. But the characters in a tragedy are not real and so we cannot personally cause them pain. Aristotle claims that we do not desire what we cannot obtain, and since we cannot personally obtain revenge for Medea we will not form the desire.

I begin by providing a detailed analysis of Aristotle's account of anger (*orgê*) and revenge (*timoria*). The English word "anger" is very broad, often referring to feelings of frustration, righteous indignation, and hate, along with many other feelings. But the ancient Greek word *orgê* (often translated as "anger") refers *only* to the desire for revenge caused by an intentional slight. In order to understand his account of anger, we must figure out how he understands the desire for revenge. He does not offer a detailed account of revenge, but from his scattered remarks we can conclude that the desire for revenge entails a desire to personally cause the wrongdoer pain. What is more, we want the wrongdoer to *know* that we are the cause of his pain and that we are causing him pain because of what he did. Given the personal nature of anger the desire to seek revenge against characters in a play would be out of place.

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The Poetry of Aristotle's Ethical Theory

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle describes poetry as a kind of imitation or representation (*mimesis*) that comes naturally to human beings because we delight in seeing images and coming to understand what they represent (48b). Poetry, in particular, is a kind of imitation that represents either admirable or inferior agents and, unlike history, it describes not what actually happened but what could likely happen (51b). This makes, for Aristotle, poetry concerned with universals and, thus, more philosophical and serious than history. This paper examines the relevance of Aristotle's description of poetics to his ethical theory. Although traditionally the *Poetics* is classified with the *Rhetoric* as a productive rather than practical science, Aristotle utilizes what might be called a "poetic description" in his ethical theory. In Books III and IV of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he elaborates on the several virtues and vices with reference to descriptive examples that illustrate his definitions. This discussion never represents a species of poetry, since his descriptions lack plot and other poetic elements, such as the tragic reversal from good to bad fortune. Yet, Aristotle's descriptions of virtues and vices do form a narrative concerning the actions of admirable and inferior agents. Each description concerns not a particular virtuous man, but the kind of actions that a virtuous man would likely undertake. These descriptions also include other poetic elements such as metaphor and analogy. Magnanimity, for example, is a mean with respect to claiming and deserving honor, but the actions of a

magnanimous man involve greatness, just as beauty involves size, and no one can image him retreating from battle at full speed (1123b-1125b). In contrast, the small-souled man deprives himself of things he deserves and the vain man imagines that others talking about his dress and manners will make him respected. At times, Aristotle cites examples from poetry to further illustrate his point (see 1116a, 1118a, 1122a-b). His incorporation of poetic description in his ethical works underscores a continuance between the productive and practical sciences and further highlights the continuing relevance of poetry and the arts to the study of ethics and politics. As such, it may provide the social sciences with an alternative approach to the contemporary reliance on mathematical exactness, which Aristotle would warn is an unreasonable expectation (1094b).